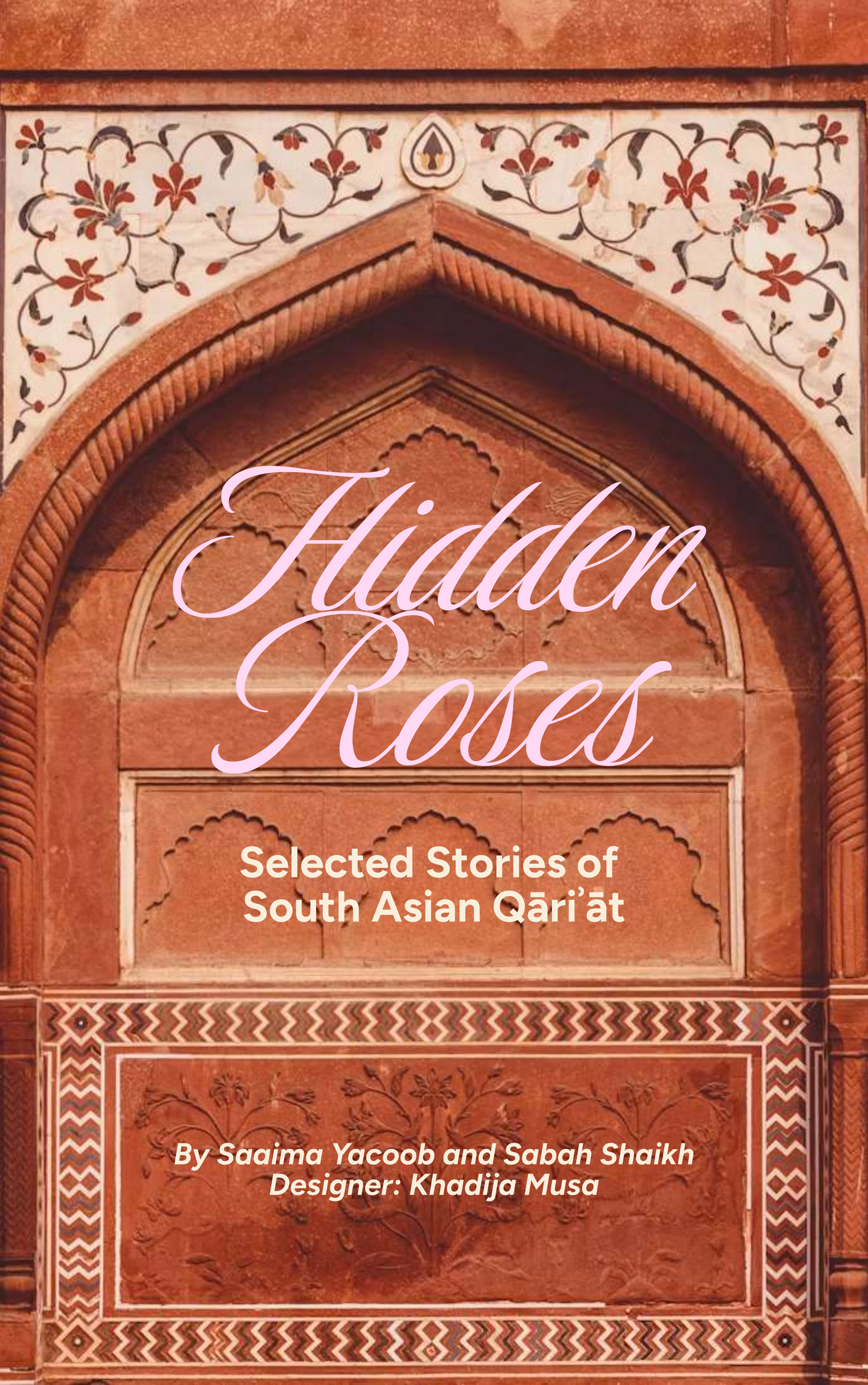


The background of the cover is a photograph of a traditional South Asian architectural archway. The arch is made of reddish-brown stone and features intricate carvings. Above the arch, there is a decorative frieze with floral motifs in red, black, and gold. The arch itself has a scalloped, carved pattern. Below the arch, there is a rectangular panel with a similar carved pattern. The overall style is traditional and ornate.

