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Hamd and Naat: Muslim Women Singers in Pakistan

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Hamd and Naat: Muslim Women Singers in Pakistan

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Music

Bates College

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

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Lewiston, Maine

3/22/2013

*Az siday-i sukhan-i ishq nadidam khushtar
Yadigari keh dar in gunbad-i davvar bemaand*

(Of all souvenirs beneath this revolving dome
none gives me more pleasure than
the music in the discourse of love)

- Hafiz

*Dedicated to my loving parents,
Muhammad Ilyas and Tahseen Ilyas*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The words of the poem resonated through the entire crowd as everyone in the audience chanted:

“O Prophet! May Allah’s peace be upon you.”

A woman dressed in traditional Pakistani clothes, with her head covered, stood on an elevated platform facing an entire crowd of women standing in the audience. After chanting the invocation for peace on the Prophet Muhammad five times, the woman on the stage chanted solo:

“O Allah! Please hear this prayer of mine,
That I get the chance to go to the Prophet’s tomb,
And there, after I recite some *naat* in his praise,
I will lower my head and recite...”

This was immediately followed by the entire audience chanting the next line with her:

“O Prophet! May Allah’s peace be upon you.”

The effect was mesmerizing. The wonderful sound of around 50 women chanting together filled me with warmth. There was an ethereal spirit in the surroundings. This was at an all-female religious gathering at Chenab Club in the Pakistani city of Faisalabad in July 2012. These women were filled with religious passion and one could hear it in their song. The song that they were chanting is called *salam* which means peace. It falls under the category of religious Islamic chants or songs that are an important part of religious life in Pakistan. These religious Islamic chants are called *hamd* and *naat*. *Hamd* and *naat* form a very popular genre of vocal

music in Pakistan. The former is set to poetry in praise of Allah (God) and the latter is in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. The *salam*, mentioned here, is a *naat*.

I grew up listening to *hamd* and *naat* at home on radio and television and at various events at my school in the small city of Faisalabad in Pakistan. I also grew up learning Quran at home and Islamic studies in school. From saying the five daily prayers with my family to participating in religious discussions at the dinner table, Islam was and still is an integral part of my everyday life. At the same time, I was also learning Indian classical music since the age of six. Everyday my private tutor, John Felbous, used to come train me in singing and in playing the *harmonium*. Music was always one of my biggest passions. *Hamd* and *naat*, therefore, appealed to both my musical interests as well as my religious values. I participated and won various *naat* competitions across Punjab. I also performed at many religious gatherings at my school.

At the age of 18, I found myself in a completely new place, new culture and amongst new people at Bates College. Never having been out of Pakistan, and living in the small city of Faisalabad, I didn't gain much exposure to other non-native forms of music. At Bates, I had the opportunity to explore and learn musical traditions that were totally foreign to me. In Professor William Matthews's class 'Classical Music in Western Culture', I studied Gregorian chant for the first time. Even though the two vocal traditions are not explicitly connected to one another, I thought that *hamd* and *naat* are very similar to the Gregorian chant in their purposes and religious context. I started thinking about this tradition in a way I had never thought before. I began to consider its various aspects and how it can culminate in an important field of ethnomusicological study. Despite being so popular in Pakistan, there is no ethnomusicological study done on this tradition. It is quite strange that there is such a lack of literature on such a prevalent and vibrant performance tradition. One reason could be that many people in Pakistan,

who have orthodox Islamic views, deny that this tradition has anything to do with music. That is because they do not want to associate something religious with the term ‘music’ that, according to the orthodox Islamic view, is prohibited in Islam. Another reason could be that ethnomusicology itself is not a very recognized field of study in Pakistan. However, I decided to pursue ethnomusicological research on this tradition during the summers of 2011 and 2012. Through this thesis, I want to use my experience of *hamd* and *naat* and the two summers of research that I have done in this field to contribute to the knowledge of world music and more specifically to the knowledge about female Muslim singers of this tradition in Pakistan.

There has been an increased interest in Muslim identity, especially Muslim women’s identity, in the academia over the past few years and this thesis can shed light on Muslim women’s identity performed through *hamd* and *naat* in Pakistan. I can contribute as an indigenous scholar and my cultural and religious background has helped me a great deal in pursuing this research. This thesis will also help Muslims and non-Muslims outside this tradition to understand *hamd* and *naat* and their importance. It can contribute to relations between Muslims and non-Muslims as it will show another aspect of Muslim life in Pakistan that is not related to any political issues depicted in the media. This thesis will be translated into Urdu as well, making it available to a Pakistani readership.

In Pakistani society, there are numerous cultural and social dynamics performed through the religious and musical traditions, *hamd* and *naat*. These influences include for example orthodox and unorthodox attitudes towards different aspects of its performance, commercialism, globalization and the dichotomy between the modernist and traditionalist attitudes amongst the audience. In this thesis, I focus on the ways in which gender dynamics are performed through *hamd* and *naat* in Pakistan.

The need for scholarship in this area in combination with my own interest in this tradition as a cultural participant and performer has led me to pursue research in this field. During the course of my research in summer of 2011 in Pakistan, I explored the musical, social, religious, cultural and commercial aspects of this tradition as well as the issues of preservation as perceived by its culture bearers. My research project in the summer of 2012 was focused on women and their role in this music.

Fieldwork

Some people who I interviewed were not very willing to give answers to a girl who was coming from an American college for research into a religious tradition in Pakistan. They were suspicious of me and were reluctant to share information. My position as a female participant of the tradition and as a member of the community profoundly affected my work. During both summers that I was researching, I was invited to perform at *hamd* and *naat* gatherings. Through my participant observation I saw that my participation had an effect on their willingness to share their cultural experience with me. Their first impression of me was usually skeptical. Due to my young age and the fact that I was coming from the United States, they doubted my ability to do this research. Once they saw my performance they were much more supportive and cooperative. These reactions were one of the many interesting aspects of my entire research experience.

In this thesis, I analyze interview material that I collected during the two summers. I have interviews (conducted in 2012) of five women performers from Faisalabad and thirteen interviews of religious scholars, male performers and producers from Faisalabad, Lahore, Islamabad and Rawalpindi (conducted in summer 2011). I also have perspectives of twelve young Pakistanis between ages of 16 and 27 sampled from Faisalabad, Karachi, Islamabad and

Lahore (collected in 2012). I took field notes during my research which also proved useful in writing my thesis.

I also documented five different performances of this tradition in Faisalabad in both audio and video format. All these performances took place in July and August 2012. One performance was by Sayyida Umm-e-Kulsum at a private gathering in a house. I was also invited to perform at this event. The woman at whose house the gathering was arranged also performed a *naat*. The video clip I recorded starts with a scene from before the start of the *hamd* and *naat* performances. It shows all the women reciting verses from the Quran. They kept count of how many times a certain verse had been recited by counting on the pits of dates. The performances start as soon as the women finish reciting. The clip then moves on to Umm-e-Kulsum's performance which is followed by a performance by me and then the host. At the end of the clip all the women stand facing in the direction of *Kaaba* (Allah's House in Mecca) and recite a *salam*. This video clip can be seen on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GINQuVxaojU>). Another event featured performances by Nadia, Shumaila, Hina, Ishrat, Motiya and Nida from Madina Town College Faisalabad at Chenab Club (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cK1D_Tbff3g). The performance scene described at the beginning of this chapter is from this event but was not recorded because some women in the audience did not want me to record them. Chenab Club also hosted an event with performances by male performers which I recorded as well (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ql_DGjTaMxE). This event featured performances by Qari Masood Ahmed, Qari Muhammad Azam, Hafiz Ghulam Shafiq and Allah Ditta Sabri. Another performance that I recorded was at Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan Auditorium in Faisalabad by Mian Tariq Mahmood Rofi (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1jkPFXnuhA>). I also attended an

event organized by the Islamic Center in Faisalabad. This was for elementary school children who had completed the Center's summer course. I recorded a video of the children performing a *hamd* at this event (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dgp7_BKVK0I). I also have audio recordings of my own performance of *hamd* and *naat* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiXnIMM1SUA>).

Gender Dynamics



**Figure 1: *Milad* at Beaconhouse School System Faisalabad
(separate arrangements for girls and boys)**

As I mentioned before the major aspect explored in this thesis is the gender dynamics performed in this genre. During my research in the summer of 2011 I received conflicting views from male performers, Islamic scholars, general public, producers and other cultural actors on women's performance of *naat* and *hamd*. In summer of 2012, I asked women specifically about people's behavior towards them and their families and their husbands' or fathers' or brothers' attitudes towards their participation. I asked them about the gatherings they performed in and whether they performed professionally or not. If they did perform professionally, I asked them

about any competition they faced from male performers and their views about the orthodox Islamic rules regarding women's modesty, veiling and seclusion.

Through these questions I wanted to gain insight into my larger questions about whether women's participation in this genre destabilizes patriarchal power structures in the Pakistani society and whether it expands the boundaries of acceptable women's activities under more orthodox interpretations of Islam or not.

Nadia Bano, for example, a blind girl who has been performing *naat* and *hamd* since her childhood said that "a woman's voice is a woman itself" i.e. it is something that should be covered or hidden from men. She performs only in women's gatherings. She said that she gets a lot of support from the men in her family and her mother accompanies her at every performance. She does not perform professionally but she said that if a woman chooses to perform professionally too, she should only do so in front of women because that is what Allah has commanded.

Nida Butt, another woman performer who has been reciting *naat* and *hamd* since she was ten, said that those who recite it professionally are doing a good thing too by spreading this beautiful tradition. She thought that there is no harm in women's *naat* and *hamd* performances being accessible to the whole world as long as it is out of love for the Prophet. She has received a lot of support from her brothers and father and a lot of appreciation and respect in the society. Her education in her school and college was free because of her status as a performer of this noble tradition.

Women performers of *naat* and *hamd* are emerging rapidly and successfully all across the country. Their performances are shown on television, sold in the form of CDs and cassettes and

they are invited to perform in private and public gatherings. One can view their performances even on YouTube. There are women like Nadia Bano who support the orthodox Islamic views about women's modesty and seclusion. However, a lot of women like Nida Butt, Umm-e-Habiba, Hooriya Rafique, Tabinda Lari and many others (that many Pakistanis see on television and YouTube) have moved beyond the orthodox practices and are successfully pursuing their careers as performers of this tradition throughout Pakistan.

The performances, whether they cater mixed audience or just women, usually feature singers sitting on the floor of a stage. The dress of these women singers is one important feature of the performance that is used to emphasize the religious aspect of it. Both the performers and the audience members have their heads covered. Motiya, another performer, said that when you are in a gathering where *naat* is being performed, you should consider yourself as though you are in the presence of the Prophet himself and hence, you should dress and behave with extreme propriety. Their dress shows that they are doing something religious.

There are people (with orthodox Islamic views) who object to women's performance in front of men and their *naat* and *hamd* being shown on television but since they are not singing popular songs and instead are doing something religious they do not face too much opposition and they continue to progress in their endeavors. The fact that they are praising the Prophet in their songs keeps orthodox people from overly criticizing their performances because one cannot stop someone from praising the Prophet. Although men still dominate this tradition, both in writing the poetry and its performance, I think that some women have challenged the orthodox Islamic and patriarchal values in the society through their performances.

All the translations of Quranic verses in this thesis have been written after comparing translations by Sahih, Muhsin Khan, Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Shakir and Dr. Ghali provided on Quran.com.

Organization

In chapter 2 I provide the ideas and concepts related to Islam, women, music and Pakistan as presented by other writers. In chapter 3 of this thesis I present the music of these songs and what typical *hamd* and *naat* sound like. I also describe different categories of *hamd* and *naat* and provide transcriptions of the *hamd* and *naat* performed in the video links provided.

