



## The Essence and Evolution of Naat Poetry in Islamic Tradition

**Shaykh Abdul Aziz Dabbagh**

Naib Nazim-e-Aala (Research), Farid-e-Millat Research Institute, Minhaj University, Lahore.

**Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Chishti**

Associate Professor of Arabic Language, Minhaj University, Lahore.

**Syed Noor Salahuddin**

BS International Relations & Research Assistant, Minhaj University Lahore.

**Abstract:** This paper explores the concept, history, and spiritual significance of Naat poetry — the poetic praise of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Scholars, poets, and intellectuals have defined Naat not merely as praise but as an expression of deep love, reverence, and spiritual insight. It transcends simple admiration and embodies a divine atmosphere where prayer, humility, and veneration converge to celebrate the Prophet's unparalleled status as Allah's Beloved. The tradition of Naat, rooted in the Prophet's own time, was actively embraced by his Companions (Sahabah), many of whom composed poetic praises during and after his life. These Naats were reflections of sincere devotion, expressing both the joy of his presence and the sorrow of his physical departure. The poetic form was treated with utmost reverence — demanding purity of intention, aesthetic excellence, and theological precision, lest one slip into exaggeration or theological error. Sayyiduna 'Ali رضي الله عنه described the Prophet's unmatched persona using the word "Naat", emphasizing that encountering him inspired both awe and love—an affirmation of the word's early usage in Islamic tradition. The document highlights the Companions' culture of Naat, how they channeled poetic expression into devotion, often without concern for literary fame. Poets like Allama Yusuf al-Nabhani carried this legacy into later centuries, and scholars such as Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ishaq Qureshi and classical narrators like Ibn Rashiq and Ibn Abd al-Barr noted its widespread acceptance and esteem. It also documents the Prophet Muhammad's own gatherings that celebrated his noble lineage and birth—establishing Mawlid (celebration of the Prophet's birth) not as an innovation, but as a Sunnah grounded in his own actions. These congregations, often public and on the pulpit, emphasized his blessed origin, moral excellence, and divine selection, and have inspired poetic tradition throughout Islamic history. Ultimately, Naat poetry is presented not just as a genre of literary creativity but as a form of devotional expression, a protector of faith, and a spiritual connection to the Prophet ﷺ. It remains a living tradition across the Muslim world, celebrated by scholars and common people alike, embodying a collective and timeless love for the final Messenger of God.

**Keywords:** Na't, Poetry, Islamic, Culture, Companions of Holy Prophet.

Scholars, poets, intellectuals, critics of literature and historians of eulogistic poetry have given a wide variety of definitions of Naat. I thought it better to serve my readers with the versification of thoughts and feelings of those who had relation of intense love with the Messenger of Allah a. We have seen that all these verses have much more to offer beyond love and veneration. An environment of the unseen divinity emerged here and there out of a system that ensued praise and reverence hued in love and humility with prayers of refuge from Satan's destructive forces and glad tidings of an era immersed in dignity, justice, philanthropy, altruism, sacrifice and fraternization. The idols collapsed and roared a welcome sentiment to the Final Prophet reported in scriptures revealed to preceding Prophets. The walls of the sacred House crooned with enchanting lines of purification of Ka'ba of idol-worship and the Worship of Omniscient Sovereign. The Grandpa begged from God his safety, security, stability and victory against evil forces.<sup>1</sup> He is divinely guided who to employ for his nursing and brought-up.<sup>2</sup> His mother again is inspired to praise her son to fortify Halima's heart and the foster sister Sheema too would sing the lullaby to tranquil him into sleep. What all is this? Love of course is a conspicuous element that has overwhelmed all events transpiring before and after his holy birth. Veneration and supplications of safeguard and victory against evil forces too are evident. But the divine unseen world's influence over all creations and the creative minds too is quite vividly discernable that signifies his unique, unparalleled status next to God in the universe. Putting all these elements together form what we call Naat. But again it is not possible to wind up this discourse here. Let us see what our master 'Ali has narrated about it:

مَنْ رَأَاهُ بِدَيْهَةٍ هَابَةٍ، وَمَنْ خَالَطَهُ مَعْرِفَةً أَحَبَّهُ، يَقُولُ نَاعْتُهُ: لَمْ أَرْ قَبْلَهُ وَلَا بَعْدَهُ  
مِثْلَهُ.

