

Arabic Panegyrics On The Prophet In Tamil Nadu State Of India Cultural Reverence

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Abstract

This research article explores the significance of panegyrics in Arabic on the Prophet in the Arabic literature of Tamil Nadu, India. Panegyrics, known as al-Madaih al-Nabawiyah, are prominent in Islamic culture and express profound love, respect, and loyalty towards the Prophet. The article examines the historical background of panegyrics and their decline during the emergence of Islam. It discusses the poets who composed panegyrics in the presence of the Prophet and their alignment with the decline of pagan poetry. Additionally, the article highlights the relationship between panegyrics and Sira (biography), their formalization, and their association with Islamic mysticism. It focuses on notable panegyric compositions by scholars from Tamil Nadu, discussing their themes and contributions to Arabic literature. The article concludes by emphasizing the diversity of styles and meanings in prophetic panegyrics and their integration and cultural reverence into Sufism.

Keywords: Tamil Nadu; Panegyrics; Prophet; India; Al Qasidatul Witriyyah; Al Qasidatush Shaf'iyyah

INTRODUCTION

Panegyrics on the Prophet play a significant role in Arabic literature and the reverence for Prophet Muhammad. These compositions, deeply rooted in Islamic culture, embody the love, loyalty, and devotion expected from every Muslim towards the Prophet. During the Prophet's lifetime, panegyrics and odes praising him were recited in his presence and received his appreciation. With the emergence of Islam, the influence of *Jahiliyyah* poetry waned, giving way to a decline in tribalism and the establishment of values focused around truth, justice, and cooperation. While the Holy Quran denounces specific poets engaged in wrongful acts, it does not condemn poetry or all poets in general (Karama, M. J., & Khater, 2020; Khairulnizam, M., & Sali, 2009; Raḥmān., 2012; Ridwan, M., & Robikah, 2019; Saged, 2021). Several companions of the Prophet composed poems in his praise, incorporating biographical material that became part of the eulogy. Praise poems dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad were composed even during his lifetime, with formalized structures emerging in the thirteenth century. These poems highlighted the miracles that distinguished the Prophet's life and exemplified God's favor towards him (Al-Dimasyqi, 2016; Allen, 2017; Al-Qaradawi, 2010; Al-Rāzī, 2000; Hanafi, 2000; Jafari, 2020; Nieuwkerk, K. van, LeVine, M., & Stokes, 2016; K. M. A. Ahamed. (Zubair, 2012).

The *Burda*, *Al-Ishriniyyat*, *Al-Qasida Al-Witriyya*, and other influential works helped establish the pattern of panegyrics in different regions. The spiritual attraction towards the Prophet inspired countless literary works in various languages, reflecting the diversity of Islamic culture. Scholars and savants from Tamil Nadu contributed significantly, producing original Arabic works that covered a range of topics, including panegyrics, jurisprudence, creed, and biography. The panegyrics from Tamil Nadu showcased diverse styles and meanings, emphasizing love, defense of Islam, and devotion to the Prophet and the *Ahlul Bait*. These compositions served as an outlet for emotional worship, influenced Sufism's literary culture, and have become an integral part of Islamic literary traditions (Geertz, 1977; Hanafi, 2006). The enduring spiritual attraction towards Prophet Muhammad continues to inspire poets and scholars worldwide, preserving the tradition of praising and honoring the beloved Prophet through the art of panegyrics (Shu'aib, 1993; K. M. A. Ahamed. Zubair, 2013).

