

## HOUSE OF JOY

By Madhuri Shekar

Directed by  
Sam Woodhouse &  
Arpita Mukherjee

March 5-29, 2020

In the Lyceum Space  
Theatre

*"If there is a paradise on  
earth, it is this. Welcome  
to the House of Joy!"*

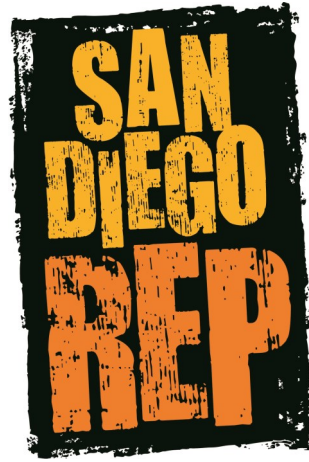
*-House of Joy*

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# The Curious Report

*An inside look at*



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This In-Depth Guide was prepared by Arpita Mukherjee, Sonia Mitesh Desai and Literary Manager Danielle Ward

*with layout/design by Sherisa Oie*

*House of Joy Cover Art by Studio Conover.*

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# We are excited about...

**producing the second ever production of Madhuri Shekar's House of Joy.** Several members of our artistic team saw a reading of this play at the Pacific Playwright's Festival at South Coast Repertory. We quickly became champions for this piece because it offered a theatrical exploration of history as told through the eyes of women warriors. It is also wonderful to support the work of a rising theatre star.

We are equally thrilled to be introducing San Diego to Arpita Mukherjee, the 2018 Eugene O'Neill National Directing Fellow who is co-directing this play with our own Sam Woodhouse. Arpita is the Artistic Director of Congressional Award-winning Hypokrit Theatre Company, which focuses on intersectional stories by and about women.

Of this collaboration, Arpita said, "It is rare for a director like me, a woman of color, to have such a perfect opportunity. Sometimes, the theatre is severely strapped for resources and asks the director to create a show for almost nothing, sometimes the director must collaborate with artists who are not ideal and sometimes directors have to work plays that we are not passionate about.



Arpita Mukherjee

I feel very fortunate to have been given a perfect opportunity by Sam Woodhouse to direct with him their upcoming production of House of Joy at San Diego Rep.... In my conversations with Sam, I have discovered a director and a leader who deeply believes in the power of ideas as well as collaboration. To be working alongside a director like Sam in such a collaborative way is a rare occurrence in the American theatre.

House of Joy is also a play I have loved and followed for a long time. The playwright Madhuri Shekar is someone I have collaborated with in the past and the play's themes are close to my heart. I deeply connect with Madhuri's references as someone that grew up in Delhi and is deeply familiar with Delhi's political and cultural history. House of Joy's language is intentionally contemporary, bringing many of India and Delhi's contradictions, as well the West's understanding of that part of the world, into focus. The play is centered on the women of the harem, who are presented as action heroes, and yet they are firmly rooted in historical circumstances. To get to work on a play as layered and complicated as *House of Joy* that is set in Delhi, at an institution that is a pillar of art and culture, with an artist as experienced and generous as Sam Woodhouse—the unlikelihood of that is not lost on me.

We hope you enjoy this uniquely told story, as seen in the round in our Lyceum Space theatre. An incredibly diverse cast of 9 and talented designers have all combined with our kick-ass directors to build an unforgettable show for you.



*San Diego Repertory Theatre produces intimate, provocative, inclusive theatre.*

*We promote an interconnected community through vivid works that nourish progressive political and social values and celebrate the multiple voices of our region.*

*San Diego Repertory Theatre feeds the curious soul.*

# Interesting Tidbits

## Female Guards in the Harem

Because the women of the Mughal court lived sequestered under purdah (a rule regarding seclusion of women from being seen by men other than the Emperor), the administration of their living quarters was run by women.

Urdubegis were the class of women assigned to protect the emperor and inhabitants of the harem. They were commonly of [Habshi](#), Tatar, Turk and Kashmiri origin. Kashmiri women were selected because they did not observe purdah. Many of the women were purchased as slaves, and trained for their positions.

These skillful women warriors were proficient in weapons combat, specifically lance, and archery. Mughal emperors spent a great deal of their leisure time in the harem and slept there at night, therefore the women assigned to protect the women's quarters were also part of the larger system in place to protect the emperor.

## Did you Know?

India is the only country where the tradition of eunuchs (hijras) is prevalent today. There are about 1 million of them, though their role in life has changed drastically from that of royal servants, confidantes and friends. Begging is now a main source of income, but there is also an age-old custom in the country to have hijras bless childbirths, weddings, housewarmings and other auspicious occasions. The eunuchs are believed to possess occult powers, and their blessings - and curses - are both considered potent.

There is a large contingent who are self-elected to be hijras. "We are the third gender," said Sita, my first hijra friend. "There is no room for homosexuals in this society. And none of us can envisage a life where we are forced to marry females and have children by them. So the only way out is to cut off our manhood and become hijras. This is the only community which will accept us and let us live our lives the way we want to. By not being heterosexuals, we are already damned. As a hijra, at least we are not the sole target of the derision and ridicule that society heaps on us. We can endure it as a community." – from [Nabanita Dutt](#)'s 2002 article, "Eunuchs—India's Third Gender" at thingsasian.com

## Coming of Age

The emperor was the only adult male who entered the harem freely. Royal princes who attained puberty had to live outside and were barred entry. The only men who could come in were physicians and that too they came in heavily veiled and covered.