“One who would be blessed with his sight, is awed; he who develops interactions with him, loves him and the one who praises him, says that he has not seen anyone his like before, nor has he seen his similitude after seeing him.”<sup>3</sup>

In this hadith, the word Naat (نَعْت) has been used and that too by the one whom the Messenger called the door of the city of knowledge that he himself is.

### The Companions' Naat Culture

Naat is the voice of the inner self imbued with Prophetic love free from exaggeration, attired in instinctual sincerity and trueness, and adorned with eloquence and linguistic and semantics aesthetics. Devoid of selfish desires and material interests, it is paid as a debt to the adoration incarnate, the most praiseworthy Messenger Muhammad, upon him be peace, consisting of words and styles worthy of his exalted station and divine

<sup>1</sup> Dr Tahir-ul-Qadri, *Seerat al-Rasool*, 4:2.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Tahir-ul-Qadri, *Seerat al-Rasool*, 4:3.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Tirmidhi, *al-Sunan*, Bk. *Al-Munaqib*, What is said about the attributes of the Prophet (a), 5:599, §3638.

stature. Its creative aesthetics ban the use of substandard expressions, untrue sentiments, artificial ideas and odd compositions to be employed to hymn the chief of all the prophets, universe and Allah's beloved Messenger. This discourse relates to the panegyrics about the greatest embodiment of truth and veracity in the universe, whose trueness spread its light throughout cosmos all his life and who was also the messenger and the supreme model of truth and righteousness. Naat is a picturesque, pleasing and striking portrayal in flower words of the Beloved Messenger's holy personage, his divine contact with God and human contact with the creation, a rapturous response to the divine inquiry: Who am I? The Naat poets, therefore, are required to observe extreme caution at all the stages one undergoes conceiving and composing Naat. The question is not merely of meeting the requirements of a poetic genre; it is rather, a grave concern of perfect protection of one's faith. It is not a matter of observing strict restrictions of poetic aesthetics devised for the Beloved Messenger's glory; it is, rather, an ordeal of how to attain to heights of faith, alarming the risk of walking over bare edge of sword or rope-walking between two hill tops over an abyss vale. There are risks and threats on the way which alarm to be on toes, walking over the sharp-edged sword or doing rope-walking over a dreadful dale.

Naat is one of the most difficult genres of poetic art. However, the Muslim lyricists have proved their worth in such an enviable manner Allah has blessed them with incredible success and exaltation. Be they the elite ones or ordinary folk, everyone has been equally involved in this devotional creativity. The long tradition of Naat poetry is such an honour in Islamic history, its pride can never be befittingly shown. The Companions of the beloved Messenger of Allah attended on him regularly and constantly at home and on journeys, day and night, in dangers and anxieties, in defeat and victories and found him such a master of all the situations that they became his sincere devotees. Those who had the talent of creative experience of poetic literature admired his accomplishments and expressed their feelings of adoration for him in their poetic creations. We have seen through the hadiths that they used the word نَعَت very often. The Companions who would praise the holy traits of the beloved Messenger in poetic form were sizeable in number.<sup>4</sup>

After the holy Messenger left, these devotees who loved him more than their own lives and could not stay tranquil without his company were inundated in love pangs and were bestowed with the intuitive moments to express their overwhelming sentiments of his physical absence from amongst them. Then they wrote Naats, praise poems and panegyrics.<sup>5</sup>

What our master 'Ali g described as Naat, was defining and describing the personality, the character, the noble qualities, sublime virtues, and accomplishments of the beloved Messenger a of Almighty Allah.

Prof Dr Muhammad Ishaq Qureshi, an eminent scholar of devotional poetry in the sense of Researcher and Critic of the poetic art and literature, in his treatise on Allama

<sup>4</sup> Armaghan-e-Na't, Shafiq Brelvi.

<sup>5</sup> Dr Tahir-ul-Qadri, *Muqaddama-e-Seerat Vol I*, p. 254.