Through the rest of the chapters in this thesis, the focus remains on female performers of *hamd* and *naat* while I also explore various dynamics other than gender and various scenarios of this performance tradition. These other social dynamics performed through this tradition are, for example, orthodox and unorthodox attitudes towards different aspects of its performance and commercialism. These too are briefly explored in this thesis. These topics can also provide areas of future research and writing as they are equally intriguing. For instance, the tension between the orthodox and non-orthodox groups of Muslims is one such dynamic that is explained in chapters 4 and 5. One out of many issues of contention between these two groups is whether or not these songs should be called ‘music’ and whether or not musical instruments can be used in the performance. Similarly, with regards to women performers there is always an on-going argument between the orthodox and non-orthodox Islamic scholars about whether or not they should perform publicly and professionally. In chapter 4, I focus on the performance of this tradition in Pakistan under an orthodox setting while in chapter 5 I focus on an unorthodox setting of this performance tradition. I describe women’s participation in both kinds of scenarios.

Commercialism is another issue and in chapters 4 and 5, I also briefly explore commercialization of this tradition. According to Dr. Khalid Zaheer, this tradition has become so popular in our culture that as a result people have started assigning a certain economic value to it. It has been adopted as a profession by most performers. For famous professional women performers like Umm-e-Habiba and Hooriya Rafique, their performances on television, performances in special gatherings and their cassettes and CDs are also a means of earning for them. These women have become popular celebrities. They appear in television talk shows as celebrity guests and people call them on live television to praise their performances and request them to sing their favorite *naat* or *hamd*. Commercialization has also resulted in the production of *naat* and *hamd* based on the melodies of popular Bollywood and film songs.

In the concluding chapter of the thesis, I again address the questions I had posed to myself during my fieldwork. Does women's participation in this genre destabilizes patriarchal power structures in the Pakistani society? Does it expand the boundaries of acceptable women's activities under more orthodox interpretations of Islam? I give my point of view on these questions in the final chapter. I explain how performing *hamd* and *naat* is the gateway for many Muslim women in Pakistan to transition from the private to the public sphere in a way that also safeguards their honor and helps them counter the orthodox opposition.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives

The love of *Allah* (God) and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) govern a Muslim's life. The opening chapter of the Holy Quran, *Surah Al-Fatihah*, says:

“All Praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.
The Beneficent, the Merciful,
Master of the day of requital.
Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.
Guide us on the right path,
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors,
Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.” (1:1-7)

These seven verses of the Quran are an integral part of each of the five prayers that a Muslim performs every day. According to Maulvi Muhammad Ali, in his translation and commentary of the Holy Quran, the two major themes in the Quran are the declaration of the glory of God and the teachings about the right way of life for mankind. Both of these themes are depicted in these verses which are repeated by every Muslim several times during a day. Praise of Allah is *hamd* and as shown by these verses, Quran itself is an expression of *hamd*.

Another feature of the daily prayers is praising and sending blessings to the Prophet Muhammad. This has been imparted to the Muslims by the Creator, Himself. Allah says in the Quran, “Surely Allah and His angels bless the Prophet; O you who believe! Call for blessings on him and salute him with a becoming salutation” (33:56). In addition to the salutations in the five prayers, Muslims have adopted their own ways of praising the Prophet and sending blessings to him such as writing or reciting *naat* poetry.

This thesis focuses on the issues of gender in the practice of this tradition in Pakistan. There is a lot of scholarship on women, music and Islam but despite the fact that *hamd* and *naat*

are very popular religious and musical genres in Pakistan, there is hardly any literature on it. However, the related scholarship on women, music and Islam in general can be a good place to start looking into this tradition.

The first question these sources can be helpful in answering is how this tradition came about. Although other Muslim countries, such as Turkey, also have songs in praise of God and the Prophet Muhammad, the performance, rules, norms and musical form of this tradition in Pakistan is different from other regions in the world. Let us look at those elements of this tradition that tie it to other Muslim cultures. One such element is the poetry.

According to Amjad, Muslims have been reciting poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad since the time of the Prophet himself. The tradition of *naat* takes inspiration from the praise of the Prophet Muhammad that Allah does in the Quran (Amjad 1992-1993). Shiloah (1995: 3) describes how poetry was the most important form of expression in Arab culture even before the advent of Islam. Many of Muhammad's companions used to write *naat* poetry. The companion most renowned for this was Hassaan bin Sabit who was also known as the 'Prophet's poet'. In the Prophet's time, this poetry was also used as a part of the process of rebuttal to the allegations and negative propaganda that was raised by the *Quffaar* (non-Muslims) of Mecca. (Zaheer 2011) In my interviews with Islamic scholars, almost every one of them told me the story of the time when Muhammad had reached Medina and little girls had sung *naat* for him to welcome him. Over time, this tradition has become an important part of Muslim culture. In Pakistan, *naat* and *hamd* are sung at religious occasions, at the beginning of any event (political, religious or educational), in every school, in homes, and on television and radio.

Shiloah (1995: 3) also describes the structure and form of the poetic phrases in Arab culture and how they are incorporated into the musical realm. *Naat* and *hamd* sung in contemporary Pakistan are based on a similar poetic structure. The melodies are not Arabic but the poetic lines, although mostly in Urdu language, follow the same poetic form. Terms like *ghina* (singing) and *lahn* (chant) are used to define the singing style in these genres. They mean to chant in a pleasant manner focusing on the meaning of every word sung (Shiloah 1995: 22). Pakistan's early exposure to the Arab world due to the invasion of the region by the Arab conqueror, Muhammad b. al-Qassim (Jairazbhoy 1993: 294), is one of the reasons behind these similarities between Arabic poetry and *hamd* and *naat*.

This tradition is not only influenced by Arabic poetry but also by Sufi music and culture. Jairazbhoy (1993: 294) and Qureshi (1995: 108) both talk about the Sufi poets such as Rumi and Khusrau and the Sufi music in *sama* gatherings (musical gatherings in Sufi tradition to reinforce religious and mystical ecstasy). This Sufi poetry focuses on the love and connection between man and God and it also constitutes a form of *hamd*. *Hamd* and *naat* are different from the Sufi music performed in *sama* gatherings and *Qawwali* that Qureshi (1995) writes about. However, some aspects of this music such as the poetry, the influence of Indian music on it and the issue of the legitimacy of *daf* (large frame drum similar to a tambourine) and other musical instruments are similar with this tradition too. The issue of the legitimacy of *daf* is that it is argued by some that *daf* is the only musical instrument that is allowed for accompanying *hamd* and *naat* performances. As Qureshi (1995: 109) writes, this framed drum is said to have been used in the Prophet's time and *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) have been quoted that allow this musical instrument to be used. Hence, some scholars argue that this is the only instrument that has been allowed in Islam. However, some other scholars (who I interviewed) said that this

instrument was the only one mentioned in the quotes of the Prophet because that was the instrument most commonly used in Arabia at his time. If at that time guitar had been in use in Arabia, then it might also have been considered a sacred musical instrument. Some Islamic scholars forbid the use of any musical instrument at all with *hamd* and *naat* because in their view, anything related to music leads to vice. There are also some who say that use of musical instruments is allowed as long as they are being used to advance a good purpose such as for praising Allah and His Prophet in a beautiful manner.

Qureshi (1995: 109) also writes about the concessions made in Sufi music (such as use of *dholak*, a two-headed drum) in order to accommodate the non-Muslim population of the Indian sub-continent. In Pakistan, *hamd* and *naat* too have carried these influences from Pakistan's cultural counterparts in India. As Qureshi (2013) says, these melodies are South Asian. The melodies of *hamd* and *naat* carry North Indian musical forms. In fact, these days a lot of the melodies are based on popular Bollywood songs. Majeed (1990: 581-586) in his Urdu book on *naat* writes about these melodies in detail and the differing attitudes of the public and Muslim scholars towards this new practice. Majeed says that a big part of *naat*, that are written and composed in Pakistan, is formed by such *naat* that are based on popular Bollywood song melodies. He says that although Islamic scholars do not consider these *naat* to be up to the standard, they are still extremely popular amongst the population in Pakistan. These are performed at *milad* gatherings (religious gatherings which are organized especially for the performance of *hamd* and *naat*), at Friday prayers and at religious events such as those organized at the time of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Majeed (1990: 581) says that this practice of basing *naat* on the melodies of Bollywood songs came about at the beginning of the 20th century, with the invention of gramophone and its introduction in India. Due to this technology film songs

spread throughout the whole population. Since these melodies became so famous, *naat* composers decided to use the same tunes to make their *naat* popular too. Such *naat* have gained fame but there are mixed views about them in the public. Some people dislike these *naat* because they remind them of the popular songs they are based on which are not religious at all. This, they believe, ruins the spirit of *naat*. They think it becomes hard to concentrate on the lyrics and praise of the Prophet when the Bollywood song that they have been based on keeps playing in one's head. Majeed (1990: 581) shares a view similar to the Muslim scholars I interviewed who think that the songs these *naat* are based on usually have inappropriate, romantic lyrics and one usually starts thinking about those lyrics when one hears such a *naat*. He says that even when the lyrics are changed, they are such that the Prophet is then depicted as a beloved and that is not religiously appropriate. Still though, some people enjoy such *naat*.

However, if you ask an orthodox Muslim, he will not call *hamd* and *naat* a 'musical' tradition. The debate for and against music, based on Islamic principles, has been investigated throughout Islamic history (Racy 2003 and Al-Kanadi 1986). Jairazbhoy (1993: 294), Shiloah (1995: 32-35, 43-44), Racy (2003: 4) and various other scholars talk about this debate. Jairazbhoy (1993) says that whenever the aspect of music in an Islamic nation is mentioned, it is necessary to talk about the conflicting attitudes towards it. He says that music is prohibited by the legists but it is practiced in folk, art and Sufi traditions. Racy (2003) mentions that throughout history, Near Easterners in general believed that music had extraordinary powers. He says that in ancient biblical traditions and pre-Islamic Arabia too music and musical instruments were considered to have powers similar to magic. Such views have continued even after multiple generations. Racy (2003) says that throughout Islamic history, secular music has been considered to have transformative powers and has been feared and condemned for generating vice and

disagreeable behaviors. Shiloah (1995) describes some early texts in Islam that addressed this issue. He writes about *Dhamm al-malahi* (The Book of the Censure of Instruments of Diversion) by the theologian and jurist Ibn Abi'l-Dunya (823-894) and how it is one of the earliest books that violently condemn music. This text and others like it, he says, forbid music because it takes one's mind off the devotional life and takes one away from God. Shiloah (1995) also mentions Ibn Djama'a (d. 1388) who considered music and dance to lead one to error and perdition. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who was a theologian and legal consultant, said that anyone who practiced *sama* was an infidel and polytheist (Shiloah 1995). However, Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, a great theologian, reformer and mystic wrote in favor of music (Shiloah 1995). He wrote that music and singing evoke the feelings of one's heart and bring those feelings out. He even defined specific cases in which the use of music was permitted (Shiloah 1995):

1. To encourage pilgrimage;
2. To incite to battle;
3. To inspire courage on the day of battle;
4. To evoke lamentation and sorrow – the latter being of two kinds: blameworthy and praiseworthy;
5. To arouse joy;
6. To elicit love and longing, in circumstances that permit singing and playing Instruments; or
7. To evoke love of God.

He also defined cases in which music was prohibited (Shiloah 1995):

1. When produced by women under certain conditions;

2. If the instruments used are expressly prohibited;
3. When the song's contents are not compatible with the spirit and precepts of religion;
4. When the listener is ruled by lust; or
5. If one listens to music for its own sake.