Hidden Roses

**Selected Stories of
South Asian Qāri'āt**

***By Saaima Yacoob and Sabah Shaikh
Designer: Khadija Musa***

Introduction

All praise is due to Allah who made a companion for our father Ādam (AS) in the form of our mother Ḥawwā' (AS), and who rewards both men and women equally for their righteous deeds. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon our Master, Muḥammad, his blessed family and his noble companions.

While researching Qārī Faṭḥ Muḥammad Pānīpatī's biography, I came across the names of many female qārī'ahs in a book titled *Tadhkirah Qāriyān-e Hind (Biographical Accounts of the Qur'ān Reciters of India)* by Colonel Mirzā Bismillāh Baig. It was then that I conceived of this project, a compilation of the stories of some of the women mentioned in Colonel Mirza Bimillāh Baig's book. However, I did not want it to be a purely academic project, but something visually beautiful that captured the historic grandeur of Muslim life in India as well as the subtle beauty and elegance that these women would have possessed. Qārī'ah Sabah helped translate the biographies of these ladies from Urdu into English and Sister Khadija Musa used her expertise in design to bring the stories of these women to life. May Allah reward them both immensely. *Āmīn*.

This project was deeply personal for me. Throughout my years of studying and teaching the Qur'ān, I have come across people who make me feel like an anomaly, an oddity that they do not know what to make of. In these moments, I would think about my mother, a former investment banker, who is now a principal of an Islamic school, and my grandmother, who even in 1940's India held a college degree and used it to better the lives of the families of the men in her husband's regiment. I also thought of my great-grandmother, Hameeda Begum, who was multilingual and helped her husband edit his court documents because her English was better than his. Hameeda Begum's mother and grandmother were teachers. At times, these stories felt simply like stories. How could we have generations of educated women in our family who contributed to the societies and communities in which they lived, when the common story is that women have only recently had these opportunities?

When I read the stories of the women that are mentioned in this book, I realized that these stories are true. There was a strong tradition of educating women in Delhi, Agra, and other cities in South Asia. And it is in the cities of Delhi and Agra where the women of my own family lived, studied, and taught.

I hope this book will inspire all those Muslim women who are treated as oddities. We are not strange at all. We are simply continuing the work of the women who came before us, gaining knowledge of our beautiful and complete religion and spreading it in any way we can, through teaching, writing, and building institutions. We are a continuation of their story, not a new story that begins in modern times.

May Allah grant all of our Muslim ancestors from the time of our father Ādam to the present with the highest level of Jannah. May Allah make us their pride on the Day of Judgment. *Āmīn*.

Saaima Yacoob

September 3rd, 2026



Bībī Zulaykhah



Among the great Sufī saints of South Asia, we find the name of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā'. The poetry of his beloved student, Amīr Khusrow, is still read, memorized and listened to today. This great saint's story starts with his mother, Bībī¹ Zulaykhah. She was the wife of Khawājah Aḥmad and was a pious and ascetic woman who engaged in a lot of voluntary worship. She was also described as someone whose du'ā's were almost always accepted. She became a widow while her son was still very young, and she raised her son, Niẓām al-Dīn, and her daughter Bībī Jannat, by spinning cotton and sewing clothes. There were many days when they had nothing to eat. On those days, Bībī Zulaykhah would tell her son, "Baba Niẓām al-Dīn, today we are Allāh's guests." My mother, Sanober Yacoob, a single mother herself, would tell us this story when we were children as an example of placing our trust in Allah.

Allah accepted Bībī Zulaykhah's du'ā's and efforts, and her son Niẓām al-Dīn was among the greatest saints our ummah has known. Bībī Zulaykhah passed away in 648 AH. Her shrine is in Delhi, and her daughter Bībī Jannat, her granddaughter Ruqaiya, and the daughters of Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Soharwardī, Bībī Ḥūr and Bībī Nūr, are also buried there. All these women had a great attachment to the Qur'ān. May Allah have mercy on them all. *Āmīn*.

¹ The Terms Bībī, Begum, and Khanam are titles used to refer to women. They can be roughly translated in English as "Lady."