# More Interesting Tidbits

## Portraits of Queens and Princesses

One of the most popular account of history is said to be via paintings. However, when we see portraits of Mughal ladies we must remember the strict purdah and protocol they lived in and realize that it is highly improbable that any of the ladies sat for it themselves. That is why we see a very stylized version of all the women with high bridged nose and slanting eyes. Manucci clarifies this by writing, “I do not bring forward any portraits of queens or princesses, for it is impossible to see them. Thanks to their, being always concealed. If any one has produced such portraits, these should not be accepted, being only likeness of concubines and dancing girls, which they have been drawn according to the artist fancy.” –from Dec 2012 article, “We now know what went inside the Mughal harems” by Rana Safvi\_in dailyo.in.

## Fact or Fiction?

Playwright Madhuri Shekar did a lot of research on harems before writing this play. The romance in this story is made up, but the political backstory is inspired by real people. The Emperor Shah Jahan (who built the Taj Mahal) was ousted by his youngest son Aurangzeb, who killed the heir apparent Dara Shukoh in civil war. And the character Noorah is based on Shah Jahan's daughter Jahanara, who tried to play diplomat in the war between brothers.

## Explore More

If you would like to see a strong Indian woman fighter show off some amazing moves, watch this short video: *Sword Fighting Granny Kicks Ass* at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUv56BoxTTM>.

*House of Joy* playwright Madhuri Shekar recently listened to a wonderful podcast episode called *The Orpheus of Delhi*, retelling a legend that takes place in the Mughal courts. She said it was a really fun story to get a feel for the culture of the time. Check it out at <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/histories-of-the-ephemeral/id1444736809?mt=2&i=1000428663460>.

# Thought-Provoking Item 1:

## Getting to Know the Mughal Empire

By Arpita Mukherjee

The Mughal Empire (also known as Mogul, Timurid, or Hindustan Empire) is considered one of the classic periods of India's long and amazing history. In 1526, Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babur (public domain portrait at right), a man with Mongol heritage from central Asia, established a foothold in the Indian subcontinent which was to last for more than three centuries.



At its height, around 1690, the Mughal Empire ruled almost the entire subcontinent of India, controlling four million square kilometers of land and a population of about 160 million.

Although each classic period Mughal ruler was the son of his predecessor, the succession was by no means one of primogeniture—the eldest did not necessarily win his father's throne. In the Mughal world, every son had an equal share in his father's patrimony, and all males within a ruling group had a right to succeed to the throne, creating an open-ended, if contentious, system. Each son was semi-independent of his father and received semi-permanent territorial holdings when he was deemed old enough to manage them. There were often fierce battles among the

princes when a ruler died. The rule of succession could be summed up by the Persian phrase *Takht, ya takhta* (either throne or funeral bier).

The Mughal Dynasty left a large and visible mark on India. Among the most striking examples of Mughal heritage are the many beautiful buildings that were constructed in the Mughal style—not just the Taj Mahal, but also the Red Fort in Delhi, the Fort of Agra, Humayan's Tomb and a number of other lovely works. The melding of Persian and Indian styles created some of the world's best-known monuments.

This combination of influences can also be seen in the arts, cuisine, gardens, and even in the Urdu language. Through the Mughals, Indo-Persian culture reached an apogee of refinement and beauty.

### Other Facts

- The very first Mughal emperor and the founder of the Mughal emperor Babur brought gunpowder to India
- Shah Jahan's court was visited by two Frenchmen Bernier and Tavernier, and an Italian adventurer Manucci
- Apart from the Taj Mahal, Shah Jahan also built the Moti Mahal in Agra, and the Red Fort and Jama Masjid in Delhi
- Shah Jahan's reign is considered the Golden Age of the Mughal empire

## Thought-Provoking Item 2:

### *Inside a Mughal Harem*

The Harem of the Mughals evoked the interest of many contemporary medieval foreign travelers. They had an air of mysteriousness surrounding them, perhaps as the entry to them was restricted. This mysteriousness gave rise to various kinds of rumors and gossips related to the inhabitants of the royal harem. But here we reveal some of what we have learned through history, some written by princess Gulbadan Begum, Emperor Babur's daughter.

The word harem comes from the Arabic word *haram*, which literally means sacred or forbidden and is used for sacred precincts of Mecca. In Persian it means sanctuary and in Sanskrit *harmya* means palace. It has the same meaning as the Turkish word [seraglio](#). It came to mean the sphere of women in what was usually a [polygynous](#) household and their segregated quarters, which were forbidden to men.

The Mughal harem was comprised of the female relatives of the Emperor. It consisted of mother, step-mothers, aunts, sisters, daughters of the emperor, plus his wives, concubines, and male infants, plus slave girls. The harem had a hierarchy, its chief authorities being the wives and female relatives of the emperor. The size of the harem was dictated by a number of factors such as marriage and war. A large number of women servants came as part of the dowry when the king married the daughter of a local ruler. The harem was a vibrant and a big physical space where women were arranged in regard to their proximity to the Emperor.