Hamd and *naat*, as religious chants, escape the censure of orthodox *ulema* (Islamic legal scholars) but at the same time rules are placed which restrict the level of musical elements allowed in the performance of this tradition. One can get an idea of these orthodox *ulema* in Pakistan from Ahmad's (2010, a) story of his own struggle against them as he tried to rise as a rock star. Al-Ghazzali's discourse leaves us with many further questions such as the prohibition of music being produced by women under certain conditions.

Restrictions are not just placed on the musical content but also on who can perform *hamd* and *naat*. Under orthodox Islam, women are not allowed to perform these songs in public. Rasmussen (2010: 222) points out in her book the Egyptian custom that considers a woman's voice as *aurat* (part of the body that should be concealed). Many people in Pakistan, who have orthodox Islamic views, believe this too. Women can sing in private, all-female gatherings but not in front of men. Despite this, we have various examples of successful women performers of this tradition in Pakistan who can be seen performing these songs professionally, in public gatherings and even on CDs, cassettes and YouTube. They face opposition from orthodox *ulema* (Muslim clergymen), orthodox Muslim men and even some women such as those from the organization that Khanum Shaikh (2010: 163-180) writes about, called Al-Huda International. Muslim women and their rights have been under much scholarly scrutiny in recent years. Whereas Islam gives equal rights to women as men, as Ahmed (1992) says the different readings

and interpretations of Prophet Muhammad's words and of the Quran result in fundamentally different 'Islams' for women. An example of this is Lughod's (1986: 124-125) description of the life of Muslim women in a Bedouin community in Egypt. She quotes a man from this tribe saying that God created Eve from Adam's bent lower rib and that is why women are always twisted.

Even though the patriarchal interpretations make a Muslim woman, living in Pakistan for instance, seem powerless and oppressed in the eyes of an outsider, they do not offer a complete view of their lives (Ahmad 2010). Ahmad (2010: 1-11) describes how even though Pakistani women live in a patriarchal society; they contribute to the society in many ways through various forms of work. Ahmad says that women are considered symbols of Muslim identity in Pakistan and their role of providing stability to the family unit is considered integral. She writes about how their honor (that is closely related to their bodies, dress and sexual purity) is one of the core values in the society. This is the reason behind the restrictions placed on women by some orthodox Islamic factions in Pakistan.

Even though wife-beating, bride-burning, acid-throwing, rape, murder and honor-killings do happen in Pakistan (Friend 2012: 96-103), this is not the reality of each and every woman in Pakistan. As Haeri (2002: 21) points out, Pakistan is a Muslim society that elected a woman Prime Minister, not only once but twice. This testifies to the fact that despite the presence of orthodox Islamic and restrictive elements in the society, women in Pakistan have found ways to emerge from the privacy of their households into the public realms of politics, medicine, engineering, banking, academia and entertainment. Like the women in Egypt described by Danielson (1999, pp 121), these women too reside prominently in the public realm while guarding their *sharaf* (honor) at the same time. This is done by the way they choose to dress for

instance. Heads are covered by almost all the women performers of *hamd* and *naat* and it is an expression of their religiosity. It marks the difference between the religious and non-religious in the shared media space in Pakistan such as the one that Frishkopf (2010: 11) writes about in relation to Egyptian media.

In the following chapters, I will expand on the ideas, arguments and discussions written by scholars mentioned above as well as present my own study of the gender dynamics involved in the performance of *hamd* and *naat* in Pakistan. However, since *hamd* and *naat* tradition in Pakistan has not been written about, I will first describe its poetry, music and performance in the following chapter before I get to the issue of gender dynamics.

Chapter 3: *Hamd* and *Naat* - History, Poetry and Performance

Poetry can be divided into various categories. One such category is devotional poetry. According to Dr. Riaz Majeed, a renowned scholar on Islam and a composer and lyricist of *hamd* and *naat*, devotional poetry in the Islamic world itself is of three types. One is in praise of a higher power or creator and *hamd* falls into this category of poetry. The word *hamd* means praise. The one who praises is called *hamid* and the one who is praised is called *mahmood*. One of the many names for God in Arabic is *hameed* which means worthy of praise. The second type is *naat* poetry written in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. The Arabic word for *naat* is *madah*. Dr. Abdur Rauf Rofi, who is a performer and composer of *hamd* and *naat* said that in the beginning *naat* meant to praise more than enough. Eventually when it became affiliated with the praise of the Prophet, it got another meaning i.e. praise of the Prophet. The subject matter of *naat* can be anything related to the Prophet Muhammad; his personality, his qualities, his mannerisms, his looks, his teachings, his sayings, his life, his city Medina, his mosque at Medina, its minarets, its green dome and his *roza* (tomb). (Majeed) The third type of devotional poetry is called *mankabat* which can be about any inspiring personality such as the companions of the Prophet Muhammad.

Syed Shafqat, an Islamic scholar believes that the tradition of *hamd* in Islam has equivalents in other religions too. He said in his interview that *hamd* and *naat* can be found in all religions that believe in a higher power such as Hinduism (the higher power is called *Bhagwan* – *bhag* means destiny – *wan* means maker), Christianity and Judaism because it essentially is just praise of the Creator. Shafqat talked about an ancient African text that said ‘Mangala Mangala, who is Mangala?’ and how the definition of *Mangala* is exactly the same as that of *Allah* as

described in the opening chapter of the Quran, *Surah Fatihah*. Hence, according to him it traces its roots back to the earliest forms of religion and belief in a Creator. Dr. Riaz Majeed and many other scholars shared the same views. It is interesting to note that many people view other religions through the lens of their own religion. In the Urdu book named *Naat*, Majeed Amjad writes that the tradition of *naat* takes inspiration from the praise of the Prophet Muhammad that Allah does in the Quran (Amjad). According to Syed Shafqat, Arabs were known for their poetry and literature and when Muhammad recited Quranic revelations to them, they were astounded by the beauty of the verses that were very poetic. They even started calling the Prophet Muhammad a poet. The verses have a great balance of words. For instance, *Surah Rahman*'s beginning verses show a great balance and flow in the words. Each verse ends on the sound 'aan' and the length of two consecutive verses match really well. When recited in a melodious way these verses sound even more beautiful, for instance in this clip (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vr8DR8frP_s).

<i>Ar Rahman</i>	(God) Most Gracious!
<i>Allamal Quran</i>	It is He Who has taught the Quran.
<i>Khalaqal Insaan</i>	He has created man.
<i>Allama hul Bayaan</i>	He has taught him speech (and intelligence).
<i>Ash-shumsu wal Qamaru Bihusbaan</i>	The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly computed.
<i>Wun-najmu Wash-shajaru Yasjudaan</i>	And the plants and trees – both (alike) bow in adoration.

The Quran even has a verse that challenges the Arabs to come up with equally good verses of their own. Quran says:

“Or do they say: "He (Muhammad) has forged it?" Say: "Bring then a surah (chapter) like unto it, and call upon whomsoever you can, besides Allah, if you are truthful!"” (10:37-38)

Hence, a poetic tradition like *hamd* and *naat* held a strong attraction for the Arabs. Sheikh Nazeer Hussain writes in another Urdu book *Naat* that Muhammad’s uncle, Abu Talib is considered to have recited the first poetry in praise of Muhammad and it is agreed upon that this was the first *naat*. Many of Muhammad’s companions used to write *naat* poetry and the companion most renowned for this was Hassaan bin Sabit who was also known as the ‘Prophet’s poet’. The Prophet is reported to have said that “Hassaan, your verses strike the *Quraish* (the dominant tribe in Mecca at that time) like arrows”. In the Prophet’s time, this poetry was even used as a part of the process of rebuttal to the allegations and negative propaganda that was raised by the *Quffaar* (non-Muslims) of Mecca (Zaheer). When Muhammad had reached Medina, little girls had sung *naat* for him to welcome him. Over time, this tradition has become a huge part of Muslim culture. Professor Abdur Rauf Rofi, in his interview, said that there are several verses in the Quran that are *naat* of the Prophet i.e. praise of the Prophet. Not in Pakistan but all over the world; in Saudi Arabia, Persia etc. a great amount of work has been done related to Prophet’s life and qualities and relating Quranic verses to it. The *naat* poetry today has basically originated from the Arabic poetry from the Prophet’s time, according to Syed Shafqat. He said that the weight, pronunciation, stresses and pauses and grammar of Arabic poetry has inspired Pakistani *hamd* and *naat* poetry.

The national poet of Pakistan, Allama Muhammad Iqbal wrote some beautiful *naat* poetry. One example of an *Urdu* poem by Iqbal is:

Loh bhi tu, Qalam bhi tu, tera wajood Al-

You are the sacred Tablet, you are the Pen and

Kitaab the Book.

Gumbad-e-Aabgina rang tere muheet main This blue-colored dome is a bubble in the sea
habaab that you are.

Aalam aab-o-khaak main tere zahoor se farogh You are the life and blood of the universe.

Darra-e-Raig ko diya, tu ne taloo-e-aftab You bestowed the illumination of sun upon the
particles of desert dust.

Faiz Ahmad Faiz, another great Pakistani poet wrote a *naat* in *Farsi* and the following are two verses from it:

Khwajeh beh takht bandah-i-tashveesh-i-mulk- The rulers on their thrones are slaves
o-maal to anxiety of land and wealth

Bar khaak rashk-i khosraw-i-dawraan gadaa- Upon the dusty earth, Oh envy of the rulers of
ye tu the age, is thy mendicant!

Aanjaa qasida-khwaani-ye-lazzaat-i seem o There are odes in praise of the pleasures of
zarr silver and gold

Eenjaa faqt hadees-i nishaat-i laqaa-ye tu Here, only the tradition of the joy of thy
countenance

In Pakistan, like some other Muslim countries, *naat* and *hamd* took the form of hymns and religious songs in addition to being a poetic genre. They are sung at religious occasions, in every school, at the beginning of any event (political, religious or educational), in homes, and on television and radio as well. Special gathering arranged for the performance of *hamd* and *naat* called *milad* are very common especially in the month of Ramadan (month of fasting for Muslims). There are many women participants of this tradition. The most famous ones are Umm-

e-Habiba and Hooriya Rafique. The most famous male participants are Fasihuddin Suhrawardy, Siddique Ismaeel, Junaid Jamshed, Shahid Qamar, Awais Raza Qadri, Iftikhar Tahir, Qari Waheed Zafar Qasmi, Qari Asghar Ali Suhrawardy and Dr. Abdul Rauf Roofi.

These songs or chants are traditionally sung without instrumental accompaniment. However, Dr. Abdur Rauf Ruffi and his group use *daf* sometimes. About the current nature of this music, he said:

“The tradition of *naat* and *hamd* is not just in Pakistan, it is all over the world. Whenever we are launching a new cassette, we are always mindful of what the trend is over the world. All over the world the tempo of *naat* is the same. There is an overall fastness in our lives today and similarly the tempo of *naat* is faster today as compared to what it was 20-30 years back. Nowadays, people don't have enough time to watch a 3 hour long movie so even the duration of films has reduced over time. Qawwalis used to be 30 minutes long but now people only listen to 5 minute long Qawwalis. People want a good impact in a short duration of time. The same change has come in *naat*.”