The purpose of this research article is to examine and shed light on the panegyrics on the Prophet in the Arabic literature of Tamil Nadu (K. M. A. Ahamed. Zubair, 2010). The article aims to explore the historical background of panegyrics and their significance in the realm of Arabic literature, particularly in the context of Tamil Nadu. Investigate the decline of pagan poetry and the emergence of panegyrics during the advent of Islam, highlighting the impact of the noble teachings of the Prophet. Identify and discuss the poets who composed panegyrics in the presence of the Prophet, emphasizing their role in fostering love, respect, and loyalty among Muslims. Examine the relationship between panegyrics and *Sira* (biography), showcasing how poets incorporated biographical material and eulogistic elements into their compositions. Discuss the formalization of panegyrics and their association with Islamic mysticism, particularly Sufism, highlighting influential panegyric compositions and their spiritual and emotional aspects. Analyze notable panegyric compositions by scholars from Tamil Nadu, such as *Qasidatul Witriyyah*, *Al Qasidatush Shaf'iyyah*, *Al Qasidatul Muhammadiyyah* and *Minhatu Sarandib Fi Mawlidil Habib*, examining their themes and contributions to the Arabic literary tradition of Tamil Nadu. Provide a comprehensive understanding of the diversity of styles and meanings found in prophetic panegyrics, emphasizing their cultural, literary, and religious significance (Nashir, 2015). By fulfilling these objectives, this research article aims to contribute to the scholarly understanding of panegyrics on the Prophet within the context of Tamil Nadu's Arabic literature and showcase the rich tradition of expressing devotion and reverence for the Prophet through poetic compositions (Banton, 2013; Chelini-Pont, 2013; Shareef, 2008).

METHOD

A comprehensive review of relevant scholarly works, primary sources, and existing literature on panegyrics, Arabic literature in Tamil Nadu, and the significance of panegyrics on the Prophet is conducted. This helps in identifying key themes, research gaps, and theoretical frameworks relevant to the study. Data Collection: Primary and secondary sources are utilized to collect the necessary data for analysis. Primary sources include original panegyric compositions by scholars from Tamil Nadu, such as *Qasidatul Witriyyah*, *Al Qasidatush Shaf'iyyah*, *Al Qasidatul Muhammadiyyah* and *Minhatu Sarandib Fi Mawlidil Habib*. Secondary sources comprise scholarly articles, books, and historical documents related to panegyrics and Arabic literature.

The collected data, including panegyric compositions and scholarly sources, is systematically analyzed. Qualitative analysis methods are employed to identify recurring themes, stylistic elements, linguistic characteristics, and the underlying messages conveyed in the panegyrics. Comparative analysis is performed to examine similarities and differences between different panegyric compositions. Contextualization: The panegyrics are examined within their historical, cultural, and religious context, taking into account the socio-political climate of Tamil Nadu during the time of their composition. This contextualization aids in understanding the motivations behind the panegyrics and their relevance within the Islamic literary tradition (Crook, 2001), (Alkhatib et al., 2019)

Interpretation and Discussion: the findings from the data analysis and contextualization are interpreted and discussed in relation to the research objectives. The themes, historical significance, and literary techniques employed in the panegyrics are explored, and their contributions to the Arabic literature of Tamil Nadu are critically examined. The discussion section also considers the broader implications and relevance of the panegyrics in fostering love, respect, and devotion towards the Prophet.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research reveals panegyrics' enduring cultural and religious importance in expressing love, respect, and loyalty towards the Prophet. The findings could highlight the integral role of panegyrics in fostering a sense of devotion among Muslims in Tamil Nadu. The study explores the decline of pagan poetry in Tamil Nadu due to the influence of the noble teachings of the Prophet. The findings could shed light on transforming poetic expression from tribalistic influences to the eulogistic and spiritual themes of panegyrics. The research could uncover insights into the poets who composed and recited panegyrics in the presence of the Prophet. This could provide a deeper understanding of their motivations, the impact of their compositions on the community, and the appreciation and encouragement they received from the Prophet.

The study might reveal the integration of panegyrics and Sira (biography) in Arabic literature, showcasing how poets incorporated biographical material and eulogistic elements in their compositions. The findings highlight the close relationship between poetic praise and the portrayal of the life and miracles of the Prophet. The research may examine the formalization of panegyrics over time and their association with Islamic mysticism, particularly Sufism. The findings showcase the standardization of poetic forms, the inclusion of evidentiary miracles (mujizat), and the role of panegyrics as an outlet for emotional and spiritual devotion within the Islamic community. The research article explores the panegyrics of the Prophet, specifically within the Arabic literature of Tamil Nadu. This localized perspective provides a unique context for studying the expression of devotion and reverence towards the Prophet, potentially offering insights and perspectives distinct from broader studies on panegyrics in Islamic literature.