The women were governed through strict rules of Purdah, and they could not move out of the harem as they liked, but many women travelled for affairs of pilgrimage to local shrines, hunting and sightseeing with the Emperor. They always moved out in beautifully decorated palanquins or on the back of the elephants. Inside the Harem they led a luxurious and a comfortable life. The Harem had gardens, fountains and water

channels attached to it.

It was left to the women to entertain themselves in whichever manner they thought fit, as long as it was within the four walls of the harem. Once a month they would participate in a *khushroz* or *Meena bazaar*, which was a kind of fair where the ladies would put up stalls and the emperor would attend.

There was another kind of entertainment, which was arranged daily for the emperor. Each queen



Page from the Late Shah Jahan Album: Harem Night-Bathing Scene, c. 1653. India, Mughal court, reign of Shah Jahan (1628-1658), Mughal Dynasty (1526-1756), 17th Century. Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper; overall: 37.8 x 27.3 cm (14 7/8 x 10 3/4 in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alton W. Whitehouse 1987.153.a

and important concubine had her own set of apartments where she maintained her own household and competed to entertain the king. Elaborate soirees would be arranged by the lady whom the Emperor was visiting that night. Some of the concubines were skilled singers and dancers themselves and may have performed for their patron. However, these were for the pleasure of the man and not the women.

The Mughal women were very well educated, not just in the religious texts, but arts, sciences, and warfare. There were libraries inside the harem for their use and many of them were skilled writers and poets. The paintings adorning the walls of the palaces bear testimony to the fact that they were interested in various matters of significance. These living spaces also reflected the tastes and preferences of the women inhabiting them. The palaces built for the Rajput Ranis, for example, were based on Rajput style of architecture. They had niches for the ladies to keep their images and pray. On the other hand, the ones built for the Turkish wives of the emperor had ornate Turkish palaces and panels. The taste and preferences of these ladies had a bearing on the architecture of the royal Harem as well.

Within the precincts of the harem were markets, bazaars, laundries, kitchens, playgrounds, schools and baths. Along with the wives and family members, there were many other workers including: ladies-in-waiting, wet-nurses, servants, maids, cooks, women, officials, administrators, and guards.

Mughal women had noteworthy control over the financial resources and were involved in various economic activities. They enjoyed annual incomes and used eunuchs as agents of commerce. Many women also commissioned buildings and gardens. For example, Shah Jahan's daughter, [Jahanara](#), contributed in many architectural projects of his new capital, Shahjahanabad. She and her sister also had a strong administrative control over the domestic

trade and gained large revenues from various towns.

The harem complex was enclosed within high walls, keeping observance of purdah in mind and consisted of some of the best buildings. It consisted of a series of annexes designed in such a way that they were airy and comfortable with a central courtyard for joint festivities. All the apartments were interconnected. There was only one strictly guarded entrance door to the harem. There was also a complex underground system of well-ventilated chambers and passages, which opened into the apartments and were used for keeping an eye and controlling the harem. Apart from this were the *tehkhanas* or basements used during summers. There was even an underground cell with a gallows erected in it, which were used for executing offenders. This was connected to a deep well and the body was dropped into it without anyone being the wiser. Since many of the offenders would be punished for crimes of passion, secrecy was paramount.

The security of the Harem was of the paramount significance for the Mughals. The security to the Harem was multi-tiered. Eunuchs were employed as interlocutors between the ladies of the harems itself and also sometimes as spies. In the words of Abul Fazl, the court historian of Akbar, "The inside of the Harem is guarded by sober and active women. Outside of the enclosure the eunuchs are placed; at the proper distance, there is a guard of faithful Rajputs, beyond whom, are the porters of the gates. Besides, on all the four sides, there are guards of nobles, Ahadis and other troops according to their ranks."



## Thought-Provoking Item 3:

### *The Critical Role of Eunuchs*

Eunuchs have been in existence since the 9th Century BC. The word derives from the Greek "keeper of the bed" because castrated men were in popular demand to guard royal harems. The practice is believed to have started in China where, at the end of the Ming dynasty, there were as many as 70,000 eunuchs in the grand palace itself and many thousands more waiting to fill vacancies in the royal quarters.