According to Marhoob Hamdani, a celebrity in *hamd* and *naat* performances, certain things need to be considered when reciting *hamd* and *naat*. Since it is something for Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, it deserves the highest care and regard. One such thing is the pronunciation of words. He said that if you are singing *naat* or *hamd*, your way of pronouncing words should be such that it depicts their meaning. Another is the places of stresses and pauses in the poetry. Knowing what you are singing, he said, helps you sing it with expression and feeling. Specifically with *naat*, one has to be careful about the words used for the Prophet's praise. The Prophet cannot be praised to the extent that he seems equal to God. Hence, some specific words, phrases and praises are only reserved for Allah's praise. If knowingly you praise the Prophet to that extent then you are responsible of committing *shirk* which means assigning equals to God and it is one of the unforgivable sins. Dr. Ruffi said that knowledge of Quran and the *Sunnah* i.e.

sayings and practices of the Prophet, is necessary for writing *naat* and *hamd* poetry. In his words, “only then can you become a poet like Iqbal”. He is referring to Allama Muhammad Iqbal, one of the greatest poets in the history of Urdu and Hindustani literature.

Based on the interviews I took a performer of *hamd* and *naat* should be a role model, should be well-versed in Quran and *Sunnah* and have a good reputation.

Musically, *hamd* and *naat* can be divided into the following categories:

- Those without instrumental accompaniment

ba-shee-r ka-hi-ye na-ze-er ka-hi-ye
 بشیر کھیے نذیر کھیے

un-hain sir-aa-je mu-ne-er ka-hi-ye
 انہیں سراج منیر کھیے

jo sa-rr ba-sa-r hai ka-la-me ra bi
 جو سر بسر ہے کلامِ ربی

wo me-ray aa-ga ki zin-da-gi hai
 وہ میرے آقا کی زندگی ہے

Figure 2: *Basheer Kahiye* - without instrumental accompaniment

Basheer kahiye, Nazeer kahiye

Call him the bearer of good new, or call him
the warner

Unhain Siraaje Muneer kahiye

Or call him the light-bearing lamp.

Jo sarr basar hai, kalame rabi

That which is entirely the word of God

Wo meray aaqa ki zindagi hai

Is the life of my master(Prophet Muhammad)

The transcription above is of a popular *naat* that used to play before every news hour on Pakistan Television Channel PTV. The most famous recording of it is sung by the female *naat* performer Huriya Rafiq Qadri. This transcription is based on a performance by me and it can be found at this link (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFwKOFPIcic>). The transcription does not assign a rhythmic duration to each note because there is no set duration in this style of *naat*. Each note can be prolonged for any duration depending on the performer. This style of *naat* features a lot of vocal improvisation techniques like *legato* (for instance in the beginning six notes), *vibrato* (for instance on the word *siraaje* in the second line) and scoops and slides. The first and the last line of this verse have climactic moments in their great rise and fall. The middle two lines act to tone down the beginning climax and then lead on to the next one. The last two lines are repeated with two different sets of lyrics after this verse and at the end of each other verse in the rest of the piece.

This *naat* is set to poetry about the qualities of the Prophet Muhammad. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, there are numerous possibilities for the subject matter of *naat*. However, this kind of *naat* that is solely about the praise of the Prophet and his qualities is considered the most important kind.

- Those with instrumental accompaniment

These can be further divided into those that are only accompanied by *daf*, those that are sung as Sufi *Qawwali* and those that also include instruments other than *daf*. *Daf* is a framed drum that is believed to belong to Iran but it is found all across Middle East and Asia.

not sung the first time

daf: — ma-w-la-ya s-a-lli — wa ssal-im da — I —

man — A — ba — dan A — la ha — bi — bi — ka

only sung the first time

khair — il — khal — qi — kull — i — mi — Hu — wal ha

bi — bul — la zi — Tu — r — ja — sh — a — faa — A — to —

only sung the last time

hu Li — ku — l — li — (Repeat 3 times) Haw — li — m mi — nal A — ha — waa — li —

mu — q — ta — hi — mi

Figure 3: *Qaseeda Burda* - using *daf*

This naat is called *Qaseeda Burda* (Poem of the Scarf). The transcription is based on this performance (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0kZxTo0Q7s>) by Dr. Abdur Rauf Ruffi's brother, Mian Tariq Mahmood Ruffi at a *milad* arranged by the Faisalabad Arts Council on the night of the 27th day of fasting during the month of Ramadan (August 2012). He is accompanied by three other singers who join him in the chorus part and three *daf* players. The first two verses from this performance are:

<i>Mawlaya Salli Wassalim da-Iman Abadan</i>	O God, send peace and prayers for always and forever,
<i>Ala Habi Bika Khairil Khalqi Kullimi</i>	Upon the one you have loved, the best of all creation.
<i>Huwal Habibul-Lazi Turja Shafaa'-Atohu</i>	He is most beloved, whose intercession is hoped for,
<i>Li Kulli Hawlim-Minal Ahwaali Muqtahimi</i>	For every fear and distress, that is going to come on the day of agony.

This poem was written during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. Dr. Abdur Rauf Ruffi described this poem's interesting history as such. Muhammad bin Hassan Al-Busairi, a Sufi from Egypt, had become paralyzed. Everyone had given up hope for his recovery when he wrote this poem that praises the Prophet Muhammad and he used this to ask Allah to cure him. While he was reciting the poem one night he fell asleep and saw a dream in which he was reciting it to the Prophet Muhammad who in turn was so happy that he gifted him his own shawl or scarf. When he woke up, he found the shawl or scarf lying over his body and he was completely cured. This resulted in the poem being called *Qaseeda Burda* (Poem of the Scarf).

The first two lines are repeated after every other verse in the piece. The other verses have the same melody as the second verse provided here in the third and the fourth line. This piece, unlike Example 1, has a rhythm that does not vary from performance to performance. However, some improvisations on notes vary between different performances. For instance, the scooping style at the syllable *da* in the word *da-Iman* is not present in some other performances of this naat.

NOT SUNG THE FIRST TIME

— Aae khu-da — Aae khu-da — ji-s ne ki —
اے خدا اے خدا کی نے جس

jus-ta-ju mi-l ga-ya uss ko tu —
جستجو مل گیا اُس کو تو

— sa-b ka tu — ra-hnu ma — Aae Khuda —
سب کا تو رہنما اے خدا

Aae khu-da —
اے خدا

Figure 4: *Aae Khuda* - with full instrumental accompaniment

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y94o2pMOT9c>

This is an example of a *hamd* that is accompanied by a wide range of musical instruments and is not limited to *daf* only. The singer is Adnan Sami who is also a composer and pianist and has performed songs ranging from Indian Classical to Bollywood. He has won numerous awards for his compositions and vocals. This *hamd* was released as part of his album titled *Sargam* in 1995.

Aae Khuda, Aae Khuda

O God, O God,

Jis Ne Ki Justaju

Whoever has tried hard,

Mil Gaya Uss Ko Tu

Has found you.

Sab Ka Tu Rahnuma

You are everyone's guide,

Aae Khuda, Aae Khuda

O God, O God.

Examples of the third category i.e. those *naat* and *hamd* that are in the style of Sufi *Qawwalis* can be found in Regula Buckhardt Qureshi's book, 'Sufi Music of India and Pakistan'.

- Those having the same tunes as popular song melodies

Bollywood songs form the most popular genre of music in Pakistan. Some *naat* and *hamd* composers use the same tunes as those of some Bollywood songs and set them to *naat* and *hamd* lyrics.

One such example is the *naat Sona Ay, Manmona Ay* set to the same melody as the old Bollywood song *Mann Dole*.

The lyrics and music of the Bollywood song, *Mann Dole*, are:

Mann do-le-me-ra ta-nn do-le-me-re di-l ka-ga-ya
 گیا کال میرے ڈولے تن میرا ڈولے من
 karaar re kau-n ba-ja-ye ban-suri-ya
 رے قراار کون بجائے بانسریا

Figure 5: Bollywood Song - *Mann Dole*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mc6eUdeX6jY>

Mann Dole, Mera Tann Dole

My body and my heart are both swinging,

Mere Dil Ka Gaya Karaar Re

My heart has lost its peace,

Kaun Bajaye Bansuriya

Who is playing this flute?

The lyrics and music of the *naat* are:

so-na-ay ma-nn-mo-na-ay A-m-i-na te-ra
 سوینا اے منموینا اے تیرا آمین
 la-al ni ka-vay Sa-dia-wa-ri- ja-wan
 لال کوئی نی لال سادیہ واری جاواں

Figure 6: *Naat* based on the Bollywood tune in Figure 5

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZXU1eYplak>

Sona Ay, Manmona Ay,

He is beautiful, He is dear,

Amina Tera Laal Ni.

Amina, your son.

Kavay Sadia Wari Jawan

Sadia says she adores him.

Amina is the name of Prophet Muhammad's mother and Haleema Sadia was his caretaker when he was an infant.

- Those accompanied with chanting Allah's names or Quranic phrases in the background in a way that they form a rhythmic pattern. This is similar to the Sufi practice of *zikr* (repetition of Allah's names or texts from Quran and *hadith*).

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a Naat (praise poem) with a zikr (remembrance) accompaniment. The score is written on six systems of music. Each system consists of a main melody line and a zikr line below it. The zikr lines consist of repeating phrases like 'il-Al-lah il-Al-lah'. The main melody lines contain lyrics such as 'Ya say-yi-di', 'Ir-ham-la-na', 'In-nil-ti-ya', 'ree has-saba', 'You-man il-aa', 'Ar-dil Ha-ram', 'Bal-ligh Sa-la-mi', 'Rou-da-tan', 'Fee-han-na-bi-yu-l', and 'Mo-h-ta-ram'. There are some annotations in the fourth system: 'DOES NOT REPEAT WITH THIS REPEAT' with arrows pointing to specific notes.

Figure 7: Naat with zikr

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcHd_WTOhFI

<i>Ya Sayyidi Irhamlana, Ya Sayyidi Irhamlana</i>	O Master, be merciful towards us,
<i>Ya Sayyidi Irhamlana, Ya Sayyidi Irhamlana</i>	O Master, be merciful towards us.
<i>Innil Tiya Ree Hassaba Youmun Ilaa Ardil</i>	O Winds, if someday you pass by the sacred
<i>Haram</i>	land,
<i>Balligh Salaami Roudatan Feehannabiyul</i>	Do give my greetings at the blessed grave
<i>Mohtaram</i>	where the most exalted prophet rests.

In this example, the desire for rhythmic accompaniment is fulfilled by *zīkr* in the background. In the background you can hear the second half of the phrase *La Ilaha IlAllah* that translates to ‘There is no god but Allah’. This phrase is the first half of a Muslim’s declaration of faith and constitutes the first pillar of Islam.

The *naat* sung without instrumental accompaniment are monophonic melodies. The ones with instrumental accompaniment are more technical. These tunes are usually composed in the same way as an Indian or Pakistani song is composed. Hamdani said that the *hamd* and *naat* he performs are mostly composed by professional composers and once the tune is composed it is orally taught to the singers and there is no written score. About his composition technique Dr. Rofi (who composes both instrumental and non-instrumental *naat*) said:

“I often compose the melodies of the *naat* I sing based on *raga* (modes in Indian Classical Music). I was composing something for *mairaj sharif* (the occasion of the ascent of the Prophet Muhammad to the heavens where he had an audience with Allah) so I composed it in *raga darbari* (court) (similar to western E-flat major scale) since it was the occasion of the Prophet going to Allah’s *darbar* (court). Even though people don’t have knowledge about the *raga*, it still has a great impact. People liked that *naat* a lot. In *naat* where you express feelings of

visiting Medina or something like that, *raga bhairvi* (similar to the western G-flat major scale) works really well. Happy songs are based on happy notes for instance in a song where the poetry is talking about the Prophet's birth. If a song's poetry says something like "I'm missing Medina" then such a song is based on sad notes. These things, however, only play a supportive role. The poetry alone has its own impact."

