CHAPTER—II

History of Na‘t Writing in Persian

The year 570 AD saw the birth of Mohammad in the house of Abdullah of Quraish family in Mecca in Arabia. Mohammad was the Prophet of Islam and commanded immense respect among the Arabs. His impeccable character earned him great regards among his countrymen. Mohammad was not only the Prophet of Islam who preached the teachings of the Quran but was also regarded as the factor for the creation of the universe (کائنات تخلیق). It is narrated by Hazrat Jabir that God the almighty had separated a portion of His Noor (Light), and named it Mohammad, the praised one. However, the life and personality of Hazrat Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) has given birth to a form of poetry in Islamic literature namely Arabic, Persian, Urdu, etc. which is regarded as Na‘t Sharif and this genre of poetry has become an important constituent of life, literature and culture of the people of Islamic world over the ages. This poetry has also become a literary tradition in the said languages. The writers and poets of Arabic and Persian during the medieval period always began their works with Hamd (Praise to Allah) and Na‘t (Praise to the Prophet of Islam). Over the ages many poets of Arabic and Persian have earned the reputation of Na‘t writers or poets of Na‘t and posterity remember them for their contribution to this genre of Islamic literature. They are often quoted on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Hazrat Mohammad all over the world. This form of poetry began by the uncle of the Prophet, Hazrat Abu Talib. But Hassaan bin Sabit brought Na’twriting as a perfect form of poetry to praise and eulogize the persona of the Holy Prophet. The most important Arabic literature that deals with Na’twriting is Qasida-e- Burda by Imam Busairi.

40 Natiya Shayri ka Irteqa; Fatehpuri, Dr. Mohammad Ismail Azad; printed at Fine Offset Works, Allahabad, 1988,
41 Farsi Adab Aur Sanae Rasool e Akram, Tabatabai, Haider, Aain-i-Sokhanwari; New Delhi, April 2000, p.9
Arabia and Iran have been enjoying neighborly relation for centuries together. They have differences all through the history and have fought many wars in the past. Before the advent of Islam at Iran, a Persian named Hazrat Salman Farsi had already entered into the company of Hazrat Mohammad and became one of the champions of Islam. Though Iran might be politically and racially antagonistic to the Arabs in history, but in case of celebrating the persona of the holy Prophet, Arab and Ajam are unanimous and see eye to eye with each other. The poets of Persian literature or Indo-Persian literature who have been writing poetry in the field of Na’thave earned the sobriquet of Hassan-e-Ajam in Persian literature. The most important poet of Iran who assumes the title of Hassan-e-Ajam is Khaqani Sherwani. Khaqani attained perfection in Persian poetry and people having realized his metal in this art form so they dubbed him as Hassan-e-Ajam. 

چون دید که در سخن تمامم حسن عجم نهاد نامم

There are a host of Persian poets who have contributed to the genre of Na’t writing in Persian literature. Dr. Mohammad Ismail Azad Fatehpuri in his monumental work Natia Shairi Ka Irtequa has covered this topic in great length and has identified the Na’t writers of Persian literature such as Ferdowsi, Syed Hasan Ghaznavi, Hakeem Sanai, Khaqani, Nizami Ganjavi, Attar, Rumi, Iraqi, Saadi, Jami, Qudsi, Qaani, Abdul Qadir Jilani, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Ajmeri, Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Amir Khusrau, Urfi, Faizi, Shaikh Ali Hazin, Ghalib, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Aziz Lucknawi and Dr. Mohammad Iqbal. Saadi has emerged as one of the great Na’t writers of Persian literature. His Bustan, Gulistan and Diwans bear ample testimony to his Na’t writings. In his Gulistan, he has beautifully consoled the Muslims that they have the Prophet of Islam as their protector and saviour

چه غم دیوار امت را که دارد جوان تو پشتیبان چه باک از موج بحر آنرا که دارد نوح کشتیبان

42 Guzidaye Ashaar-e-Khaqani Sherwani, Sajjadi, Dr. Syed Ziauddin; Shirkat-e-Sahami Kitabhaiye Jeebi, Tehran, p. 11
43 Ibid.
While praising the personality of Hazrat Mohammad, Saadi writes in Gulistan:

شفیع مطاع نبی کریم  قسیم جسیم بسیم وسیم

But the most important Na‘t written by Saadi is in Arabic. It is said about this Na‘t that the Holy Prophet had come to his dream in order to help him in completing the Na‘t sharif. This Na‘t written by Saadi, is very often recited and quoted in all the assemblies of Milad-un-Nabi:

