

= Mah Laqa Bai =

Mah Laqa Bai ( 7 April 1768 ? 1824 ) , born Chanda Bibi , and sometimes referred to as Mah Laqa Chanda , was an Indian 18th century Urdu poet , courtesan and philanthropist based in Hyderabad . In 1824 , she became the first female poet to have a diwan ( collection of poems ) of her work , a compilation of Urdu Ghazals named Gulzar @-@ e @-@ Mahlaqa , published posthumously . She lived in a period when Dakhini ( a version of Urdu ) was making its transition into the highly Persianized Urdu . Her literary contributions provide insight on such linguistic transformations in southern India . She was an influential female courtesan of the Deccan ; the Nizam , ruler of Hyderabad , appointed her to the omrah ( the highest nobility ) , and as a close affiliate at the court . In 2010 , her memorial in Hyderabad , that houses her tomb , was restored using funds donated by the Federal government of the United States .

= = Life = =

Mah Laqa Bai was born as Chanda Bibi on 7 April 1768 in Aurangabad in the present @-@ day Maharashtra . Her mother was Raj Kunwar ? a courtesan who migrated from Rajputana , and father was Bahadur Khan , who served as a Mansabdar ( military official ) at Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah 's court . Khan migrated from Delhi to Hyderabad Deccan where he met and married Raj Kunwar . Chanda Bibi was adopted by Kunwar 's childless sister Mehtaab Ma who was married to Nawab Rukn @-@ ud @-@ Daula , a Prime Minister of Nizam of Hyderabad .

Chanda Bibi 's adoptive father took personal interest in her education and provided her with the best teachers . While growing up , she had access to a well @-@ endowed library and was exposed to the vibrant culture of Hyderabad . By the time she was 14 , she excelled in horse riding and archery . Due to her skills , she accompanied the Nizam II ( Mir Nizam Ali Khan ) in three wars ; dressed in male attire , she was noted for bow and javelin skills in the wars . Owing to her contributions , the Nizams awarded her with Jagir ( lands ) on various occasions , that include the neighborhoods of Hyderguda , Chanda Nagar , Syed pally and Adikmet . On one occasion , she was conferred the title of Mah Laqa ? meaning " Visage of the Moon " . Though she never married , she was in love with Raja Rao Rambha Rao ( a Maratha military chief who led a cavalry of 600 army men , fought against Maratha Empire under the second Nizam and became his favourite ) , and used to admire Captain Sir John Malcolm ( an assistant of James Achilles Kirkpatrick , the British Resident at Hyderabad ) .

She was an influential woman in the court of the second and third Nizam of Hyderabad . At that time , she was the only woman to be given recognition publicly in Hyderabad State . In addition , she was appointed to the omrah , the highest nobility . Mah Laqa was frequently consulted by the rulers of the state on policy matters . As a pride among the nobility in those times , a battalion of 500 soldiers was reserved to march with her while she visits any official . She was also a courtesan while the Nizams held court . She was a mistress of the Prime Ministers of the Nizams . She died in 1824 and bequeathed her properties that included land , gold , silver and diamond @-@ studded jewelry to homeless women . Her residence which was located in Nampally , Hyderabad , today had been converted into a Government aided girls degree college . Mah Laqa of Deccan was the contemporary of renowned poets like Mir Taqi Mir , Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda and Khwaja Mir Dard in North India .

= = Accomplishments = =

Mah Laqa was influenced by the literary work of mystic poet Siraj Aurangabadi ( 1715 ? 1763 ) , and learned poetry from Nawab Mir Alam who later became the Prime Minister of Hyderabad State . Her first language was Urdu , and she was also fluent in Arabic , Persian and Bhojpuri languages . She was the first woman poet to author a diwan , a complete collection of Urdu ghazals . The collection , named Gulzar @-@ e @-@ Mahlaqa , comprises 39 ghazals , and each ghazal consists of 5 couplets . The collection was published in 1824 after her death . The Diwan e Chanda is a

manuscript collection of Mah Laqa 's 125 Ghazals , compiled and calligraphed by her in 1798 . It was signed and gifted to Captain Malcolm on 18 October 1799 , during a dance performance at Mir Alam 's residence . It is now preserved in the British Museum .