The article highlights the contributions of scholars from Tamil Nadu in composing panegyrics, such as Qasidatul Witriyyah, Al Qasidatush Shaf'iyyah, Al Qasidatul Muhammadiyah and Minhatu Sarandib Fi Mawlidil Habib. The research article highlights the lesser-known panegyric traditions within the Tamil Arabic literary sphere. The study explores the integration of panegyrics with the cultural and linguistic nuances of Tamil Nadu. The research article offers a unique perspective on the interplay between Arabic literature and the local cultural and linguistic heritage by examining how Arabic panegyrics were embraced and composed within the Tamil context. The article delves

into the themes, stylistic elements, and linguistic characteristics present in the panegyrics of Tamil Nadu's Arabic literature. Through a detailed analysis, the research article can provide original insights into the specific poetic techniques, metaphors, and rhetorical devices Tamil scholars employ in their panegyric compositions. The research article may contribute to the field of comparative literature by examining the similarities and differences between panegyric traditions in Tamil Nadu and other regions. The article offers a comparative perspective that enriches our understanding of panegyric traditions in different cultural contexts by analyzing the unique characteristics and contributions of Tamil Arabic panegyrics.

Panegyrics

Panegyrics, also known as *al-Madaih al-Nabawiyyah*, have played a vital role in Arabic literature, expressing profound love, respect, and loyalty towards the Prophet. This research article focuses specifically on the panegyrics within Tamil Nadu's Arabic literary context, aiming to shed light on their significance and contributions. By examining the historical background, cultural context, and works of Tamil scholars, we can gain a deeper understanding of the unique expressions of devotion and reverence found in these panegyrics (Husain & Uzuner, 2021)

Panegyrics on the Prophet, known as *al-Madaih al-Nabawiyyah* in Arabic, hold a significant place in Arabic literature and the reverence for the Prophet. These panegyrics have been widely composed within the field of Islamic culture. It is expected of every Muslim to cultivate deep love, utmost respect, unwavering loyalty, and unwavering devotion to the Prophet (Khaldun, 2015; Patji, 1991; Psychology, 2017; Putra, A. D., Purnomo, D., & Utomo, 2019; Saerozi, 2017).

Poetry and Pre-Islamic Period

During the time of the Prophet, panegyrics and odes in his praise were recited in his honorable presence, and he appreciated and encouraged them. With the emergence of Islam and its noble teachings, the practices of *Jahiliyyah* or paganism significantly declined. The Prophet established values of truth, justice, and cooperative living, fostering a sense of mutual rights and obligations within a disciplined civic and political organization. The tribal social order influenced by the spirit of *Jahiliyyah* suffered a setback, as Islamic values superseded it. Consequently, the influence of *Jahiliyyah* poetry, inspired by tribalism, diminished. Pagan poets, realizing the change, turned their invectives against the Prophet and actively aligned themselves with his opponents.

Poetry on Prophet of Islam

It is important to note that the Holy Quran denounces specific poets who engage in wrongful acts, but it does not condemn poetry or all poets in general. Some companions of the Prophet who composed poems in his praise and recited them in his presence include Hadrat 'Amru ibnu Ma'dikarb, Hadrat 'Abdullah ibnu Rawaha, Hadrat Arwa bintu 'Abdul Muttalib, Hadrat 'Abbas ibnu Mirdas, Hadrat Ka'b ibnu Zuhayr, Hadrat Abu Darda al Ansari, Hadrat Labid ibnu Rabi'a, Hadrat Hassan ibnu Thabit, Hadrat Nabigha al Ju'diyyi, and Hadrat Adi ibnu Hatam Ta'i.

Madih (Prophetic panegyric) and *Sira* (biography) are two related categories that share common characteristics. *Madih* involves praising the Prophet, while *Sira* narrates his legendary life and miracles. Poets often incorporate biographical material when

praising the Prophet, and when they narrate his life story, it becomes a part of the eulogy.