Now that the nature of *hamd* and *naat* has been established, the next chapter will focus on *hamd* and *naat* performance in an orthodox Islamic setting. In it I will explore performance codes, aesthetics and mannerisms associated with *hamd* and *naat* performances based on orthodox Islamic principles. These principles are derived from orthodox interpretations of Quran and *Sunnah*. I will also explore the implications of these orthodox beliefs on women's performance of *hamd* and *naat*. When I use the word 'orthodox', I am referring to the more strict ideology of Islam that is more conservative in its beliefs. As opposed to this, I will use the word unorthodox to refer to the more liberal ideology of Islam.

Chapter 4: Performance context - The Orthodox Islamic perspective

To understand the gender dynamics performed in this tradition, one is led into the intimate realm of its performance context. Even though gender dynamics exist at the level of poetry as well, they are more evident in performance. That is because performance is the most prevalent form in which this tradition shapes and presents itself in the religious culture in Pakistani society. This chapter explores these dynamics in the context of an orthodox Islamic perspective.

Due to their religious function, *hamd* and *naat* performances require following certain norms of setting and procedure that are based on Islamic principles. Some of these norms are about the use or disuse of musical instruments, about the words of the poetry, but the most important ones are those concerning women. Islam gives great importance to women and their role in the society. It gives women rights and importance not just in the house as mothers, wives and daughters but also in the society at large. There are many instances from the life of the Prophet Muhammad and from the caliphates of his companions Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali. which describe Muslim women's involvement in preaching, business and even wars. Since women are so important in Islamic social life where they have to interact, compete with and face men, there are certain rules that should govern their lives according to Quranic teachings.

Many Quranic verses instruct the believing women to observe modesty in their dress and behavior. Allah says in the Quran:

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their head covers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their

husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers that you might succeed.” (24:30)

The logic behind this instruction is explained more clearly in another verse of the Quran:

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to cover themselves with [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.” (33:59)

These instructions were aimed at providing protection to women against the corruption in the patriarchal society of 7th century Arabia. Syed and Ali (2005) describe how these simple instructions for observing modesty were developed into more restrictive concepts such as seclusion for women through patriarchal interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah/Hadith (Prophet Muhammad’s sayings) over time. These interpretations were textualized in the form of *Tafsir* (exegesis) of the Quran (Syed and Ali 2005, pp. 1). Today, this restrictive ideology is practiced and propagated by many men and women in the Pakistani society and it has its implications on the *hamd* and *naat* performance practice too.

Even though you will see many female popular and classical singers being revered as celebrities in Pakistan, when it comes to a religious tradition like *hamd* and *naat*, the standards change. Orthodox Muslim *ulema* (clergymen) are openly against musical practices and the popular, classical and other forms of music in the society. However, since *hamd* and *naat* fall under the religious category, this opposition from the *ulema* against music and female performers becomes more severe. If women want to recite *hamd* and *naat* then they are required to do so inside their own houses or in all-women gatherings only. This is the view of most scholars such as Mufti Saleem and Shafqat Shah.

Quran says:

“Be not soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease (of hypocrisy, evil desire) should be moved with desire, but speak in an honorable manner”. (33: 32)

This verse of the Quran is used by many scholars and *ulema* to conclude that women should not perform *hamd* and *naat* in public. Their performance on television and gatherings that include men is highly discouraged by the orthodox groups. They can attend a *milad* (gathering featuring *hamd* and *naat*) only if there is separate arrangement for women to sit. According to Qari Najam Mustafa:

“Women should surely attend *milad* if there is separate arrangement for women to sit. It would be against proper mannerisms for men and women to sit together in a *milad mehfil* (gathering). Also, it would divert men’s attention away from the *naat khwani* (*naat* performance).”

Qari Najam Mustafa does *qirat* (recitation of Quran) and performs *hamd* and *naat* at the Parliament House in Islamabad.

Dr. Abdur Rauf Rufi, in his interview, said “A woman’s voice should not reach a *na-mehram*”. *Na-mehram* for a woman is any man who is not her father, brother, husband or son. Ahmed Khan, a performer of *hamd* and *naat*, believes that even if a woman is reciting Quran in her house, her voice should not be heard outside the *chaar-diwari* (four walls) of her house. He said that if a *na-mehram* is in the house then her voice shouldn’t reach his ears either. He believes that it would be a sin if he hears her voice while she is reciting the Quran. This led him to conclude that if the case for recitation of Quran is so strict then for singing *naat* and *hamd*, it would be even stricter because it involves singing. According to Mufti Saleem, this modesty of voice is another reason why women are not allowed to lead prayers in a mosque. Muhammad Shahzad, another famous performer, said that *naat* and *hamd* performance is something that you

do out of your own will and that is not obligatory in Islam but modesty is a Quranic injunction. Therefore, he said that issues related to modesty come first and are more important.

Many women, themselves, agree with this orthodox Islamic point of view and follow it exactly. Usually the *milad* gatherings for women are arranged in their own houses. They invite all the women in their neighborhood and their female relatives and friends. During the month of Ramadan (month of fasting according to the Islamic calendar), these gatherings are done at a much larger level and special auditorium halls and clubs are reserved for this purpose. The public that is allowed to attend is restricted to women only. When I was in the field, I attended many *milad* gatherings.

One such gathering was arranged in Chenab Club in the city of Faisalabad in July 2012. This is the same gathering that is mentioned in chapter 1.

A group of girls sat on an elevated platform facing the audience. A sound speaker system had been set up. Every woman in the room wore either an *abaya* (a loose gown or robe) and *hijab* (head scarf) or the normal Pakistani dress *shalwar kameez* with the *dupatta* (long scarf) covering the head and upper part of the body. Each girl recited various *naat* and *hamd* and the performances were interspersed with phrases that were sung by the entire audience and the performers. These were like the *salam* I talked about in the beginning of the introduction and were all invocations of peace on the Prophet Muhammad. Some women in the audience rocked back and forth, with their eyes closed and with a look of religious ecstasy on their faces, as a *naat* or *hamd* was being recited. Some were moved to tears during some passages. Some could be seen lip-synching to the performance if it was a famous *naat* or *hamd* that they knew well. It was the words of the devotional poetry that expressed their love for Allah and Prophet

Muhammad and the mellifluous voices of the women performers that captivated the audience so much. Sometimes one of them would tell an anecdote from the life of the Prophet in between performances. These anecdotes had important lessons in them related to morality, spirituality and rights of fellow human beings.



Figure 8: Nadia Bano (right) singing *naat* at Chenab Club Faisalabad (2012)

They sang without musical accompaniment. That is the traditional way of performance of *hamd* and *naat*. According to the orthodox Islamic view, music leads to vice and hence it is haram. It is not traditionally used with *hamd* and *naat* because it is considered to divert one's attention away from the devotional lyrics. Some people allow the use of *daf* only since it was used at the time of Prophet Muhammad but some oppose the use of *daf* too. The *hamd* and *naat* performer Ahmed Khan believes that use of musical instruments is also against the proper mannerisms of a *hamd* and *naat* performance. He quoted a *hadith*:

“Abu Umama (Allah be pleased with him) reports that the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him & give peace) said: “Allah Mighty and Majestic sent me as a guidance and mercy to believers and commanded me to do away with musical instruments, flutes, strings, crucifixes, and the affairs of the pre-Islamic period of ignorance” (Musnad Ahmad & Abu Dawud Tayalisi).

Such *ahadith* (plural of *hadith* – sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) and their authenticity are debated upon by scholars. However, many people believe this to be true and they refrain from the use of musical instruments. Nadia Bano, a blind girl, who performed at this gathering at Chenab Club and also performs at private gatherings in houses said that one should be very cautious when reciting *naat* because it is something for the Holy Prophet, indicating that there is a certain respect that should be given to this tradition. Motiya, a member of the *milad* committee at Madina Town College in Faisalabad and another one of the performers at the gathering at Chenab Club explained the mannerisms to me in more detail.

Motiya complained that many people these days are forgetting the proper manners and behavior that should be observed at *milad* gatherings. She expressed that if one cannot follow the Prophet Muhammad's teachings then there is no point in conducting a gathering in his honor. She believes that a *milad* gathering is different from other normal gatherings and is, in fact, the venue for us to make our religious traditions more prominent. She said,

“Those women who perform *naat* and *hamd* professionally on television and record albums are ignorant of our religious teachings. They have only learned this world’s ways, not the ways of the religion. All I can say is that may Allah guide them to the right path”.

She quoted some verses from the Quran in which Allah says:

“O you who have believed, do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet or be loud to him in speech like the loudness of some of you to others, lest your deeds become worthless while you perceive not. Indeed, those who lower their voices before the Messenger of Allah - they are the ones whose hearts Allah has tested for righteousness. For them is forgiveness and great reward. Indeed, those who call you, [O Muhammad], from behind the chambers - most of them do not use reason. And if they had been patient until you [could] come out to them, it would have been better for them. But Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.” (49:2-5)

Quran lays out the manners that should be observed in the presence of the Prophet Muhammad. According to Motiya and many other scholars and performers of this tradition, being in a *milad* is similar to being in the presence of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad. As the Quranic verses above suggest, one should be extremely cautious when one is in the presence of the Prophet Muhammad, “lest your deeds become worthless”. Motiya reprimanded the woman who had organized the *milad* gathering because her dress was inappropriate (its cloth was very thin and could be seen through). She said that when the Prophet’s companions used to sit with him, their necks used to be lowered so much that it seemed as if birds were weighing down on their heads and as if the birds would fly away even if they moved a little. She expressed how she was disappointed that the audience was sitting on chairs instead of on the floor and had their shoes on.

Another aspect of some modern day performances of *hamd* and *naat* that is deemed disrespectful by some scholars, performers and listeners is the practice of doing *zikr* (repeating God’s name) in the background of the *naat* or *hamd* in such a way that it seems like rhythmic accompaniment. An example of this practice was mentioned in Chapter 3 and as mentioned

before, this practice comes from the Sufi musical practice. Since it gives the effect of a musical instrument being used in the background and some people do it just for the sake of creating rhythm, it is discouraged by *ulema*. Muhammad Fawad, another performer, believes that it ruins the essence of *hamd* and *naat* that should be sung without rhythmic accompaniment. Dr. Abdur Rauf Rofi said,

“The *zikr* in the background to create rhythm is totally wrong. *Fatwas* have been carried out against that. When something becomes popular in a society people automatically start looking at its quality. This is just the sociological behavior of people. *Naat* became very popular and now people look for good quality in *naat*. The proof of that is that you are doing a research project on it. Now people even object to having performers who smoke, at their *naat/hamd* gatherings. People are very cautious about these things now.”

Another practice that is looked down upon is basing *hamd* and *naat* on the tunes of popular song melodies. According to scholars, performers and listeners who are against it, this practice takes away the essence of the tradition. When people hear the melody they are immediately reminded of the song and that diverts their focus away to something that is not appropriate in the religious context. As Muhammad Fawad said,

“One should try to make original compositions rather than base them on the tunes of popular bollywood songs. It makes a bad portrayal of *naat* because it is possible that the song one bases it on could be something not appropriate for such a religious tradition.”

Qari Najam Mustafa said:

“Such *naat* should not be performed that are based on popular song tunes. Some people say that even though if it is a song tune it doesn't matter because at least people are reciting *naat*. However, the song doesn't go away from people's minds when they hear such a *naat*.”

Nadia Bano also commented on this practice:

“These days the way people sing *naat* in the same way as popular songs is very wrong because when you are listening to such a *naat* you can feel the effect of

the song. The tunes are same and there have musical accompaniment similar to those in songs.”