Makhdūmah Begum

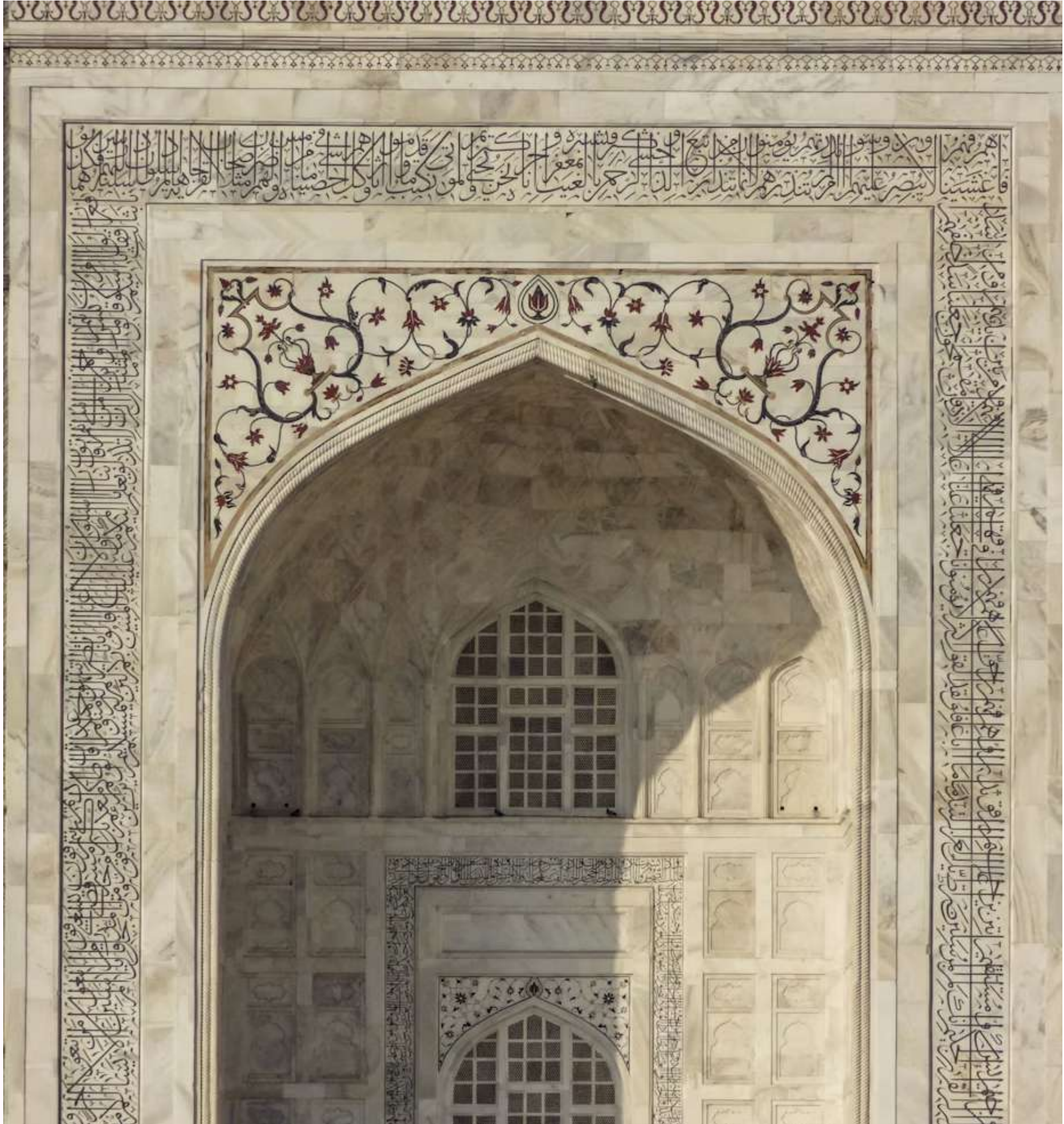


She is the wife of Abū al-Ḥasan Lāhorī. Abū al-Ḥasan was originally from Khurāsān. He was born in 972 AH and became a soldier at a young age. He came to India during the reign of Akbar, the third Mughal Emperor of the Indian subcontinent. Makhdūmah Begum, his wife, was a remarkable lady with a deep passion for the Qurʾān. She was also knowledgeable in other sciences, the arts, and poetry.