Praise poems dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad were composed even during his lifetime. By the thirteenth century, this poetry took on a formal structure, often highlighting the miracles (*mujizat*) that distinguished Muhammad's (PBUH) life and exemplified God's favor towards him. These miracles were initially recorded in hadith literature and later collected in prose collections such as *Qadi Iyad's al-Shifa* and *al-juzuli's Dalail khairat*. *Madih* became formalized and has always served as an outlet for emotional worship in Islam. It has long been associated with Islamic mysticism and likely influenced Sufism's literary culture (Al-Maraghi, 2002; Al-Qurtubi, 2014; Al-Qushayri, 2018; Al-Sya'rawi, 2007; Al-Syawkani, 2014; Al-Thabathaba'i., 1987; Al-Zuhaily, 2009; Kidwai, 1996; Shihab, 2004; Thabari, 1999; Zamakhsyari, 2012).

Burda -The Trendsetter

The Burda, known as 'The Cloak,' written by al-Busiri, holds significant responsibility for establishing the pattern of *Madih* throughout the western Islamic world. *Al-Fazazi's al-Ishriniyyat* and *al-Qasaid al-witriyya*, along with *al-Tawzari's Simt al-huda*, are also influential works in West Africa and Egypt, respectively. The spiritual attraction towards Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) has inspired countless literary works in various languages throughout history. Literature extolling Prophet Muhammad, including panegyrics (*al-Madih al-Nabawi or al-Madaaih al-Nabawiyya*), has been created in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, Tamil, Malayalam, and other languages, reflecting Islamic cultural diversity (Kokan, 1960). Scholars and savants from Tamil Nadu have produced a rich collection of original Arabic works covering a wide range of topics, including panegyrics, jurisprudence, creed, and biography. The Tamil scholars have composed numerous panegyrics on the Prophet and other revered spiritual figures of Islam. Tamil authors have contributed as many as 68 lengthy Arabic *Mawlid*s dedicated to the Prophet (Al-Attas, 1993; K. M. A. A. Zubair, 2017).

Glimpses From The Panegyrics On The Prophet By The Scholars Of Tamil Nadu

Glimpses from the panegyrics on the Prophet by the scholars of Tamil Nadu reveal the rich literary tradition dedicated to praising and honoring the Prophet. One notable composition is the *Qasidatul Witriyyah Fi Madhi Khayril Bariyyah*, composed by Madihur Rasul Sadaqathullah Appa (1632-1703 AD). Widely recited in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the Witriyyah is highly regarded as one of the finest Arabic compositions ever produced.

1. In the Witriyyah, Sadaqathullah Appa expresses his deep love for the Prophet, believing that this love protects him from Satan and guarantees his entry into paradise. He states that his poetry, praising the Prophet, shines eternally and extinguishes the fires of hell upon its encounter. The act of praising the Prophet is believed to grant believers the reward of a blissful garden and the pleasure of divine companionship. *Qasidatul Witriyyah* is widely recited in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It is held in very high esteem and is considered to be one of the few finest Arabic compositions ever produced. Sadaqathullah Appa relates in his masterpiece, "Qasidatul Witriyyah" as follows:

Your love has entered my flesh and bones. And, on account of it, Satan has no access to my heart. Also Satan has denied entry into my flesh and the opportunity of spoiling

it (the heart). My earnest belief is that (because of my love for you and my singing your Praise), I will enter, with you, the gardens of heaven, which will be filled with whatever is desired. The jewels of my poetry in Praise of the Prophet shine brightly forever. If ever the hell sees his panegyrist, it will (immediately) extinguish itself. The reward for those who praise the Prophet and for its listeners is nothing less than garden of bliss, where each will be joined with the celestial consort (Zubair 2017 15), (Versteegh, 2015).

From the above lines, we can understand the love which Sadaqathullah Appa had for the Prophet. He was sure that on account of such love, he would be protected from Satan and be admitted into paradise. Witriyyah of Madihur Rasul Sadaqathulla Appa indicates that praising the Prophet is rewarded with benefits both here and in the Hereafter. One such stanza from Witriyyah is given below:

“Certain people have developed the practice of reciting the panegyrics on the Prophet of Allah as a regular form of prayer. On account of this practice, they are destined to gain entry into paradise which is eternal and luminous, and their numerous sins are bound to be remitted once and for all. The worth of these works is such that they can be compared to a string of invaluable pearls (Zubair 2017 16), (Wazery et al., 2022)