According to Dr. Abdur Rauf Rofi, basing *naat* and *hamd* on popular song melodies has been a result as well as means of commercialization. It was used to promote *hamd* and *naat*. When people would hear the tunes, some of them would already know them and could sing along and be attracted towards them. This way *hamd* and *naat* could compete against popular songs in the commercial market. However, commercialization of this tradition is also viewed negatively. Many women perform on television and they are opposed by both men and women who have more orthodox Islamic views. Even if they are not appearing on television but have made it a profession and perform to earn livelihood, it is still discouraged. The next chapter explores the other side of the argument. However, it was agreed upon by all the people I interviewed that a *naat* or *hamd* performer should be compensated and/or appreciated for his/her travel, expense and time even if it is just as a token of appreciation.

Muhammad Shahzad, a *naat* performer said:

“With time everything is becoming more and more advanced. Our basic needs have increased. If I travel to Karachi, it will cost me a lot of money and time (around 4 days going there and coming back by train). So then if someone invites me to do *naat khwani* in Karachi, they give me air ticket too. The basic expenses of travel should be paid to the *naat khwan* (*naat* performer). However, the *naat khwan* cannot fix a price for his *naat*. There is a *fatwa* (Islamic legislation) passed by Maulana Ahmed Raza Khan that such money is *haram* (unlawful) for the *naat khwan*”.

Many scholars and performers quoted from *ahadith* that the Prophet Muhammad used to reward his companions who recited *naat* or *hamd* poetry for him. At one instant he had awarded one of his companions with his shawl. The Prophet’s shawl was and is considered a very sacred thing and to receive it is considered as a great honor. However, many women *naat* performers

who perform only at private gatherings do not get compensated for anything. Motiya complained about this too:

“People don’t give any monetary compensation to the *naat khwan* they invite to perform. They would give gifts in boxes but the things inside those boxes are worth nothing. They gain a lot of popularity for themselves, in magazines and media. It is not that these people don’t afford to give a little compensation to the *naat khwan* for their time and performance. All the girls who came here to recite *naat* do not belong to any rich or high class background. They are all poor girls. They are the ones in the *milad* committee too. If they give, it wouldn’t make us richer or make them poorer. They have to give in the way of Allah. They are so miser in spending in the way of Allah and they spend immense amounts on big houses, clothes and membership of these big hotels like PC and Chenab Club but they don’t spend in the way of Allah”.

Another thing that I saw during my fieldwork was that people threw money at the performer as a way of appreciating them. Many scholars and performers believe that this is another disrespectful practice that has come into this tradition through other cultural practices.

Qarim Najam Mustafa said:

“Throwing money as a way of appreciating the *naat khwan* is not appropriate. It is against the mannerisms required for *naat khwani*. But since it has become a culture here, most people don’t mind it and have become used to it. Better way to do it is to put the money respectfully in front of the performer. This trend has come into this tradition through *qawwali*. The negative aspect of it is that sometimes people do it solely to show off. That is wrong. They could also just give it to the *naat khwan* respectfully after the performance.”

Muhammad Fawad said that throwing money looks similar to the practice of throwing money at dancers. Hence, it is extremely inappropriate to do so at a *hamd* or *naat* performance.

Most *naat* and *hamd* poets are men but there are some famous *naat* and *hamd* that are written from a woman’s point of view. Two such examples were stated by Nadia Bano. One of them is “*main muddat se iss aas pe jee rahi hu*” (I have been living on this one hope for a long while). This *naat* talks about a woman desiring to go to Mecca to the house of Allah. The second

example she mentioned is “*bhar de jholi meri ya Muhammad*” (Please grant me with blessings O Muhammad!). Such *naat* poetry that asks the Prophet to grant a person’s prayers is considered as *shirk* (assigning partners to Allah) by many scholars and *ulema*. *Shirk* is one of the most serious sins in Islam since Islam is strictly monotheistic. This kind of *naat* poetry that elevates the Prophet Muhammad to the rank of God has led to an entire group of orthodox Muslims opposing this tradition in its entirety. Dr. Abdur Rauf Rofi and many other scholars believe that this fault can be attributed to illiteracy and amateur poets.

Some of these issues discussed in this chapter affect the entire tradition while some affect women more specifically. However, it does not stop women from participating in this tradition and professing their love for their religion and the Prophet Muhammad. Since they are participating in something religious, their families support them. Nadia Bano said:

“I get a lot of respect in my social circle because I recite *naat*. We have gained that respect from praising the Prophet. My family cooperates with me a lot and supports me in my performances. My mother is sitting right here next to me. It’s the spirit and love of Muhammad that we have without which we would be nothing. I don’t get any support from government or any organizations but I get encouragement from my colleagues and my teachers.”

Nida Butt, another female performer at the *milad* in Chenab Club said:

“*Naat* should be delivered in a beautiful manner and that itself is a big art. Since I started reciting *naat* I have received a lot of appreciation, love and support. I believe that through the recitation of *naat*, Allah blesses us in every aspect of our lives.”

It is this faith and dedication in these women that is most appreciable. Those women, who are gifted with a good voice but cannot sing professionally due to the society’s taboos surrounding music, can make use of their talent in their religious rituals. This way they get

encouragement and support from their families too. It allows them to do something enjoyable while keeping their spirituality and moral values intact.

The following chapter will take us into the world of the women who perform *naat* and *hamd* at a professional level. It will look at how these women overcome the orthodox opposition and what other dynamics come into play through their performance.

Chapter 5: Performance context - The Unorthodox Islamic Perspective

One should expect to see differences between orthodox theory and popular practice as that is a natural sociological phenomenon of societies. Religious theories and institutions are interpreted in different ways by different people. We will see this become apparent as this chapter unfolds the unorthodox perspective about the performance of *hamd* and *naat*.

During the times that I was not interviewing and attending live performances, I would turn on the television and watch the performances of *hamd* and *naat* on the television. I found numerous channels that showed programs that were specifically about *hamd* and *naat* such as QTV, ARY Digital and Geo. One program that is regularly aired on Geo is called *Alim Online*. *Alim* means scholar and as the name suggests the show hosts famous Islamic scholars who address various issues of Islam and answer live calls. One day in the summer of 2011, I luckily found an old episode of the show being re-aired on the channel that hosted Umm-e-Habiba as its celebrity guest. Umm-e-Habiba is known as one of the biggest names amongst female *hamd* and *naat* performers in Pakistan. The host of the show, Amir Liaquat, who himself is also a performer of *hamd* and *naat*, began her introduction by describing the beauty of her name and the history associated with it. Her name, Umm-e-Habiba, was the name of one of the Prophet's wives. He went on to say how Allah had blessed her with a beautiful voice, had taught her the mannerisms of reciting His and His Prophet's praise and taught her to love Him and His Prophet. He quoted her saying:

“I am the *koel* bird,
I dwell in the garden of Medina,
and *Salle Ala* (Blessings on the Prophet) is my song”.

He said that he had learned the art of reciting *naat* by listening to Umm-e-Habiba and the first *naat* that he had ever performed, at the age of seven, was ‘*meri janib bhi ho ik nigah-e-karam*’ (I wish for the blessed eyes to fall on me too). He said he had learned it from listening to cassette recordings of Umm-e-Habiba. He recalled how when he was little child, his mother had taken him to an all-women *milad* gathering where he recited this *naat* and in his words “since the *naat* was so loved, my voice was loved too”.

After this elaborate introduction, Umm-e-Habiba came into the picture. She wore the Pakistani dress called *shalwar kameez* that is worn by the majority of women in Pakistan, whether they are Muslim or Christian. It is also worn in India and is associated with the culture of the subcontinent rather than any religion. However, the part of her dress that expressed her religiosity was her *dupatta* (large shawl/scarf) that she wore on her head and it was large enough to cover the upper part of her body.



Figure 9: Umm-e-Habiba at Alim Online

Image courtesy: <http://www.vemuv.com/v=2OPdCFPEHqw>

Later, when I researched more about her biography and career, I found out that she has been in this career for 40 years and she was awarded the Pride of Performance award by the President in 2001 for her contributions to *hamd* and *naat* performance. This is one of the biggest awards in Pakistan. She has her own website through which I found out that she even has an award by her name that is given to girls who win in competitions of *hamd* and *naat* performances at Amroha University in India. (<http://www.ummehabiba.com>)

Despite her age, she looked very beautiful. She wore a lot of make-up but it complimented her looks. She started by talking about how her father started teaching her *Qirat* (recitation of the Quran) from the time that she was in grade six. When a radio channel in Pakistan started a program on *Qirat*, she went and performed in it. She won numerous competitions of *Qirat* held at various colleges and universities. At one such occasion, after she won the first prize, she was approached by a man named Yawar Mehdi from NewsReel (a television channel) and he asked her if she could sing *hamd* and *naat* too. She was then invited to perform. She performed at Radio Pakistan first. The next morning when the radio program was aired, her *naat* could be heard at every channel in every city. That, she said, was the beginning of her career by the grace of Allah.

After describing her career she began to recite that first *naat* which she had ever performed. It was a monophonic melody. She looked completely immersed in the spirit of the *naat*, with her eyes closed as she rocked from side to side while singing in a beautiful, mellifluous way. The host's voice could be heard in the background repeating the word '*Subhan'Allah*' which means 'God is Glorious'. It is a phrase that is used most commonly by Muslims all over the world in praise of anything beautiful or praise-worthy. It implies that since everything is created and given to us by God, He is the One who deserves the praise for it.

As soon as she finished singing, the host prompted her to tell the other story associated with this *naat*. This turned out to be the story of how she got married. She said that her husband heard her *naat* on a cassette while he was living in Chicago. He was so moved by her performance that as soon as he heard it, he prayed to Allah and said “O God! I don’t know who she is and where she is from but I want her to whom this voice belongs”. Smilingly, she said that the prayer was accepted. This story was followed by a photograph of the couple. In that picture, she wore *shalwar kameez* and this time she was not covering her head.

She then explained how she avoided coming on television until after she was married. This was her father’s wish that the public does not see her face on television, even though she did study in a co-educational system. After her marriage, her father said that it was her husband’s decision whether he wanted to let her perform on television or not. Her husband allowed her to perform on television and hence, she started appearing on television.

The program went on as she recited more *naat* and they talked more about her experience. However, I wondered about a lot of things that she had said and done at the program. Her performance and experience was different from some of the other female performers I had met. Her dress was not as orthodox as was of most women who performed *hamd* and *naat*. Her face and voice was being seen and heard not just in Pakistan but also in other countries across the world. She was not in an all-female gathering. The host too was a man. The setting of the performance was not for a merely religious purpose. It had a commercial aspect too. She was being asked questions about her personal life such as her marriage story. She was similar to any other television celebrity. They talked more about her career as a performer than the tradition itself and its purpose i.e. the love of Allah and His Prophet.

These aspects of her interview and performance give us some insight into the unorthodox perspective. The restrictions and mannerisms that are associated with the performance of *hamd* and *naat* according to the orthodox view get considerably eased here. Women, who according to orthodox Islam, should not be heard by any *na-mahram* are seen and heard by the entire world. This rule is also not observed by the large number of Pakistani women who appear in the Pakistani film industry and fashion industry as well as those who appear on the television as newscasters, talk show hosts, talk show guests (ranging from those in the medical profession to the ones who are important political figures) and popular singers. However, most of the attention of the Islamic scholars and orthodox sects is focused on the women performers of *hamd* and *naat*. It is because, as explained in the previous chapter too, since they are doing something for a religious purpose that involves Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, they are required to observe the Islamic norms of behavior even more so than other women in Pakistan. This, however, does not stop women from appearing on television and radio to perform *hamd* and *naat* and as celebrities within this tradition, as can be seen in the example of Umm-e-Habiba. As in the case of Umm-e-Habiba, they are supported in this by their husbands, fathers, brothers and family. They represent those who maintain a more liberal stance about these Islamic rules and norms. Their support gets bigger and their image becomes more authentic as they get backed by many Islamic scholars too who are also more liberal in their views. Many of their male competitors in this tradition also support them. Hence, one can see an entire group that represents the opposite side of the orthodox argument.