Yusuf b, Ismael al-Nabhani—a Naat poet of great literary caliber, has comprehensively described how the majority of Companions would compose Naat poetry venerating Allah’s Messenger a. He writes:

“Naat of the Prophet a is the most difficult literary genre to compose; yet the Muslims have proved their worth treading this testing path. They have been writing, reciting, publishing and promoting Naat over last fourteen centuries with great zeal and zest everywhere. The elite as well as common people displayed their devotion, humility and veneration equally well and made the tradition of Naat of the Prophet a an honor and pride for the history of Islam.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Ibn Rasheeq:

“There was not a single individual from amongst Banu Abd al-Muttalib, except the Prophet, who would not compose poetry.”<sup>7</sup>

It was so common a practice amongst the Ansar of Medina, that according to Anas:

قدم علينا رسول الله وما في الأنصار بيت إلا وهو يقول الشعر، قيل له  
وأنت أبا حمزة قال وأنا.

“When Allah’s Messenger a came to us, all the Ansar people would compose Naat; it was asked, ‘O Abu Hamza (Anas g): do you also compose Naat poetry?’ He said: ‘yes.’”<sup>8</sup>

“Hafiz Ibn Abd al-Birr counted 120 Companions composing Naat. Naat could not be made a practice in Mecca due to unfavorable and insecure circumstances there. There, the Companions would be on toes to protect and defend the holy Prophet a and themselves and were vigilant, alert and valiant soldiers. In Medina, the lighting disclosures of the Prophet a were at peak—a founder of the state of Medina, inspiring the pious society of Medina, the inventor of a civilization, and the Messenger of a new system of life. A preacher, a thinker, a commander, an army general, reconciling people and showing them the straight path, the Prophet’s blessed presence in Medina was a spring season of blossoming flowers of love, dignity and fraternity all around. The Companions would imbue their words with love and devotion and earn his favors, bliss, blessings and largesse. The world witnessed a flash flood of Naat overflowing the whole of society.”<sup>9</sup>

We need to ponder how the minor girls gathered in Quba to offer their warmest poetic welcome on the arrival of the Prophet there: *طلع البدر علينا* is a famous Naat song that we recite in our Naat programs even today. That is a great manifestation of Medina’s love psyche for the Beloved Messenger of Allah a displayed in most spectacular manner on the very first day of his blissful arrival. It proves that the Naat sentiment

<sup>6</sup> Prof Dr Muhammad Ishaq Qureshi, *Allama Yusuf b, Ismael al-Nabhani—a Na’t poet of great literary caliber*, Na’t Rang 25

<sup>7</sup> *Al-A’mdoh-al-Ibn Shareeq, al-Juz’ al-Awwal*, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Muslim*, al-Sahih, Bk. Asceticism, Ch. Denying eulogy, p. 414.

<sup>9</sup> Dr Ishaq Qureshi, *Allama Yusuf b, Ismael al-Nabhani—a Na’t poet of great literary caliber*, Na’t Rang 25.

had germinated in the Medina mind-set even before the venerable Prophet blessed that soil with the holy and heavenly touch of his consecrated feet.

It is this tradition of Naat poetry that has reached our times and the ripe minds charged with sincere and fervent love for the holy Messenger have conceived it and disseminated its thought and throb to the entire community of seekers of the Prophetic love, the world over.

The poet Companions, after the departure of the Messenger of Allah, maintained their devotional poetry standards and kept it from eulogistic tone and tenor.

### **The Holy Prophet's Naat Gatherings**

As has been described, Naat was a pleasant literary creative feature of the Muslims' life in the Prophetic era. It was sporadic in Mecca but prolific and profuse in Medina owing to peculiar socio political oppression and brutal hostility of disbelievers in Mecca but the establishment of Muslim state in Medina under the most produdent and merciful control of Allah's Messenger and the legislation of Mithaq-e-Medina. The Muakhat package eliminated the Muslims's economic inequality, disparity and scarcity. They rose into a strong military might that would not only dauntelessly defend their independence and freedom but would also provide protection to the weaker neighbouring tribes. The Muslims grew in number and the devotees of Allah's beloved Messenger would learn from him knowledge, wisdom, application of Islamic law in practical life and love and devotion stormed them into an invincible force of peace, love, justice and firm followership of the Holy Prophet.