Makhdūmah Begum had one son, Aḥsanullāh Ṣāfar Khān, who grew up to be highly capable and talented and joined the army on his father's advice. Both her husband and son achieved considerable success in their military careers.

During her lifetime, Makhdūmah Begum, with the help of her son, established an Islamic seminary and endowed numerous properties to it. Students from far and wide would travel to attend this institution. The curriculum included tajwīd, qirāʾāt, and other important Islamic sciences. She passed away in 1066 AH and was buried in a small tomb that she had built for herself during her lifetime as part of the tomb she had built for her husband. Her son is also buried there, near his father. May Allah have mercy on all three of them. *Āmīn*.

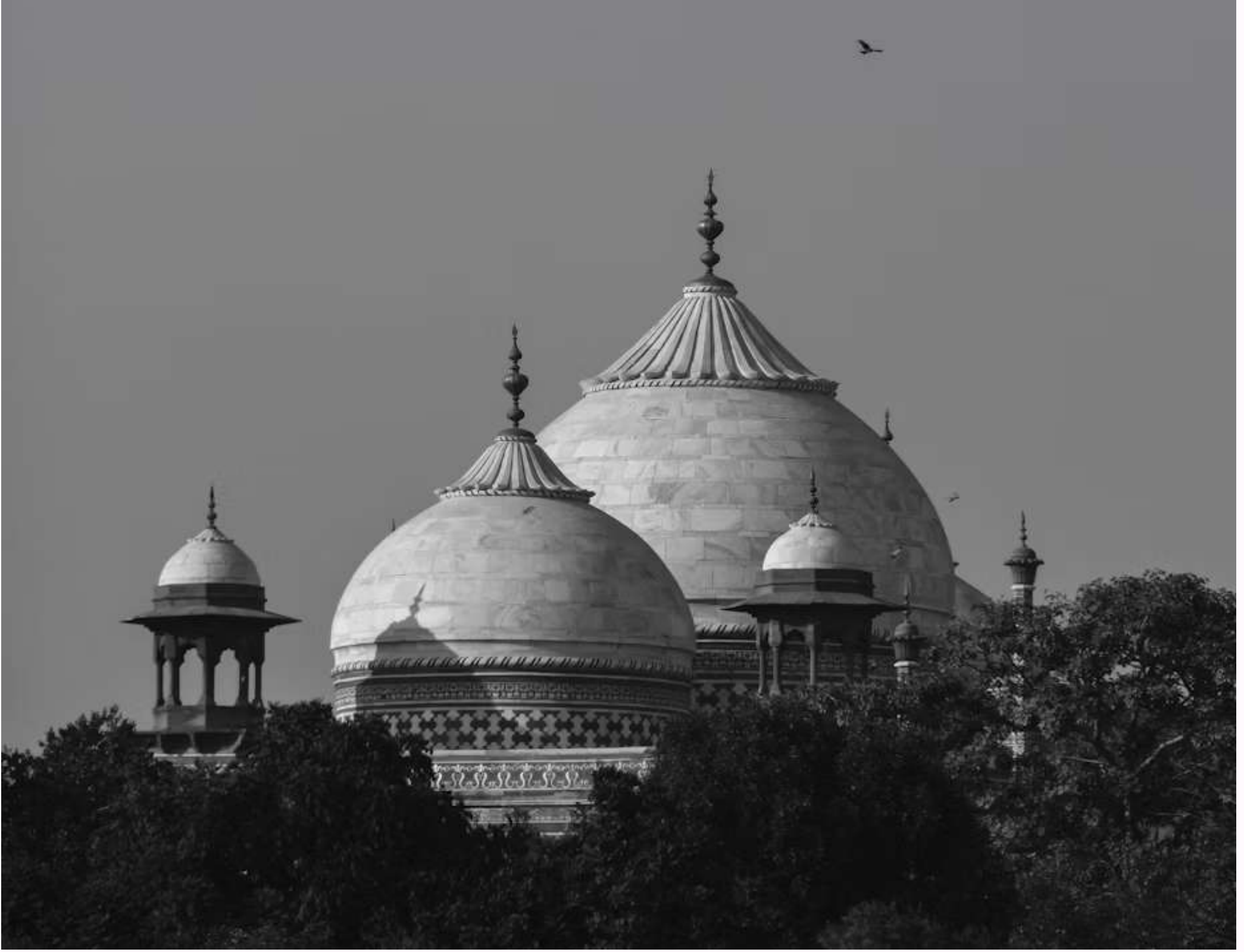
Sittī al-Nisā' Khānum



Sittī al-Nisā' Khānum was the sister of Ṭālib Āmulī, a renowned poet during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Jahāngīr, who was also known as Malik al-Shu'arā', the king of poets. She was a ḥāfiẓah, qāri'āh, and an 'ālimah. In addition to tajwīd and qirā'āt, she was well-distinguished in linguistics and literature. Both Emperor Shāhjahān and his wife, Mumtāz Mahal, appreciated her knowledge and expertise. Not only was she the teacher of their daughter, princess Jahān Ārā Begum, but also, she took charge of palace affairs when Mumtāz Mahal passed away. Jahān Ārā Begum studied tajwīd, qirā'āt, and other sciences under Sittī al-Nisā' Khānum's tutelage. Sittī al-Nisā' Khānum did not have any children of her own; however, after her brother Ṭālib Āmulī passed away in 1036 AH, she raised his two daughters as her own.