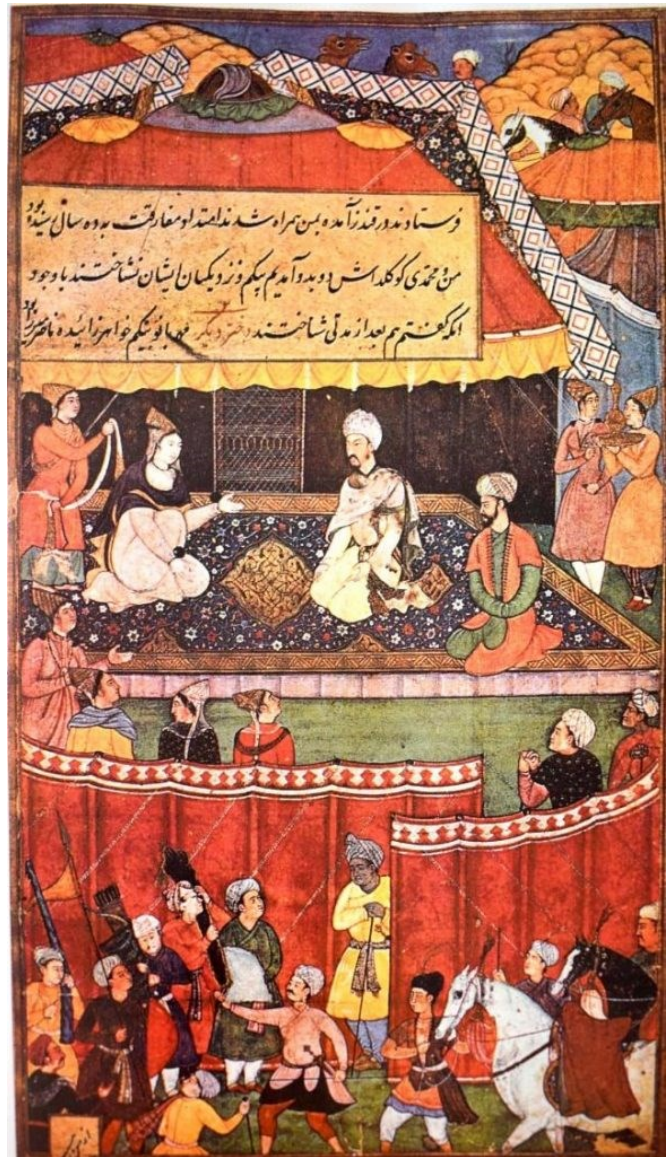
The eunuchs or *khwajasaras*, which is the Persian term for a range of men with removed or non-functional sexual organs, were employed in the Mughal Empire as slaves, servants, and administrative officers. They were both slaves and slave owners. At times, they also worked as brokers in sustaining the system of slavery. Some of them became aides of queens.

The most important service they performed, however, was related to their role in the exchange of information. Their divergent sexuality put them in an ambiguous position within the Mughal society, but they undeniably formed an integral part of both worlds: the Mughal harem as well as the Mughal public sphere.

The eunuchs were the most important source for the knowledge of the harem to the outside world and vice versa. Because they occupied the space of the harem and the bazaar, they became an important link between the two. It also needs to be pointed out that the information that was circulated by eunuchs was not only of popular nature, but also confidential.

True to their positioning within the empire, a eunuchs' role in the harem was also one of managerial and administrative nature. A proper hierarchical system was in place at the royal harem where there were eunuch in-charge called *nazirs* who were mainly supervisors. They were assisted by other subordinate *khwajasaras*.

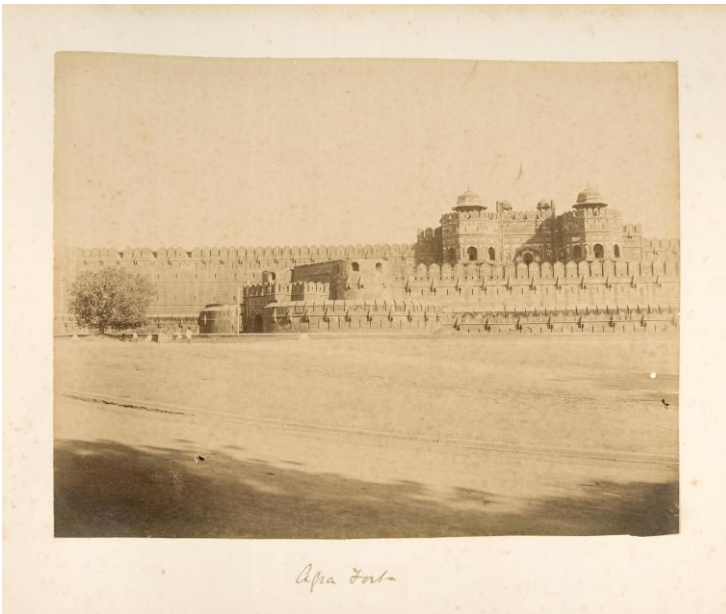
Eunuchs were also in-charge of the security of the palace. They were in charge of the King's safety inside the harem since royal bodyguards were not allowed inside. The *khwajasaras* would form a ring around the Emperor whenever he was in the harem. They guarded the harem against the entry of unwanted men and any objects that could be used by women for sexual pleasure, such as cucumbers.



Babur meeting a princess, work of Mansur, Baburnama, AD 1598, National Museum, New Delhi. In the frame, *khwajasaras* can be seen in the service of the princess.

## Thought-Provoking Item 4:

### Mughal Architecture



The Mughal dynasty was established after the victory of Babur at Panipat in 1526. During his five-year reign, Babur took considerable interest in erecting buildings, though few have survived. His grandson Akbar built widely, and the style developed vigorously during his reign. Among his accomplishments were Agra Fort (pictured above circa 1889), the fort-city of [Fatehpur Sikri](#), and the [Buland Darwaza](#). Akbar's son Jahangir commissioned the Shalimar Gardens in Kashmir.

Mughal architecture reached its zenith during the reign of Shah Jahan. Although an able military commander, Shah Jahan is best remembered for his architectural achievements. The period of his reign is widely considered to be the golden age of Mughal architecture. Shah Jahan commissioned many monuments, the Jama Masjid, the Red Fort, and the Shalimar Gardens in Lahore, plus the Taj Mahal in Agra. The end of his reign corresponded with the decline of Mughal architecture and the Empire itself.

Mughal Architecture incorporates Indian elements with Persian and Islamic elements. It also influenced later Indian architectural styles, including the Indo-Saracenic style of the British Raj, the Rajput style and the Sikh style.