بلغ العلي بكماله
كشف النجی بجماله
حسنات جميع خصاله
صلواعلیه و آلہ

The tenth century witnessed the contact of India and Persia and also the birth of Persian language and literature in Indian subcontinent. The Ghaznavids had established their second capital at Lahore and within span of a century, a flock of poets appeared to have clustered over Lahore. The first book on Sufism, Kashiful Mahjoob was written by Ali Hujveri in Lahore. But during the Ghorid period Indo Persian relations entered into a formidable phase. The generals of Mohammad Ghori had established three centers of Persian learning at Uchh in Multan and Sindh, Delhi in north India and Lalkhnauti in east India. They were founded by Qabacha, Qutubuddin Aibak and Ikhtiaruddin bin Bakhtiar Khilji and thus the glorious era of Sultanate began in Indian history. Amir Khusrau, who has been called Tuti-e-Hind has also emerged as the most notable writer of Na‘t poetry. His two poems on the nature of Na‘t have earned great reputation all over the Persian speaking world. One of his poems of Na‘t has been composed in the form of a lyric or Ghazal. In the entire ode of Na‘t, the poet has praised the persona of the Prophet as that of a beloved and the entire poem appears more as a ghazal rather than Na‘t. Nonetheless the poem clearly shows

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44 Gulistan-e-Saadi; Saadi, annotated & edited by Husain Ustad Wali; Intesharaat-e-Qadyani, Fourth edition, Tehran, p.29
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
and depicts the traits of the holy Prophet in his traditional literary beloved. What has been said about the Prophet as *Shams-ul-Hoda* and *Badrud Doja* has been celebrated in the following Ghazal of Khusrau.

The second ode which is ascribed as Khusrau but has not been traced in any of his Diwan is mostly sung by the Quwwal over the ages. Here the poet speaks about a timeless and spaceless world wherein only Allah and his praised one Muhammad are seen in sublime and celestial form. The entire sublime world of love has been depicted in the Na‘t and Hazrat Muhammad is shown as the divine light around which the moths of love and devotion were circumvallating themselves. This poem is considered as masterpiece of love poetry as well as Na‘t poetry.

The second phase of Muslim rule in India was represented by the Mughals in the history of the Indian subcontinent. Babur is regarded as the founder of the Mughal Empire in India when he arrived in India in 1526 and defeated Ibrahim

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48 Ibid., p. 437
Lodi at the famous Battle field of Panipat. He was succeeded by his son Humayun and then there was a short interlude of Suri dynasty by Sher Shah. Humayun with the help of the Safavids of Iran reestablished the Mughal Empire and pushed the Afghans to the eastern frontiers of India. But the most glorious era of Mughal history began with the reign of Akbar the Great who founded his capital at Agra. Akbar was a man of great philosophical thinking who tried to evolve a syncretic socio religious order for the people of India which came to be known as *Din-e-Ilahi*. He paved a very congenial path to Reality whose hallmark was *Sulh-i-Kul* or universal tolerance. Religious freedom was accorded to all and sundry in Akbar’s India. But the poets who gathered at the court of Akbar displayed a philosophical bend of mind. Faizi, Ghazali Mashadi and others expressed profound ideas in their poetry. But the most important poet of Akbar’s and Jahangir’s period was Mohammad Jamaluddin Mohammed Urfi Shirazi who was a great rival to the Faizi, a court poet of Akbar. Urfi is indeed one of the greatest Persian poets of India. *His sharp thinking and daring approach dealt a blow to traditional poetry then existing and paved the way for Ghalib and Iqbal for the distant future.*

Urfi has written various forms of poetry and has a complete Diwan of poetry in his credit which has been published both in India and Iran. Even during his life time his fame had travelled as far as Constantinople in Turkey. But the greatest achievement of Urfi in the Indo Persian literature rests upon the Na’t which he has composed on the one hand praising the Prophet of Islam and on the other hand celebrating the greatness of the Iranian kings. In this Na’tone is amazed to find that Urfi is striking proper balance between Iran and Arabia in which Hazrat Mohammad appears as the king of Spiritual world and the Kai and Jam are representing the physical world of Iran. He says that nobody is able to praise both the King of Arabia and the King of Iran in the same breadth. He shows utmost respect to the Prophet of Islam and says that when people go to Madina Munawwara to pay