She passed away in 1056 AH, and the emperor Shāh Jahān spent twenty thousand rupees on her tomb, a considerable amount at that time. May Allah have mercy on her.

Jahān Ārā Begum



The Mughal kings educated both their sons and daughters, beginning their education with learning how to recite the Qur’ān. It was only after they had completed their recitation of the Qur’ān that they began to study other subjects. This emphasis on the Qur’ān meant that all of the princes and princesses had studied tajwīd and qirā’āt. While all the women of the royal families of the Mughals were more educated and distinguished than other women, some of these princesses became the pride of the royal family. Two of them were the daughters of the Emperor Shāh Jahān (the king who build the Taj Mahal).

Jahān Ārā Begum was the daughter of the Emperor Shāh Jahān and Mumtaz Mahal and was born in 1023 AH. At a young age, she was placed under the tutelage of Sittī al-Nisā’ and studied tajwīd and qirā’āt with her. In addition to being well educated, Jahān Ārā Begum engaged in a lot of voluntary worship. She spent much of her wealth in acts of charity and on the welfare of people, building a religious seminary and the central mosque in Agra. Her piety, generosity, and noble character earned her great respect.

Among her spiritual guides was Mullā Shāh Badakhshī. Her book, Ṣāhibiyyah, is about the life of her teacher, his senior students, and her own spiritual journey. This book also includes some of her poetry. She originally wrote it in Persian, but it has been translated into Urdu. Another one of her books is titled Mu’nis al-Arwāḥ (The Companion of Souls), on the biographies of Sūfī saints. This book was also originally in Persian and has been translated into Urdu. Her books are still available to read, Alḥamdulillāh.