Her Nom de plume was Chanda . The Urdu words Bulbul ( songbird ) , Gul ( rosebud ) and Saqi ( one who serves wine ) recurred as themes in her ghazals . Her popularity in reading poetry made her the first poetess of the region to participate and present her poetries in a mushaira ( poetic symposium ) which was earlier reserved for men . Along with her poetry , sometimes she sang the songs composed by the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah and Sultan of Bijapur Ibrahim Adil Shah II . From her Diwan of 39 Ghazal collection , one Ghazal " Hoping to blossom ( one day ) into a flower " translates as :

Mah Laqa learned singing and classical Indian music Thumri from Khush hal Khan , a master musician of that time , and a great @-@ grandson of the Tansen , the maestro of Mughal court . She excelled in Ghazal singing in multiple raga ( melodic modes ) and Taal ( rhythms ) ; she was adept at the Yaman raga and Khayal Tappa which she use to sing at special occasions . Mah laqa preferred using Bhimpalasi raga in romantic Ghazals . When singing Sufi songs she used Dhrupad raga mixed with taal chautala and raga Bhairavi . Mah Laqa excelled in singing love lyrics accompanied by Deccani style of Kathak dance . She established a cultural centre in which 300 girls were trained by her along with other masters . Maha Laqa 's library contain manuscripts and books on poetry along with the arts and the science collections . She sponsored and supervised the publication of Mahnama , a historical book about the revival period of Hyderabad State . Although Mah Laqa practiced Islam , she was influenced by the understanding of Hindu books and philosophy . One author studied her writings and said that " her verses had a distinct darbari ring in which she eulogized the king and nobles , a common style employed by poets during the 17th and 18th centuries . "

= = Memorial in Hyderabad = =

Near a hillock in Moula @-@ Ali , Hyderabad , Mah Laqa constructed a walled compound where she frequently held mushairas . Inside this compound , she built a tomb for her biological mother in 1792 . After her death , Mah Laqa was buried next to her mother . The tomb was constructed in the Mughal and Rajasthani architectures style in the Char Bagh pattern . Along with mausoleum , the complex contains a pavilion in centre that is decorated intricately with stucco work , the caravanserai , a mosque and two stepwells . On a carved teakwood over the door of her mausoleum , an inscription in Urdu can be seen which translates as :

Scott Kugle , a Professor of Emory University and a researcher , studied the life of Mah Laqa Bai . During his study , he came across this memorial in a dilapidated condition . Kugle proposed the idea of renovating it . In the year 2010 , by using funds from the US government through the Consulate General 's office in Hyderabad , the Center for Deccan Studies spearheaded the year @-@ long renovation project . The Muslim Educational , Social and Cultural Organization also provided support to the project . In this renovation project , the debris was cleared , water channels were rebuilt , trees , bushes , the buildings and their exquisite decorations were restored .

= = Legacy and influence = =

Abdul Halim Sharar ( 1860 ? 1926 ) , an Urdu writer and novelist , presented Mah Laqa Bai in his novel Husan Kay Dakoo ( the robbers of beauty ) as a well @-@ informed lady who got benefits from the modern educational system . Sajjad Shahid , a Hyderabad @-@ based scholar writes in his series of articles published in The Times of India that Mah Laqa Bai was the inspiration for Mirza Hadi Ruswa 's famed novel Umrao Jaan Ada , published in 1899 . Ruswa , the author of the novel , had served briefly at Hyderabad 's " translation bureau " ( later merged to found the Osmania University ) , before he wrote the fictionalized account of a courtesan . Umrao Jaan Ada is referred to as the first true novel of Urdu literature . Narendra Luther , an expert on Hyderabad 's history , posits that Mah Laqa Bai , the first women poet of India whose anthology was ever published "

brought much pride to Hyderabad " . Pallabi Chakravorty , a Kathak dancer and a professor in the Department of Music and Dance at Swarthmore College , US , and Scott Kugle told in the seminar " Mad and divine women " that Mah Laqa Bai , besides being an aristocratic courtesan , was a devoted mystic , and was enamored by Sufi and bhakti elements . In 2013 , during the Hyderabad heritage festival , a monologue stage play " Maha Laq Bai Chanda " on the life of Mah Laqa was sponsored by Andhra Pradesh State Tourism Department . The play was directed by Vinay Varma ; Ratika Sant Keswani played the role of Mah Laqa bai .