Some features common to many buildings are:

- Large bulbous onion domes, sometimes surrounded by four smaller domes.
- Use of white marble and red sandstone.
- Use of delicate ornamentation work, including *pachin kari* decorative work and [jali](#)-latticed screens.
- Monumental buildings surrounded by gardens on all four sides.
- Mosques with large courtyards.
- Persian and Arabic calligraphic inscriptions, including verses from the Quran.
- Large gateways leading up to the main building.
- [Iwans](#) on two or four sides.
- Use of decorative [chattris](#).
- Teachings from the Holy Quran and various floral patterns are visible in the arches while swastika, lotus, bells and other Hindu motifs used widely by the sultans form parts of other embellishments of the palaces thus giving them a grand and exquisite appearance.

Here are some of the places of note:

#### Humayun's Tomb

Humayun's tomb (pictured right courtesy of weforanimals.com) was built by his widow Haji Begum in 1565 A.D. in Delhi in 1569

A.D., fourteen years after his death. Planned by a Persian architect and constructed by Indian workers, it is a combination of both Persian and Indian styles of architecture. The mausoleum stands in the center of a square enclosed garden which is divided and sub-divided into squares—as was typical of Mughal gardens. The central chamber is octagonal in shape and contains the tomb. Built of red sandstone with an inlay of black, white and yellow marble, it presents an imposing picture.





### Fatehpur Sikri

Akbar's greatest architectural achievement was the construction of Fatehpur Sikri, his Capital City near Agra. The construction of the walled city began in 1569 A.D. and was completed in 1574 A.D. It contained some of the most beautiful buildings – both religious and secular, which testify to the Emperor's aim of achieving social, political and religious integration.

### Taj Mahal

The Taj Mahal (photograph lower right circa 1880-1889) in Agra is a dream in white marble envisioned by Shah Jahan (and planned by Persian architect Isa) as a memorial to his beloved wife Mumtaz Begum. Built on the banks of the river Jumna, it was started in 1632 A.D. and took 22 years to complete. Marble from Makrana and precious stones from different parts of the world were used in its construction.

An octagonal hall with an exquisite perforated marble screen contains the cenotaphs of Mumtaz and Shah Jahan. The vaulted ceiling is crowned in the center by a large bulbous dome which tapers off into a foliated crest. Around the dome are four cupolas. The surface of the wall—exterior and interior and the cenotaphs are beautifully decorated with *pietra dura*, floral and geometrical designs. Borders of inscriptions decorate the main archways.

A Mosque on the west and a corresponding structure on the east in red sand-stone complete the effect of symmetry. Situated in a large enclosed rectangular garden with fountains, ornamental pools and water-courses, the entrance to the Taj is through a majestic gateway.

After his death, Shah Jahan's body was taken to the Taj Mahal and interred there next to the body of his beloved wife.



Fatehpur Sikri photo by Diego Delso, delso.photo License CC-BY-SA.



## Thought-Provoking Item 5:

### *Ancient Arts of War*



The weapons and fighting techniques seen in *House of Joy* were inspired by the Indian martial art of kalaripayattu. However, just as the script is a fictionalized version of

reality, so are the techniques used in our fight sequences. For those interested in understanding more of the history of this ancient Indian martial art that dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, we have gathered some of the interesting history here:

Because of its ancient roots, kalaripayattu (meaning “art of the battlefield”) has been noted by some as the “mother of all martial arts.” It includes strikes, kicks and acrobatic jumps, grappling, preset forms, weaponry, and healing methods that are unique to India. It is also an incredibly graceful art that incorporates moves used in traditional Indian dance styles as well as yoga. It is ultimately taught not just as a martial art, but as a way of life that epitomizes respect, compassion, and duty over all else.

One of the primary weapons used in kalaripayattu is a staff similar to Karate’s rokushakubo (often shortened to ‘bo’). Knives are also used in training, with experienced practitioners using highly sharpened blades. Another weapon that is unique to India is the urumi, or spring sword—a long, flexible blade that is wielded with whipping motions.

This was a martial art in which both men and women trained in starting at age 7. In fact,

women were even noted to excel in this art. The legend of Unniyarcha (sometimes spelled Unniarcha) tells of a warrior and heroine believed to have lived in northern part of Kerala, India during the 16th century. This popular character in Kerala’s folklore is remembered for her bravery and skills in Kalaripayattu.

In the 1800s, after India was forced under colonial rule by England, British forces confiscated weapons, killed many of those trained in kalaripayattu, and outlawed the practice of the art altogether. But now—thanks to a few remaining practitioners who continued to teach in secret—this ancient Indian martial art is taught at schools all over India. Masters like 78 year old Meenakshi Raghavan runs a school with over a hundred students and regularly performs combat demonstrations across India against men half her age. She is insuring the art of kalaripayattu is once again thriving.