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49 *Dreams Forgotten; Kirmani Waris; IMH Press private Ltd; Delhi-6; 1986; p. 169*
their obeisance to the Prophet of Islam, their feet are replaced by eyes and they walk upon their eyes to pay their homage to Prophet Muhammad. Urfi says that the form of Na‘t poetry is a difficult path wherein one has to be very cautious as this path is as sharp as a sword and it is equally difficult to praise the holy Prophet and extol Kai and Jam in the same breadth. At the end Urfi invokes blessings from the Prophet of Islam to enable him to get divine proximity and make his name eternal. He also seeks pardon from the Prophet if he has erred while writing the difficult composition of nat. He boasts himself of the Na‘t and says that his composition has put Hassan-e-Ajam Khaqani into embarrassment as nobody could achieve this kind of composition in the world of literature. The entire composition of Na‘t written by Urfi is reproduced here:

عرفی مشتاسب ابن حنیف، نعیم، ایستاد، صحرا، است

The other most important poet of Na‘t writing during the Mughal India was Haji Mohammad Jaan Qudsi Mashadi, who came to India during the reign of Shahjahan in 1632 AD. Shahjahan appreciated his poetry and gave him generous reward. Though Qudsi was the poet of Qasidah and Ghazal, but his fame in India rests upon the Na‘t he composed in praise of the Holy Prophet. Like Amir Khusraw he has also adopted the genre of Ghazal to eulogize the Prophet of Islam. Qudsi is full of devotion in the Ode to the Prophet of Islam. He is supplicant before the Prophet of Islam and solicits his intervention to save him from the divine punishment. He regards Prophet as a noble blooded Arab for whom God has revealed the Quran in Arabic, again he says that you are friend and masiah of humanity and Qudsi has come to you for your care and treatment. The tone and tenor of the entire Ghazal is highly charming and devotional. It is in the fitness of things to quote the natia Ghazal of Qudsi here under:

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Hazrat Sufi Syed Fateh Ali Waisi is one of the spiritual figures of the 19th century Bengal. He wrote a *Diwan* which is full of *nats* only and his love and respect for the Prophet of Islam is clearly reflected from all the compositions of this *Diwan*. His style of writing is very much similar to that of Hassan bin Saabit who was the pioneer of Na‘t writing of Islamic literature. The beauty and the sublimity of his Na‘t writing have earned him the title of Khaqani Sherwani of Bengal. He, in his Diwan of Nat, says that his adoration of Prophet Muhammad forms the opening line and the same also constitutes the ending line of his Nat. In other words both the Matla and the Maqta are immersed in the love of Prophet of Islam. Like a true lover and devotee of Prophet of Islam he composes Na‘tafter Na‘tin the aforesaid *Diwan* and Bengal is reverberated by the sound of his Nat. Waisi like Khusraw and Qudsi has adopted Ghazal as a form for his Na‘t writing. He boasts himself of no less than Anwari and Urfi and Hassan e Ajam as far as Na‘t writing is concerned. In this connection the following couplet of Waisi is quoted here

زنآن خاص نموده است خدا هر دو قسم را‌
چون لیل و نهار از رخ و زلف تو کنایه‌
دیندی اگر این همه اعجاز قسم را‌
ان ب الферج و انوری و عرفی شیراز‌
حسن عظم و یسی دود نغم را‌
از حیرت این نظام همه یکسره گفتی‌

52 Natia Shayri ka Irtaaqa; Fatehpuri, Dr. Mohammad Ismail Azad; printed at Fine Offset Works, Allahabad, p. 351
53 Aaina-e-Waisi, Rehman, Muhammad Matiur; Lebul Lethu Press, Ramna Road, Patna, 1976; p. 449
The tradition of Na’t writing passed on from Persian to Urdu literature and the two names which have earned great fame in the field of Na’t writing were that of Hali and Iqbal. Hali in his celebrated work Musaddas has composed stanzas after stanzas in praise of Holy Prophet and which are oft quoted by orators on the occasion of Milad Sharif. Similarly Iqbal has reformed the Muslim community of Indian subcontinent with his immortal works: Shikwa and Jawab-e-Shikwa which he concludes with a crisp maxim of a couplet.

کی محمد سے وفا تو هم تیرے ہیں
بے جہان چیز حیا ہے لوح و قلم تیرے ہیں

(Ki Muhammad se wafa tune to ham tere hain,
yeh jahan cheez hai kya loh wa kalam tere hain)