Ardent love of the Holy Prophet was the prevalent sentiment throbbing in all the hearts, men, women, old, youth, adult, children, everyone of every age group, male or female. The sentiment whenever and wherever was manifested was articulated in the form of poetic praise and devotion of Allah's beloved Messenger.

Allah's Messenger observed this love culture that would find expression in his praise and adoration. He expressed his great liking for the sentiment and would form special gatherings in order for participants to remember the most esteemed Prophet a. In these gatherings odes and hymns were recited in praise of the Prophet a, and peace and blessings were invoked upon his blessed person. People attended these gatherings with great reverence and enthusiasm. They illuminated their minds and souls with glorified descriptions of the beloved of Allah. Such assemblies were especially organized pertaining to *Mawlid al-Nabi* by the beloved Prophet himself.

Ab%o Hurayra g narrates that the Companions asked the Prophet a:

يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، مَتَى وَجَبَتْ لَكَ النَّبُوءَةُ؟

O Messenger of Allah, when was prophethood bestowed upon you?

This was an unusual enquiry, because who amongst the noble Companions did not know that the Holy Prophet a declared his prophethood at the age of 40? Hence, it is evident that the noble Companions were not asking about the moment the Prophet a received prophecy, but they were asking about the inception of his spiritual existence when Allah bestowed on him the cloak of prophecy. Thus, the Holy Prophet a replied:

آدَمُ بَيْنَ الرُّوحِ وَالْجَسَدِ.

(I was a prophet, when the creation of) Adam was between the spirit and the body.<sup>10</sup>

The meaning of this hadith is that the Holy Prophet a was bestowed prophecy at the time when Adam's creation had not been completed yet. In this way, the beloved Prophet a explained his creation prior to his birth to the noble Companions.

«مَنْ أَنَا؟» — 'Who am I?'

Besides the Friday sermons, it was the Holy Prophet's practice to organise gatherings in which he discussed religious, moral, spiritual, educational, theological, political, social, cultural, legal, organisational and administrative issues with the noble Companions. Apart from this, he would organise gatherings in which he would mention the excellence of his lineage and matchless nobility, and the incidents surrounding his blessed birth. Below, some narrations are mentioned, which quite clearly substantiate this point:

Mu' alib b. Abī Wad' a g narrates:

جَاءَ الْعَبَّاسُ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ a فَكَأَنَّهُ سَمِعَ شَيْئًا، فَقَامَ النَّبِيُّ a عَلَى الْمِنْبَرِ، فَقَالَ: «مَنْ أَنَا؟» فَقَالُوا: أَنْتَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْنَا السَّلَامُ! قَالَ: «أَنَا مُحَمَّدٌ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْمُطَّلِبِ، إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَلَقَ الْخَلْقَ فَجَعَلَنِي فِي خَيْرِهِمْ فِرْقَةً، ثُمَّ جَعَلَهُمْ فِرْقَتَيْنِ فَجَعَلَنِي فِي خَيْرِهِمْ فِرْقَةً، ثُمَّ جَعَلَهُمْ قَبَائِلَ فَجَعَلَنِي فِي خَيْرِهِمْ قَبِيلَةً، ثُمَّ جَعَلَهُمْ بُيُوتًا فَجَعَلَنِي فِي خَيْرِهِمْ بَيْتًا وَخَيْرِهِمْ نَسَبًا.»

Al-Abbās came to Allah's Messenger a, for he seemed to have heard something (indecent from the unbelievers and was in a rage and wanted to tell the Holy Prophet, or the Holy Prophet was already aware of it due to his prophetic knowledge) so the Prophet a stood on the pulpit and said: 'Who am I?' They said: 'You are Allah's Messenger. Peace be upon you!' He said: 'I am Muhammad, the son of Abd Allāh b. Abd al-Mu' alib. Allah created the creatures, so He put me among the best of them (the human beings). Then He divided them into two segments (the Arabs and the non-Arabs) and He put me among the best of them (the Arabs). Then He made them tribes and He put me among the best of them (the tribe of Quraysh). Then He made them households and He put me among the best of them as a household (Banū Hāshim), and the best of them in lineage. (So I am the most exalted of the entire creation, my lineage, my tribe, my household, and personal glory.)'<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Manāqib* [The Book of Virtuous Merits], chapter: 'The Excellent Merits of the Prophet', 5:585 §3609; Ibn Mustafā in *Kitāb al-qadr*, p.27 §14 has stated that the narrators are reliable; Tamīm al-Razī in *Kitāb al-fawā'id*, 1:241 §581; Ibn ṣabbān in *Kitāb al-thiqāt*, 1:47; al-Laylakī in *Iṭīqād Ahl al-Sunna*, 1:422 §1403; al-ṣakīm in *al-Mustadrak*, 2:665 §4210; al-Bayhaqī in *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa wa ma'rifat al-Sharī'a*, 2:130; al-Suyūfī in *al-Durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr bi al-Mawṭh'or*, 6:569; and Na'ir al-Dīn al-Albānī in *ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi' al-Nabawiyya*, p.54 §53 has declared this hadith authentic.