#### Interesting Article for Further Reading:

<http://www.barcroft.tv/sword-fighting-granny-martial-arts-kalaripayattu-india>

**In terms of weaponry during the Mughal Empire, there was a significant evolution during the ruling periods of Babur, Akbar, Aurangzeb and Tipu Sultan. The military used a variety of weapons for close combat including swords and shields, spears and daggers, maces, as well as horses, camels, and elephants. For long range attacks, the used bows and arrows, as well as some of the world's largest cannons, muskets and pistols.**



## Thought-Provoking Item 6:

### *Empress Nur Jahan*

**By Arpita Mukherjee**

The Mughal Empire is remembered for a lot of things in India, but the incredible reign of a rare empress is unfortunately not one of them. Instead, most Indians know Nur Jahan for her great romance with the 17th century emperor Jahangir, immortalized in movies, plays, and even an opera. But, at a time when most royal women were cloistered in harems, Nur Jahan defied norms by openly ruling, alongside her husband, advising him on important matters and even issuing orders and coins.

“In act after act—hunting, advising, issuing imperial orders and coins, designing buildings—she ensured that her name was etched indelibly in public memory and in history,” the feminist historian Ruby Lal writes in her new book, *Empress: The Astonishing Reign of Nur Jahan*

As Nur Jahan travelled through the length and breadth of the country with Jahangir—issuing imperial orders, hunting a killer tiger near Mathura, and discussing the expansion of the empire—she rose to become co-sovereign. This does not mean that, in her own time, people did not raise eyebrows. In 1622, her stepson and Jahangir’s son, Shah Jahan, had risen in revolt. The catalyst for his revolt was the moment Nur Jahan arranged a match for her daughter from her first marriage, Ladli; she chose the youngest prince, Shahriyar. About that time, Shah Jahan went into rebellion against Jahangir. And it’s very clear that he felt threatened; he knew about the power of Nur Jahan. In fact, Shah Jahan and Nur Jahan had been closely aligned.

Then there were also visitors to India like Thomas Roe, the ambassador of James I of England, who followed Nur and Jahangir through the camps in Gujarat and Malwa. He called her the goddess of heathen impiety. In the 19th century, orientalist renditions of the romance of Nur and Jahangir become very important in the histories of the time. Later, colonial renditions highlight and forward such

stories. Nur Jahan becomes a classic oriental queen. It is certain that the erasure of Nur’s power travels into modern times and we only hear about her romance with Jahangir, not about her work as co-sovereign of the empire.



Nur Jahan holding a portrait of Emperor Jahangir, about 1627; borders added 1800s. Mughal India, opaque watercolor and gold on paper; 30 x 22.1 cm (page); 13.6 x 6.4 cm (painting), The Cleveland Museum of Art

## Thought-Provoking Item 7:

### *Female Desire in the Mughal Dynasty*

#### *Daughters broke chastity norms, but had limited agency*

**Excerpt of Dec 2018 article on Firstpost.com by Dr Syed Mubin Zehra, the author of *Sexual & Gender Representations in Mughal India*.**

Mughal emperor Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal, the world's best known monument dedicated to love, in the memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal who died in childbirth. But, the emperor was not half as generous when it came to his daughters' choices...

[T]he lives of Mughal daughters offer us a glimpse into a burdened existence, one that singularly bore the weight of chastity, lineage and purity... Daughters are perceived as being the bearers of *izzat* (honour) in any household, and the Mughals were no exception. While matrimonial alliances with Rajput women were wide-spread, Mughal daughters were not allowed non-Mughal partners. It was a serious threat to the patriarchal Mughals and was dealt with sternly.

Take the example of Jahanara Begum... She was her father's daughter—a builder of mosques and gardens, a poet, and had a string of lovers like her father, who, as was the practice, had several wives and many more concubines. She was in love with a handsome young man, the son of her chief dancer who charmed the princess with his singing, writes Italian traveller Niccolao Manucci... Another lover was a commoner too. When Shah Jahan, who was born of a Rajput mother, heard of the affair, he reached his daughter's palace, unannounced. Caught unawares, Jahanara hid the man in a cauldron used for baths... the emperor commanded the harem eunuchs to light fire under the cauldron "for the princess' bath" and did not leave until the young man had been boiled to a gory death.

Such instances find no mention in Mughal documents or official sources. As the Mughal women were circumscribed to the domestic sphere, little is written about their sexuality in texts representative of that period. They, however, have been written about by foreigners. Their travelogues and some contemporary literature shed a light on sexual relations in the Mughal harem. These accounts also testify to the failure of the chastity norm.

An emperor's need to suppress a daughter's sexuality was an important tool for maintaining chastity. And to keep up the chaste image, seclusion of the women, especially the royal daughters, was vital. There were broadly two reasons for keeping the daughters "pure". First, to maintain the *nasab*, or the lineage, pedigree. Second, *nasab* was through the male line, so relationships with non-Mughals were out of question.

...

Fidelity to the emperor co-existed with the norm of chastity. The most important section of the Mughal household was their women, whose foremost asset was a chaste character. Her body was the site on which were inscribed coded and socially sanctioned images of the "perfect woman," always constructed by the patriarch. The queen mother was the epitome of the Mughal womanhood and so was the daughter, who became the "persona of chastity."

Perhaps the sexuality of women was considered a threat, which was neither economic nor political, but a social threat for the representation of Mughal daughters and women in general. This led to the subjugation of Mughal daughters and the segregation of women as a subordinate gender developed within the harem.