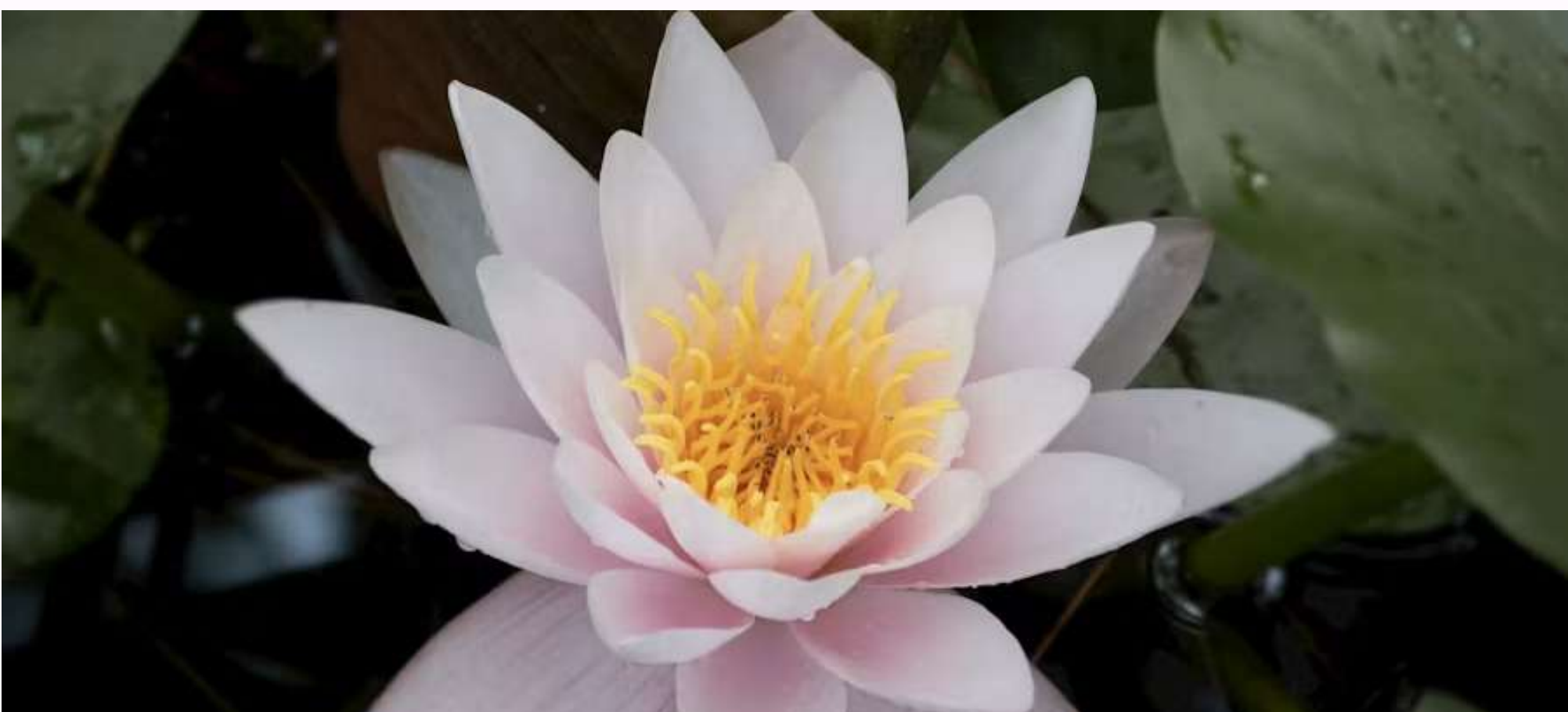
Jahān Ārā Begum passed away in 1096 AH and was buried in the courtyard of the shrine of Hazrat Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’ in Delhi. May Allah have immense mercy on her. *Āmīn.*

Thurayyā Begum



She was the daughter of Shāh Jahān and ‘Azīz al-Nisā’ Begum, also known as Akbar Ābādī Begum. Due to her natural aptitude and intelligence, she completed a full recitation of the Qur’ān at a very young age. Thurayyā also studied other sciences but had a very strong attachment to the Qur’ān. She was almost always found busy in its recitation.

Zayb ul-Nisā’ Begum



She the daughter of the Emperor Aurangzeb, the sixth Mughal Emperor of the Indian subcontinent. She was born in 1045 AH, and her mother’s name was Dilras Bāno Begum. Zayb al-Nisā’ Begum was virtuous and righteous who grew and developed in accordance with the standards of that time. She memorized the Qur’ān and then studied tajwīd, qirā’āt, and fiqh with Mullā Jīvan, who was a renowned Indian jurist of the time and also a celebrated teacher of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. She also studied fiqh with Mullā Āzmatullah. In addition to the sciences of tajwīd, qirā’āt, and fiqh, she also excelled in poetry and calligraphy, achieving such a mastery of the calligraphic scripts of nast’alīq, naskh, and shikasta that few could equal her. She died in the year 1103 AH at the age of fifty-five. May Allah have mercy on her soul. *Āmīn.*

Zīnat al-Nisā' Begum



She was another daughter of the Emperor Aurangzeb. Zīnat al-Nisā' was known as a virtuous, righteous, ḥāfiẓah and qāri'ah. Among her many admirable characteristics was her piety and asceticism. The tradition of learning and teaching the qirā'āt and hifẓ continued in her lineage until the time of the last Mughal king, Bahādur Shāh Zafar (d. 1279 AH). Her daughter, her granddaughter, Shākirah Begum, the daughter of Shākirah Begum, Faṭimah Begum, and the daughter of Fāṭimah Begum, Haydarī Begum, were all qāri'āt and ḥāfiẓāt.