In his interview, Dr. Riaz Majeed expressed how much he liked the *naat* performances by Umm-e-Habiba. He and his wife discussed with me how many female *hamd* and *naat* performers have really beautiful voices and how they move the audience with the way they express the

poetry through their performance. Dr. Khalid Zaheer, a very famous Islamic scholar, also head of the Department of Islamic Studies at University of Central Punjab and who also appears on television programs as an authority on Islamic matters, explained to me the context in which the Quranic injunction regarding a woman's voice was revealed. As stated in Chapter 4, the Quran says:

“Be not soft in speech lest he in whose heart is a disease (of hypocrisy, evil desire) should be moved with desire, but speak in an honorable manner”.
(33:32)

Dr. Zaheer said that there was a time when the enemies of the Prophet would come to his house with the excuse of talking to his wives on some Islamic matter but their intentions were to defame the Prophet by badmouthing his wives. Due to this, Allah revealed this injunction for the wives of the Prophet. Today this verse is generalized to include all women and is exaggerated to the extent that a woman's voice is believed to be kept hidden from men completely. According to him, this view is too extreme and he does not see any harm in women expressing their love of Allah and the Prophet through *hamd* and *naat* performances.

Dr. Zaheer also talked about the dress of a woman and agreed that the Quran requires women to cover themselves except what is obvious i.e. their face, hands and feet. He said that these three parts of their body, even if they are embellished, are allowed to remain uncovered because that is what they are meant for. Hence, one can see why Umm-e-Habiba's make-up and appearance would not be seen as objectionable according to the more liberal Islamic perspective.

Muhammad Fawad, the performer who is mentioned in Chapter 4 too, quoted the story of the Prophet's arrival in Medina and used the fact that he was welcomed by the songs of the girls of Medina as a defense for the performance of women in public. Nida Butt, who performed at the all-female gathering at Chenab Club in July 2012, believes that there is no harm in women's

hamd and *naat* performances being accessible to the whole world. She said it is for the love of the Prophet and since it is done with good intention and for a good purpose, it should not be discouraged even if it is by women. There are numerous examples of women like her and Umm-e-Habiba who perform in religious gatherings that include men and on radio and television. Their performances can be found on YouTube as well. I, myself, have performed *hamd* and *naat* at my co-educational high school. Young girls and boys are seen competing against each other locally and internationally at *hamd* and *naat* competitions.

This does not mean that these women are transgressing the Word of Allah; only their interpretation of the Word is different. They too observe the proper, respectful manners in their public performances. It is these manners that distinguish them at first sight from female popular singers and film artists. Their dress is always modest and covered. Whether they wear the more traditional Muslim women's dress that comprises of the *abaya* (a loose gown or robe) and *hijab* (head scarf) or just the normal Pakistani dress *shalwar kameez*, they wear it in a way that covers those parts of their body that the Quran has ordered them to cover. They sit in a respectful way and their eyes are lowered in respect as they recite the praises of Allah and the Prophet.

According to Dr. Khalid Zaheer, important issues that two people can disagree upon that are absolutely essential to faith are dealt with very clearly in the Quran such as the distribution of a deceased's property, the laws of marriage and divorce and rights of fellow beings. When it comes to such issues, Allah clearly lays out the *sharia* (Islamic law). Other issues are left for the people to comprehend on their own based on the other teachings given in the Quran. For instance, he quoted the verse of the Quran that says:

“Say: Who hath forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of Allah, which He hath produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He hath

provided) for sustenance? Say: They are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) for them on the Day of Judgment. Thus do We explain the signs in detail for those who understand. Say: My Lord forbiddeth only obscenity, such as are apparent and such as are within, and sin and wrongful oppression, and that ye associate with Allah that for which no warrant hath been revealed, and that ye tell concerning Allah that which ye know not.” (7:32-33)

According to him, the word *zenat*, which he translated to “beautiful”, means something that is adorned or added to. He said it is the embellished beauty that Allah mentions here. He went on to say that all beautiful things have been created for humans and they just need to be careful about the fact that part of that beauty can carry with it obscenity or evil. Hence, it is the use of that beauty that determines whether it is allowed or not. In his view, women participation in this performance tradition out of love of Allah and His Prophet is allowed.

He considered this issue to be similar to the use or disuse of musical instruments in the sense that their use determines whether or not they are allowed. This constitutes another aspect of an unorthodox performance of *hamd* and *naat*. As described in Chapter 3, one finds such *hamd* and *naat* performances that are accompanied with all kinds of musical instruments, those based on popular song tunes and those that are accompanied with the repetition of names of Allah or phrases from the Quran that form a rhythmic pattern such as the Sufi practice of *zikr*. All of these fall under the unorthodox perspectives.

It is an age-old debate in Islam about whether or not music is permitted. I have already described the orthodox perspective that considers the use of music as *haram* (forbidden). However, there is a large majority of people who believe that music is not forbidden except when it is used in an obscene or indecent way. Especially when it comes to use of music with *hamd* and *naat*, the unorthodox groups view it as definitely permissible due to the good purpose and intention behind it. Performers, Muhammad Fawad and Muhammad Shahzad, both

mentioned the performer Sami Yusuf who uses music with *hamd* and *naat*. According to them, since many people have been attracted to his performances due to the music, it is a good practice.

Qari Najam Mustafa said:

“If you use music to do something good, for example if you write something for the betterment of humanity and use music to promote it, it is not wrong. For instance, every country has its national anthem and patriotic songs that are sung with musical accompaniment. Through those songs you develop more love and patriotism for your country. Similarly, Sufi poetry that is sung with musical accompaniment promotes feelings of love between man and his Creator as well as for Prophet Muhammad. If you use music to promote such things then it is totally fine.”

About the use of musical instruments he said:

“What are musical instruments? You basically take notes and pitches from the human voice and make it into an instrument that produces similar sounds. The instruments produce the same notes that you can produce with your voice. So if you call musical instruments haram, then you can call the sounds that come out of humans as *haram* too. Human voice is also music and melody. So basically, it all comes down to how you use it. If *daf* is allowed, then why are not other instruments? They all should be allowed then. *Daf*'s modern form is drums so how can you forbid one and allow the other. There is no prohibition on the use of musical instruments. It all depends on how they are used.”

Dr. Zaheer said that the power of music should definitely be used to promote this tradition. Tania Sohail, the art curator at the Arts Council Lahore told me that she does not listen to *hamd* and *naat* because she does not find the compositions attractive. She recommended that the tradition should involve good musical composers and use musical instruments to increase the appeal of the songs among those people who are not orthodox religious.

Similarly unorthodox practices such as use of popular song tunes for *hamd* and *naat* and the practice of *zikr* in the background are also defended by some people based on the idea that since the intention behind these practices is good, they are permissible. The repetition of Allah's name or Quranic phrases on the background of *hamd* and *naat* is considered to be a good

practice by some people as long as it is not done solely for the purpose of providing rhythmic accompaniment.

Another important practice that is defended by the unorthodox groups is the commercialization of the tradition. According to Dr. Zaheer, any practice that becomes popular on such a large scale as *hamd* and *naat* gets assigned a certain importance and commercial value. People desire to listen to these songs. It appeals to their spirituality and since Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country, there is a large number of such people. This requires the tradition to come into the media and television which are the most convenient ways to make the songs accessible to every person in Pakistan. As a result the performers are in high demand. They have to travel to other places and put in a lot of time and effort. Hence, many people do not believe that making such performance practice as one's profession is wrong. Some people again add the condition that it is not wrong as long as it is done with the right spirit and intention.

Now that we have looked into all the dynamics that are performed through this tradition and the two sides of the argument, the orthodox and unorthodox, I bring us back to the questions that I laid out in the Introduction. Since the subject of Muslim women has been and still is an important part of all discourse on Islam, it is worthwhile to address their role in this tradition. Does women's performance of *hamd* and *naat* destabilize the patriarchal structures in the Pakistani society? Does it expand the allowed activities for women under orthodox Islam? In the conclusion that follows, I address these questions from my point of view.

Chapter 6: Conclusion - Answering the Questions

If one simultaneously considers the orthodox and the unorthodox views on the tradition of *hamd* and *naat*, one would begin to wonder about how two approaches on the same religion can be so radically different. Is one approach correct and the other wrong? While reading *In the City of the Marabouts* by Geert Mommersteeg, I found the answer to this question. In this case, the differences lay between orthodox Islam and popular cultural practices related to *marabaoutage* in Djenne, West Africa. However, Mommersteeg encountered the same question because both approaches seemed to disagree on some important aspects if not all. His answer to this issue is that “deciding which standpoints are doctrinally sound is a task for the theologians and not for researchers who view religion as a cultural system” (Mommersteeg, pg. 24). This is surely true. Also, since *hamd* and *naat* performance practices do not fall into the category of the basic tenets of Islam as set by the Quran and *Sunnah* and are invented practices by the followers of the religion, there is no law book that can definitively tell us what this tradition ought to be like.

It is a cultural practice in the Muslim world that was born out of love for Allah and the Prophet Muhammad. Some aspects of it, such as women’s participation, use of musical instruments and commercialization, are debated upon based on their relation to the basic teachings related to modesty, spirituality and piety as written in the Quran and taught by the Prophet. When Muslims are confronted with such an issue for which there are not clear instructions in the Quran, they try to be as careful as they can by interpreting and relating Quranic injunctions to the issue in question. Scholars are consulted but eventually it is up to the individual how he or she resolves the issue. In this effort of resolving the issue for one’s self, one

might be labeled as an orthodox if one is very careful or as a liberal if one is less careful. Such debate, according to Dr. Khalid Zaheer, is a very good debate. It is necessary for the purpose of preventing either side from reaching an extreme.

Such debate is especially helpful for the women in Pakistan. If only the orthodox point of view was considered “true” then these female performers of *hamd* and *naat* would have never been able to express their love of Allah and the Prophet without restrictions and convey their talent and musical abilities. This religious manner of conveying their talent is extremely important for these women because it allows them to guard their honor while they move from the private realm of their houses to the public sphere.

Pakistan still carries many influences from the Indian culture from the time that the two countries were one subcontinent. The classical music in Pakistan is the same as North Indian classical music. The popular song melodies as well as *naat* and *hamd* and the styles in which they are sung are also essentially based on North Indian classical music theory and style. However, classical and popular musicians are looked down upon by some traditionalist people. The musicians and singers, in this culture, used to be associated with the lower class and were called *marasi* (a derogatory term for musicians). Nowadays, this attitude has changed among the educated people with the emergence of young, educated talent in the field of music in Pakistan but some people still use such insulting terms. I, myself, have been a victim of such attitudes.

I remember one occasion when I was 7 years old, when two of mother’s aunts came to visit us and saw my *harmonium* (Indian Classical instrument that is similar to a pump organ) and *tabla* (Indian Classical drums) in the house. They asked my mother why we had those. My mother told them that I was learning Indian Classical music. As soon as she said it, frowns

creased both of their brows. They expressed their disappointment and indignation to my mother for letting me get involved in music. At another occasion someone said to my family that we (i.e. my family) “have changed from *jatt* to *marasi*”. *Jatt* is one of the respected castes in Pakistani culture. After I came to Bates and videos of my singing performances at Bates went up on Facebook, a distant acquaintance remarked that I had not gone to Bates to study but instead “*o tey othay nachun gaan gayi aye*” (A Punjabi sentence that translates to: she has gone there to sing and dance. Here, singing and dancing is being referred to as something low and indecent.). Such derogatory attitude is faced by men too but in the case of women it is more severe due to the stricter norms of behavior for women based on religious and cultural values.