## Thought-Provoking Item 8:

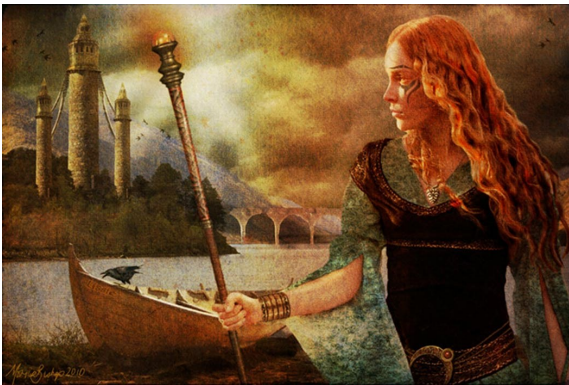
### Women Warriors

While Joan of Arc is one of the most known women warriors, history has many incredible female fighters around the globe.

Here are just a few that you may not have heard about:



At 20 years old, **Triệu Thị Trinh** (a.k.a. Lady Triệu) urged her fellow Vietnamese to rebel against the Chinese forces that sought to conquer their homeland in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. On the battlefield, she carried two swords and sported bright yellow robes while she rode a war-elephant. After liberating her territory with an army of over 1,000, she beat the Chinese back in 30 advances before eventually losing the war. She is quoted as saying, "I'd like to ride storms, kill sharks in the open sea, drive out the aggressors, reconquer the country, undo the ties of serfdom, and never bend my back to be the concubine of whatever man."



**Scathach** was an Irish warrior whose name translates to "the shadowy one" in Gaelic and with good reason. She trained soldiers and heroes at her covert school—so covert in fact, that if you wanted her to teach you, you had to search for her first. Legends say, those seeking her training had to cross the dangerous and stormy Irish Sea. But reaching the fortress was just the beginning: Scathach's impregnable castle had a gate that was guarded by her fearsome daughter, Uatach. Scathach imparted on her trainees how to pole vault over a castle's walls, fight underwater, and use a special weapon of her own making called a *gáe bolg*, which was a barbed harpoon.



Some of the most legendary Japanese samurai were a group of females called the **Onna-bugeisha**. They were every bit as well-trained and powerful as their male counterparts. They used a special weapon called a *naginata* that was designed specifically for women and allowed them to have better balance because of their smaller stature. One of the most formidable warriors was **Tomoe Gozen**. There was no warrior that could match her strength or agility. In 1184, she led 300 samurais into battle against 2,000 Taira clan warriors. She was one of the only seven samurais to leave the battlefield with her life.





The reign of **Queen Boudica** is one of fearsome revenge and injustice. After her husband died in 60 A.D., the Romans took over his kingdom, beating, torturing and raping Queen Boudica and her daughters. She gathered her people and other tribes willing to fight against the Romans and launched a series of savage attacks on their cities throughout England. They sacked two Roman cities including the capital of Roman Britain, Camulodunum. Her army is said to have had close to 100,000 soldiers.



*Queen Zenobia's Last Look Upon Palmyra* by Herbert Gustave Schmalz

In 267, **Zenobia** became the ruler of the Palmyrene Empire (now Syria) after her husband and stepson were both assassinated. Within two years, she was battling back the advances of Rome and expanding the boundaries of her kingdom by force, invading Egypt and Anatolia. Though an accomplished rider, she also showed a kinship with her army by walking miles in step with her foot soldiers. She was truly their warrior queen. She captured key trade routes before the Romans responded by laying siege to Emesa, where they captured her.



In 1705, Sikh warrior **Mata Bhag Kaur**, more commonly known as Mai Bhago, led 40 Sikhs—former army deserters—against soldiers of the Mughal Empire during the Battle of Muktsar in Punjab, a state in northern India. She shamed the deserters for abandoning their Sikh leader, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, in 1704. She dressed as a man and led them back into battle under her own banner. All the deserters died on the battlefield, but Mai Bhago went on to serve as the Guru's bodyguard until he died several years later.



## Thought-Provoking Item 9:

### Indian Dance Styles



Swapanthi Dance, San Diego

India is a country with a wealth of diverse artistic expressions, and the San Diego area is home to a number of arts schools and organizations who celebrate and carry on many of these artistic traditions. Below, read about a few – of several— Indian dance styles, some of which will be performed by local dancers in pre-show lobby performances before select *House of Joy* performances:

**Bharatanatyam** is one of the main classical dance forms of India and originated in the temples and courts of southern India. There is sculptural evidence of its existence dating back 3000 years. Originally a temple dance, it was brought to the stage for public performances around the 1930s. Traditionally, it is performed by a female soloist, although there are now ensembles performing as groups and featuring both male and female dancers. The style is made up of three main elements – clear technique and rhythmic patterns,



Kathak School of Dance, San Diego

expression – including distinct facial expressions and highly stylized gestures, and dramatic storytelling. **Kathak** is also one of the main Indian classical dance forms. The word “Kathak” means storytelling. It originated in the temples of northern India to portray epic tales in Hindu scriptures, but soon spread as it was used by wandering storytellers around the country. Present

during the Mughal Empire, Kathak developed a strong tradition incorporating elements of both Hindu and Muslim culture. It is characterized by intricate footwork and precise rhythmic patterns, along with emotive storytelling elements and is danced by both males and females.