<sup>11</sup> Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Da'awāt* [The Book of Supplications], 5:543 §3532; al-Tirmidhī in *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Manāqib* [The Book of Excellent Merits], chapter: 'The Prophet's Excellent Merits', 5:584 §3608 narrates the words 'best of them in person' in the place of the words 'best of them in lineage'; Aḥmad b. ḥanbal in *al-Musnad*, 1:210 §1788

In this narration, there are several noteworthy points:

- i. Whenever the Holy Prophet a wished to make a critical point that he wished to emphasise to the Muslims, he would ascend to the pulpit and deliver his sermon. Otherwise, if the issue at hand was not of critical importance, then he would just inform those who were nearby as opposed to ascending the pulpit and delivering a sermon. In the narration above, the Holy Prophet a ascends to the pulpit; hence, this is an indication that the issue at hand was of critical importance.
- ii. The most revered Prophet a asked the Companions, ‘Who am I?’ They all replied, ‘You are Allah’s Messenger. Peace be upon you!’ Although the reply of the Companions was based on truth, it was not the expected answer, as on this occasion the required answer was different. When he did not receive the answer that he was seeking, he himself replied: ‘I am Muhammad, the son of  Abd All h b.  Abd al-Mu alib.’ This is a clear indication that he wanted to inform the noble Companions about the excellence of his sublimely noble lineage and blessed birth. This is a topic related directly to the subject of *Mawlid al-Nabi  a*. Although the noble Companions were already aware of these facts, this statement with so much emphasis indicates that he wished to make his *mawlid* as one of his Sunnas.
- iii. In the above mentioned hadith, he did not inform the noble Companions of any commandment of Allah or any topic on deeds and morality; rather, he told them about his blessed birth, and the superiority of his lineage. This is from the acts of *Mawlid al-Nabi *.
- iv. The Holy Prophet a did not make mention of his *mawlid* on an individual level privately, but he held a congregation comprising the noble Companions, which is indicative that special arrangements were made for this gathering.

In the books of hadith, biography and Prophetic virtues and merits, authored by great scholars like Imam al-Bukh r , Imam Muslim, Imam al-Tirmidh , al-Q       , al-Qas all n  and al-Nabah n , there are numerous narrations that have no relation to matters of the religion; rather, they are concerned with the Prophet’s birth, nobility, lineage, and his excellent virtues and merits.

### Conclusion:

Naat is not merely poetic praise but a profound spiritual expression of love, reverence, and devotion to the Prophet Muhammad a, deeply rooted in the early Islamic tradition. From the Prophet’s time, his Companions composed heartfelt verses reflecting their intense emotional connection, admiration, and awe. Naat evolved as a sacred art, blending linguistic beauty with theological depth, demanding sincerity, caution, and reverence from its poets. It embodies the essence of prophetic love that transcends time, expressing both divine inspiration and human longing. The Prophet a himself encouraged such gatherings and praises, often highlighting his noble lineage and blessed birth. This deep-rooted tradition, embraced by scholars and common believers alike, continues to serve as a radiant legacy of spiritual devotion, connecting hearts to the beloved Messenger a through the timeless beauty of sacred poetry.

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has added the words, ‘I am the best of you in household and the best of you in person’; Ibid., 4:165; al-Haytham  in *Majma  al-zaw  id wa manba  al-faw  id*, 8:216; and al-Bayhaq  in *Dal  il al-Nubuwwa wa ma  ifa a w  l     ib al-Shari a a*, 1:169.