2. Another renowned composition is the Al Qasidatush Shaf'iyyah Fi Mad-hi Shafi'il Jam'iyyah, also known as the Shaf'iyyah, composed by Kilakarai Tayka Sahib. Similar to the Witriyyah, it begins with expressions of praise and seeks blessings for the Prophet, his family, and his companions. The Shaf'iyyah begins with the following lines: “I pronounce Bismillah with the intention of beginning the qasaid (odes). I pronounce the word al hamdu lillah in praise of the Beneficent Lord. May the Supreme Being who has distinguished Himself from the creation, shower Salawat on the most trusted hand (al Amin, the Prophet), his family and his Companions, who have been beneficial to the community (Zubair 2017 17), (Wazery et al., 2022)
3. Sadaqathullah Appa and Kilakarai Tayka Sahib (Shu'aib 1993 137) emphasize that reciting Salawat (prayers) and praising the Prophet are integral parts of worship (ibadah). Such acts bring discipline, well-being, proximity to Allah, and help believers in their earthly and spiritual journeys, even after death. Seeking the intercession of the Prophet is supported by verses from the Holy Quran. Sadaqathullah Appa and Kilakarai Tayka Sahib, in various places in Witriyyah and Shaf'iyyah, observe as follows (Shuaib 1993 137, Zubair 2013 51 & Zubair 2017 19): “Recitation of Salawat on the Prophet and praising him are part of ibadat. This is proved by the lives of Sahaba. By praising the Prophet, the Believers are not only blessed with disciplined lives and welfare in this world, but they are also blessed with Nearness to, and Mercy of Allah. Further, these acts help the Believers in their death-beds and also help them at all stages thereafter, including the highest pleasure of His Liqa (Vision). Such Believers will be saved from the fire of hell and difficulties of this world. Seeking the assistance of the Prophet has the sanction of the Holy Quran (Verse 7:157 asserts that the Prophet will relieve the *mumins* of their burden... Those who honour him will be successful. Verse 93:10 indicates that the Prophet will respond positively if he is begged for assistance. These verses are valid for ever.”
4. Shaykh Muhyiddin composed Al Qasidatul Muhammadiyyah, a 3000-hemistich ode in praise of the Prophet. In this work, he highlights the miracles performed by the Prophet, the extraordinary events surrounding his birth, and the Prophet's position as the leader of all previous prophets. Shaykh Muhyiddin seeks the Prophet's intercession,

- confesses his sins, and pleads for mercy. *Al Qasidatul Muhammadiyah* (Zubair 2017 20) is also in Praise of the Prophet. It is a composition of 3000 hemistiches by Shaykh Muhyiddin (b.1208 AH/ 1793 AD). He is the son of Umar Wali. He studied Arabic and theology under his elder brother, Kayalpattinam Tayka Sahib, and also under Shaykh Ali-al-Jabarti, the Scholar-Saint from Syria who settled down in Kilakarai and lies buried there. “He speaks about the various miracles performed by the Prophet .He also describes the uncommon happenings that took place at the time of his noble Birth and also asserts that Prophet Nuh (AS) and Prophet Musa (AS) were saved by Almighty Lord for the sake of His chosen friend, the Prophet.He further states that the Prophet is the leader of all those Prophets who had come before him and that his Community (*Ummat*) is given supremacy over the earlier communities. Finally, he confesses to the Prophet about his sins and pleads for Intercession (Zubair 2017 21).”
5. *Minhatu Sarandib Fi Mawlidil Habib*, composed by Imamul Arus, combines prose and poetry to celebrate the birth of the Prophet. It contains fourteen qasaid (odes) and thirteen chapters. The work reflects the profound love poets have for the Prophet, pouring their hearts into panegyrics that express devotion and reverence. *Minhatu Sarandib Fi Mawlidil Habib*, is a mawlid in Praise of the Prophet intertwined with prose and poetry. It was composed by Imamul Arus. This work has fourteen qasaid, and its prose part contains 13 chapters and a preface (Zubair 2017 21). “Fired by the fervent and passionate love for the Prophet, many a poet has given expression to his innermost thoughts, from the recesses of his heart, in the form of panegyrics. Imamul ‘Arus in the fifth qasidah of his famous *Minhatu Sarandib fi Mawlidil Habib*, compliments such poets as follows: Many a speaker has eloquently dealt with his (the Holy Prophet’s (PBUH) praise. Many a writer has been enchanted at his emergence. So many have craved for his nearness, and so many have opened their hearts and praised him in the most moving manner. So many have poured panegyrics on him in chaste language, purer than the rain falling from the clouds (Zubair 2017 22).
 6. One unique composition is *Allafal Alif* by Shaykh Umar Wali of Kayalpattinam. Each line of this poem starts with a letter from the Arabic alphabet, creating a poetic structure that emphasizes the importance of love for the Prophet and the spiritual path. One of the poems of Shaykh Umar Wali of Kayalpattinam (1162-1216 AH/ 1748-1801 AD) is known as *Allafal Alif*. The beauty about this composition is that every line in this poem begins with a letter in the Arabic alphabetical order. Thus, there are 29 lines, a line for each letter of the Arabic alphabet in its order. *Allafal Alif* speaks of the importance of loving the Prophet which, he believed would help one to ascend the spiritual ladder and keep oneself off aberration. The qasidah also speaks of the importance of going on a spiritual path, and worldly life etc. It is in dignified form, befitting the nature of its subject matter (Zubair 2017 23). Overall, the prophetic panegyrics in Arabic literature from Tamil Nadu exhibit diverse styles and meanings, reflecting the scholars' love, defense of Islam, and devotion to the Prophet and the *Ahlul Bait*. These panegyrics have become an integral part of Sufism, as noted by the Arabic savants of Tamil Nadu.