**Odissi**, another of the main Indian classical dance forms, is indigenous to Orissa in the northeastern part of the country. It is similar to Bharatanatyam, energized by elevations and jumps, and possesses two distinct styles – one in which



Odissi School of Dance, San Diego

women perform, the other in which men perform as women. The style was greatly suppressed by the Mughal dynasty, as well as British colonialists, but has remerged since India gained Independence in 1947.

**Manipuri** originated in the North Eastern Indian state of Mainpur. The movement is more lyrical and smooth than some of the other main classical dance forms, and carries a strong religious and devotional component. It places an equal weight on the music, and rather than music as accompaniment, the music and instruments often become a part of the dance itself.

**Bollywood** is a modern conglomeration of elements of multiple classical styles, driven by India’s commercial film industry. Hand and finger gestures, postures, footwork and costumes all have roots in the various traditional styles, but the form itself is a relatively new and contemporary expression that has taken the world by storm.

## Thought-Provoking Item 10:

### *Modern-day Princess' Fight for Freedom*



If you type “Sheikha Latifa” in a YouTube search bar, the result will be a wealth of videos asking questions like “What happened to Dubai’s Princess Latifa” or using the hashtag #FreeLatifa. In fact, there is an entire channel called “Free

Latifa” and accompanying website [freelatifa.com](http://freelatifa.com).

Who is Princess Latifa and what is all this about?

Princess Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammad al-Maktoum is the daughter of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai and Prime Minister and Vice President of the United Arab Emirates. In early 2018, she attempted to flee, recording a video that she sent to friends over WhatsApp. This 39 minute video now has over 4 million views on YouTube. In it, she says “There’s just no justice here...especially if you’re a female, your life is so disposable.” The story goes that she escaped over the border into Oman and caught a boat with the assistance of a French ex-spy. However, not long after, in March of 2018, the boat was seized and she was not seen again until the family released photos the following December. The story given by the royal family was that she survived a kidnapping. The video she made throws heavy doubt on that narrative.

A Human Rights campaign, managed by some of Princess Latifa’s friends, plus a Human Rights Lawyer who serves as the CEO of Detained International, has emerged—#freelatifa. They received backing from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The latest press release from the campaign, dated November 5, 2019 details a custody battle between Latifa’s father and young children he has with Princess Haya bint Hussein. In it, human rights lawyer David Haigh states:

*“It is now 20 months since an elite commando unit made up of hundreds of armed state security personnel, helicopters and planes was sent by the UAE and India to attack a small US-registered yacht in international waters, kidnap Latifa al Maktoum, and take her back to involuntary captivity in Dubai.*

*Thankfully, however, recent developments at the High Court in London concerning Princess Haya and her custody battle with the Dubai ruler to protect her children and the continuing investigation of the United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances suggest the picture is changing, and the Dubai authorities’ disregard for international law and specifically women’s rights may be forced to end.*

*How strange that someone who is the subject of an application for a “non molestation order” re alleged child abuse in a custody battle over two of his children should be keeping another of his children - a 33-year-old adult - captive back home in Dubai. You’d have thought that releasing Latifa might strengthen his case in his custody battle.”*

Tiina Jauhiainen, the campaign director for the Free Latifa campaign and Latifa’s best friend said:

*“I cannot believe it is now 20 months since my brave friend Latifa was dragged away at gunpoint, kicking and screaming for her freedom. I have fought since that dark day for humanity, and I and the team at Free Latifa, Latifa’s friends and family, including Marcus her cousin, will continue to fight every day until Latifa is free.”*

Read a New York Time article about Princess Latifa at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/10/world/middleeast/princess-latifa-sheikha-dubai.html> and read more about this modern-day princess’ fight for freedom by visiting [freelatifa.com](http://freelatifa.com).

# Timeline—Indian History

## 1500-500 BCE:

The Vedic Period- the Vedas, ancient liturgical texts, originate during this time period. Our understanding of this time period comes from this ancient texts which were originally orally passed down. The Vedas had a large influence on Hinduism.

## 1526 CE

The Mughal Empire is founded by Babur, the founder and first emperor.

## 1540-1555 CE

The Sur Empire, founded by Sher Shah Suri interrupts Mughal rule.

## 1556-1605 CE

Emperor Akbar rules over the Mughal Empire. He helped consolidate the Empire and encouraged trade with Europe.

## 1858-1947

India is under the control of the English crown

## 250-543 CE

The Gupta Empire rules over most of the Indian subcontinent during the Golden Age of India.

## 1530 CE

Babur's son Emperor Humayun becomes the second emperor of the Mughal Empire.

## 1555 CE

Emperor Humayun returns from his exile in Persia to reestablish the Mughal Empire.

## 1612 CE

Mughal Emperor Jahangir gives the East India Trading Company the rights to establish a factory in the important port city of Surat (located in Gujrat) which helped them gain power in India.

## 1947

Pakistan is established as separate country as a way of quelling rising violence



Hindu painting manuscript circa 1590-95 (above). First Mughal Emperor (below).



Emperor Humayun



East India Trading Company's Coat of Arms



# Food for Thought Questions

1. Has someone ever made you aware of problems in a situation you thought was all working fine? How did you react to this new information?
2. What preconceived ideas do you have about harems; what happened inside of them, who lived there, and how it was protected?
3. What is more important to you —safety or freedom?
4. Have you ever broken a law that you felt was unjust? What happened?
5. Who in history would you say is a woman warrior? Do you have a woman warrior in your family?