Badr al-Nisā' Begum



She was the fifth daughter of the Emperor Aurangzeb. Her mother's name was Shahanshāh Begum. She was an intelligent lady and began reading the Qur'ān under the guidance of an elderly teacher at the age of five. Amazingly, she completed her memorization of the Qur'ān by the age of seven. Not only did she recite the Qur'ān with tajwīd, but she was also blessed with a beautiful voice. Once, her father was taking a walk after fajr and strolled into the garden, where he heard Badr al-Nisā' Begum reciting the Qur'ān. He did not make it known to her that he could hear her and kept listening for half an hour. When she finished her recitation, he came forward, kissed her on her forehead and also gave a gift to her teacher. After that day, special attention was devoted to Badr al-Nisā' Begum's education. She studied Arabic and other Islamic sciences but always remained inclined towards the Qur'ān. She passed away in 1080 AH at the young age of twenty-three. May Allah have immense mercy on her soul. *Āmīn*.

Bādshāh Begum



Bādshāh Begum was one of the daughters of the Emperor Aurangzeb. Her mother was Dilras Bāno, and Aʿzam Shāh was her full biological brother. She had a special attachment to the Qurʾān and qiraʾāt. She completed her first recitation of the Qurʾān at a young age and studied other sciences under an elderly teacher. Bādshah Begum was extremely intelligent and impressive. For a while she showed some interest in poetry. However, she later lost interest in poetry and attached herself solely to the Qurʾān, reciting it daily.

Bībī Makkhan Ellichpurī



Bibi Makkhan bint ʿAbd al-Qādir ibn Shāh ʿAbdullāh was born in 1055 AH in Ellichpur (Achalpur), in Maharashtra, India. Her grandfather and father were scholars and luminaries of the Qadrī path of Sufism. As a result, she also developed an interest in learning the Islamic sciences. She studied with Ḥāfiẓ Sayyed Ḥasan, one of eminent qārīs of that time. After memorizing the Qurʾān and studying the qiraʾāt, she went on to study Arabic and Persian, as well as ḥadīth and fiqh. Bībī Makkhan was known for being occupied with the recitation of the Qurʾān, fasting during the day, and standing in worship at night, and for being an ascetic. Because she had a melodious voice, her recitation of the Qurʾān was marvelous. She regularly prayed voluntary prayers.

After her husband passed away, she inherited his estate and became the owner of Nawbāgh, which provided her with a large income to support herself. She adopted her brother Shukrullāh's daughter and raised her well. Because she was very farsighted and intelligent, she paid attention to her niece's education.

When she grew up, she wrote to Shāh Ināyatullāh Bālāpurī, requesting his son Munībullāh’s marriage to her niece and also proposing that, in lieu of this marriage, she would place him in charge of her estate. Shāh Ināyatullāh accepted this proposal and his son and Bībī Makkhan’s niece were married. Qārī Munībullāh was a great scholar and a sūfī, which is probably why Bībī Makkhan chose him as a husband for her niece.

Bībī Makkhan had forty servants whom she also mentored, making them habitual in prayer and fasting, just like herself. All of her servants would customarily recite the Qur’ān every day, such that her home would be resounding with voices reciting the Qur’ān.

Bībī Makkhan’s niece and her husband, Qārī Munībullah, had three sons, Sayyid Mujībullāh, Muḥammad Qamr al-Dīn, and Sayyid Shams al-Dīn. Bībī Makkhan oversaw all of their education and training. She worked hard on their *tajwīd* and *qirā’āt* studies. All three of them grew up to be prominent scholars, *qurrā’*, and pious men.

Bībī Makkhan lived to the age of eighty-five, out of which fifty years were spent in consistently fasting during the day, standing in worship at night, reciting the Qur’ān, and making *dhikr*. She passed away on the 6th of Safar, 1140 AH, and according to her will, she was buried next to her two teachers, Qārī Ḥasan and Qārī Ḥusayn. Close to her death, she saw Sayyidah Fāṭimah (RA) in her dream. Sayyidah Fāṭima (RA) told her to come to her and to pray on the hem of her garment. *In shā’ Allah* this is a sign of her acceptance with Allah. May Allah have mercy on her soul. *Āmīn*.