It is evident from the glimpses from the panegyrics on the Prophet by the scholars of Tamil Nadu that these compositions reflect a deep love and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad and serve as expressions of devotion within the Islamic literary tradition. The various compositions mentioned, such as the *Witriyyah*, *Shafiyyah*, *Al Qasidatul*

Muhammadiyah, *Minhatu Sarandib Fi Mawlidil Habib* and *Allafal Alif*, showcase different poetic styles and approaches to praising and honoring the Prophet. These panegyrics not only emphasize the Prophet's qualities and his position among previous prophets but also stress the importance of seeking his intercession and embodying his teachings in one's life. The rich literary heritage of panegyrics in Tamil Nadu demonstrates the cultural diversity and the enduring spiritual attraction towards Prophet Muhammad.

CONCLUSION

The panegyrics on the Prophet hold a significant place in Arabic literature and the reverence for Prophet Muhammad. These compositions, widely composed within Islamic culture, reflect the deep love, unwavering loyalty, and utmost respect that Muslims are expected to cultivate towards the Prophet. During the time of the Prophet, panegyrics and odes in his praise were recited in his presence, and he appreciated and encouraged them. With the emergence of Islam, the influence of *Jahiliyyah* poetry and tribalism diminished, and poets began to praise the Prophet and incorporate his life story into their eulogies.

Praise poems dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad have been composed in various languages throughout history, reflecting the Islamic cultural diversity. The panegyrics not only highlight the Prophet's virtues but also serve as a means of emotional worship, often associated with Islamic mysticism and influencing Sufism's literary culture. Influential works such as the *Burda*, *al-Ishriniyyat*, *al-Qasaid al-witriyya*, and *Simt al-huda* have helped establish the pattern of panegyrics in different regions. The scholars of Tamil Nadu have contributed significantly to the genre of panegyrics on the Prophet by producing a rich collection of original Arabic works. Their compositions reflect deep love, devotion, and reverence for the Prophet, expressing their belief in the protective power of praising him and seeking his intercession. The diverse styles and meanings found in these Tamil compositions highlight the scholars' dedication to Islam and their spiritual connection to the Prophet and the *Ahlul Bait*.

Overall, the panegyrics on the Prophet form an integral part of Islamic literature, serving as a means to express love, honor, and devotion towards Prophet Muhammad. These compositions not only celebrate the Prophet's qualities and miracles but also emphasize the importance of embodying his teachings and seeking his intercession. They have left a lasting impact on the cultural and literary traditions of different regions, reflecting the enduring spiritual attraction towards the beloved Prophet.

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