Qamar al-Nisā’ Begum



Qamar al-Nisā’ Begum was the daughter of Amīr Miān, a scholarly and honorable person, who was the landlord and treasurer of Ankleshwar and Godhra (cities in Gujrat, India). He raised all of his children as virtuous scholars. Qamar al-Nisā’ was born in 1240 AH and studied *tajwīd* in her childhood. She married at the age of twenty, and twenty years later, became a widow in 1280 AH at the age of forty. After becoming a widow, she began teaching Qur’ān and continued to do so for forty years in the cities of Ankleshwar and Dabhoi in Gujrat, India. She taught girls and young boys under the age of twelve. One of her male students was Qārī Ishāq Ḥasan, who the author of her biography had met in person when Qārī Ishāq was seventy-nine years old. Qārī Ishāq spoke highly of Qamar al-Nisā’ Begum. He described her as a righteous woman who spent a large part of her day and night reciting and teaching the Qur’ān. She prayed *tahajjud* regularly. May Allah have mercy on her soul. *Āmīn*.

Saʿīd Jahān Begum M.A. M.Ed.



Saʿīd Begum was born in Deccan, Hyderabad on the 5th of August, 1919. Her father's name was Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad Ibrāhīm. She was highly educated in both secular and Qurʾānic studies. She completed a Diploma in Science in 1937, then received her B.A. in 1946, M.A. in 1949, and M.Ed. in 1950. After completing her secular education, she focused her studies on tajwīd and qirāʾāt and completed both tajwīd and the qiraʾah Imām ʿĀṣim in 1952. By 1957, she had studied the ten qirāʾāt as well. In addition to her studies in tajwīd and qirāʾāt, she also took the examination for the entire tafsīr of the Qurʾān and successfully passed it in 1958. In the same year, she pursued an M.A. in Arabic Literature and ranked among the top students.

Saʿīd Begum was the founder and principal of Madrasah Khayābān. She held the position of assistant commissioner of Girl Guides and was a member of the administrative council of several women's madāris, some of which are Minhāj al-Sharqiyyah, Muʿaẓẓam Jāhī High School, and Sunrise School, Murādnagar. Her contributions also include organizing home nursing, working in Hindi campaign conferences, and for 17 years, she served as a supervisor and superintendent of various government schools. As for tajwīd and qirāʾāt, she would teach daily lessons at home, creating a strong culture of studying tajwīd and qirāʾāt among women.

Saʿīd Begum studied tajwīd and the ten qirāʾāt from Khwajah Muḥammad Aḥmad Sāhib. She also benefitted as a student from Qārī Roshan ʿAlī Sāhib by reciting some of the Qurʾān to him. Her khatam was also made in his presence. The Shaykh al-Qurrāʾ of the time gave her the title of Saʿīd al-Qurrāʾ (The Joy of the Qurʾān Reciters).

She had numerous students in the ten qirāʾāt. Some of her notable students were: Āminah Begum bint Yaʿqūb Ālī, ʿAzīz Sultānah bint Muḥammad ʿUmar, Amat al-Nūr bint Khwajah Ḥasan, Shujāʿat Begum bint Shams al-Dīn, Saghīrah Rukhsānah bint Khwajah Ḥasan, Maḥmūdah Begum bint Muḥammad ʿUmar, Amat ul-Karīm, wife of Khwajah Ḥamīd Aḥmad, and Salīm al-Nisāʾ Siddīqī. Approximately one hundred students completed a khatam with her in a single riwāyah. May Allah have mercy of her soul. *Āmīn.*



These are just some of the names mentioned in *Tadhkirah Qāriyān-e Hind*. There are other books as well that are dedicated to the female reciters of the Qurʾān, such as the fifth volume of Shaykh Ilyās Barmāwī's *Imtāʿ al-Fuḍalāʾ al-Bashr*, and Qāriʾah Gadijah Bester's *10 Amazing Sheikhas*. The names of female Qurʾān reciters are also scattered throughout classical biographical works on the qurrāʾ. In shāʾ Allāh, over time, we will come to know more of them. May Allah allow us to continue to serve the Qurʾān and grant every Muslim woman and girl a strong relationship with His Book and make the Qurʾān an intercessor for us on the day of Judgment. *Āmīn*.

اللهم صلّ على سيدنا محمد و على آله و صحبه وسلّم

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