In such a society where some women might have to face such attitudes if they decide to sing publicly, these religious songs provide a safe haven. Since *hamd* and *naat* are Islamic songs, the female performers in this tradition are generally highly respected for their performances. No one in the society would dare to use derogatory terms for these female performers because they are praising Allah and His Prophet Muhammad. It would not just be an insult to them but an insult to the religious tradition. Hence, many women who possess beautiful voices and have the desire to sing opt to perform in this tradition which is more respectable and honorable for them. They do also have the religious vigor and love towards Allah and the Prophet that attracts them to this performance tradition but this too is an important aspect of their performance. The women who I interviewed said that the reason they chose to perform *hamd* and *naat* was because they have great love for Allah and the Prophet Muhammad and due to this, their lives are filled with blessings from Allah. However, I felt that there was more to that reason than was disclosed. Nadia Bano told me that she used to sing popular songs on her own before she began to perform *hamd* and *naat*. She said that Allah guided her to the right path and then she started singing *hamd*

and *naat* only. It is not expected to hear anyone admit that they have objectives behind the religious acts that they perform other than the obvious spiritual reasons. *Hamd* and *naat* performances are considered religious acts and hence, the objectives behind them are supposed to be religious only. However, with the level of professionalism and commercialism that has become associated with this tradition, to me, the objectives seem to extend beyond the religious.

Whether they perform in all-female gatherings or on television, these women find an expression that combines their talent and religion and that also safeguards their respect. Due to their religious aim and motivation, those women who perform professionally are supported by the men in their family. If they had decided to sing popular songs, many of them would have not been allowed by their families to adopt such as profession. It certainly seems to me that women performers of *hamd* and *naat* have, if not destabilized, at least challenged some of the patriarchal values in the society.

Similarly, due to the fact that their performance is based on the love of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, they are supported by many Islamic scholars, performers and general public who have more liberal Islamic views. This gives them more legitimacy and certainly helps them expand the allowed activities for women under Islam as perceived by many Muslims in Pakistan.

This tradition is very important to me personally since I have participated in it too at various occasions. Through this thesis I hope that I have brought the tradition, as practiced in Pakistan, and the interesting dynamics that are performed within it, out in the open for further study and education. In this thesis I have only been able to give an outline of *hamd* and *naat* and briefly describe the social and cultural dynamics performed through it, more specifically the

gender dynamics. However, this thesis is also a starting point in further research in this area. Following the ideas introduced in this thesis, there are a number of topics that can be taken up and studied further. For instance, the commercialization of *hamd* and *naat* is an important subject and it ties in with the globalization of it through the advances in technology and the existence of websites such as YouTube. The musical aspect and the debate of its legitimacy based on Islamic principles is another debate that can be explored further. Another dynamic that is only briefly mentioned in the Introduction but that can be researched into, is the dichotomy that exists between the more modernist consumers of the tradition in Pakistan, who prefer rock and popular music over such religious music, and the more traditionalist consumers. How do the musical aspects of this tradition contribute towards the modernists' approach? Is the music in this tradition less attractive to some people than other forms of popular music or is its lack of appeal amongst the modernist circles due to the fact that it is associated with religion? Is the hype that surrounds all discourse related to Islam across the world today a factor that reduces this tradition's appeal to the modernist group? These are questions and topics related to *hamd* and *naat* that are worth exploring as future areas of study.

I will conclude this thesis in the same way that a *milad* gathering is usually concluded i.e. with a *durood* - a prayer for the Prophet Muhammad. Each of a Muslim's daily prayers also concludes with this prayer.

Allahumma Salli Ala Muhammadiw Wa Ala Aali Muhammadin

Kamaa Sallaita Ala Ibrahima Wa Ala Aali Ibrahima Innaka Hamidum Majid

Allahumma Baarik Ala Muhammadiw Wa Ala Ali Muhammadin

Kamaa Baarakta Ala Ibrahima Wa Ala Aali Ibrahima Innaka Hamidum Majid

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ
 وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ
 عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ
 إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ
 اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى
 آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا بَارَكْتَ عَلَى
 إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ
 إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ

"In the Name of Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful. O Allah, let Your Blessings be upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as you have blessed Ibrahim (Abraham) and his family. Truly, You are Praiseworthy and Glorious. Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as you have blessed Ibrahim and his family. Truly, You are Praiseworthy and Glorious".

(Image Courtesy: <http://cintarindurasul.blogspot.com/2012/07/kisah-perbualan-antara-junjungan-nabi.html>)

Oral Sources

Female Performers

Sayyida Umm-e-Kulsum

Nadia Bano

Ishrat Tufail

Nida Butt

Motiya

Male Performers

Dr. Abdur Rauf Rofi

Muhammad Fawad

Qari Najam Mustafa

Muhammad Shahzad

Ahmed Khan

Syed Manzoor-ul-Qunain

Tafu

Marhoob Hamdani

Islamic Scholars

Riaz Majeed

Dr. Khalid Zaheer

Syed Shafqat

Mufti Muhammad Saleem

General Public

Tania Sohail (curator at Lahore Arts Council)

Zulfiqar Ali Zulfi

Haleema Shehryar

Rabia Ilyas

Ahsan Khan

Sadia Khan

Hira Ashraf

Jehanzeb Asif Mehmood

Qasim Mahmood

Mehak Baig

Maha Yusuf

Areej Naseem

Sarmad Amir

Sarah Qamar

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Abu-Lughod, Lila (1986) *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press. Print.

Focused on the Bedouins in the Western Desert of Egypt, this book talks about their poetry and how it clashes with the Islamic morals they believe in. It talks about the feelings expressed in the poetry and relates it to their ideology. It also talks about issues regarding gender and sexuality as perceived by these people.

Ahmad, Salman (2010 a) *Rock and Roll Jihad: A Muslim Rock Star's Revolution*. New York: Free Press, a division of Simon and Schuster, Inc. Print.

After he had to move from the United States to Pakistan, Salman Ahmad had to face restriction from orthodox Islamic groups on practicing and performing music. Music was his passion and he was determined to not let it go despite the restrictive elements in the society. This book is about his journey of resistance against those restrictions. He became very successful in his mission as he topped all music charts in Pakistan with his western style rock music.

Ahmad, Sadaf (2010 b) *Pakistani Women: Multiple Locations and Competing Narratives*. Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press. Print.

This book features essays from different scholars on various aspects of life of Pakistani women. Ahmad writes about the various roles of Pakistani women and how they contribute in the society in not only domestic capacities but also professionally. She also explains the reasons behind some of the restrictions placed on women in the Pakistani society.

Ahmed, Leila (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Print.

This book looks at the debate about women and Islam by describing the history of this issue and how it has come into play in the current Islamic societies. It addresses the issues related to veiling and seclusion. It analyses the basis of these rules and norms as described in the Quran and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Towards the latter half, it moves into discussions on Muslim feminism.

Amjad , Majeed (1992-1993) *Naat*. Lahore: Government College Lahore. Urdu. Print.

This book in Urdu language mainly focuses on the poetry of *naat*. It describes the history of the tradition and introduces the reader to both Arabic and Urdu poetry in this genre. The author writes about specific poets and evaluates different *naat* poetry.

Danielson, Virginia (1999) “Moving towards Public Space: Women and Musical Performance in Twentieth-Century Egypt”. *Hermeneutics and Honor: Negotiating Female “Public” Space in Islamic/ate Societies*. Ed: Asma Afsaruddin. London, England: Harvard University Press. Print.

This collection of essays features various authors discussing how despite different restrictions, Muslim women have found ways to negotiate their space in the public sphere. Under orthodox and patriarchal interpretations of Islam, women's participation in the public sphere is restricted. However, Muslim women from different parts of the world have participated publicly throughout history and unsettled/blurred the traditional structures. Starting with Umm-e-Kulthum in the 1910s, women in Egypt began to perform at public social events, theaters, concerts and in media rather than just within their own domestic circle. They used covered and modest dresses to protect their identity as Muslim women and at the same time they used clever poetry and their mastery of Arabic singing to become the center of attraction in the public sphere.

Friend, Theodore (2012) *Woman, Man, and God in Modern Islam*. Cambridge, UK: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Print.

This book that follows the life of women from Indonesia to western Turkey, through Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia, it focuses on issues ranging from the Muslim woman's clothing to issues of violence against women. It talks about feminist achievers in these countries and expresses hopes for an open Islam.

Frishkopf, Michael (2010) *Music and Media in the Arab World*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press. Print.

A collection of essays about music and media in the Arab world, this book looks into the history of the music and media and also their development since the turn of the twentieth century.

Haeri, Shahla (2002) *No Shame for the Sun: Lives of Professional Pakistani Women*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

This book, as the title suggests, is about professional women in Pakistan. It focuses on the lives of six such women and expresses the diversity in their views. It talks about the various codes of conduct in the Pakistani society, issues related to marriage and gender equality.

Jairazbhoy, Nazir Ali (1993) "Pakistan". *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies*. Ed: Helen Myers. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. Print.

This book is a collection of ethnomusicological accounts by various authors regarding music from different continents of the world. The book is divided by continents. It features an account on Pakistan and its music by Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy. This account provides us the historical details of Pakistani music and how it has developed since the partition of India and Pakistan. It mentions the names of institutions and organizations in Pakistan that work towards the development of the music in the region.

Majeed, Riaz (1990) *Urdu Main Naat Goi*. Lahore, Pakistan: Iqbal Academy Pakistan. Urdu. Print.

Written in Urdu language, this book is one of the very few pieces of literature about this tradition in Pakistan that exist. It starts with describing the word *naat*, the poetry and its history. It looks into the Arabic counterpart of this tradition. Then it moves into the field of *naat* in Urdu language as found in Pakistan. It briefly talks about some *naat* poetry written by women and the *naat* that are based on the tunes of popular film songs.

Mommersteeg, Geert (2012) *In the City of the Marabouts: Islamic Culture in West Africa*. Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.. Print.

This book talks about the marabouts (Sufi practitioners) in Djenne, Mali, West Africa. It describes their practices through stories from the author's journey through Djenne. It also mentions songs that they sing in praise of the Prophet Muhammad, especially during his birth month.

Qureshi, Regula Burckhardt (1995) *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and meaning in Qawwali*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Print.

This book is the most famous book on *Qawwali* performances in Pakistan and India. It looks into the musical structure of this genre as well as its cultural context. It provides an in-depth view of the *Qawwali* performances at Sufi shrines in the Indian subcontinent. It also assesses the social dimensions of this music.

Qureshi, Regula (2013) "Pakistan". *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. Web. 21 March 2013.

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20726>.

This article gives an overview of all the types of music in Pakistan. It starts by describing the geography and history of the country. Then it goes on to describe various categories of music, the instruments used and the general structure of the music.

Racy, A. J. (2003) *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Print.

Focused on the East-Mediterranean and Near-Eastern Arab world, this book looks into the state of tarab (musically induced state of ecstasy) and how it has shaped the structure of the music there. It also provides important information about the debate on the legitimacy of music according to Islam. It also mentions how women are discouraged from pursuing music professionally due to the religious and cultural norms.

Rasmussen, Anne K. (2010) *Women, the Recited Quran, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press. Print.

This book focuses on the recitation of Quran as well as Islamic music performed by women in Indonesia. It relates the music with the religious nationalism in Indonesia during a specific era (end of Suharto's "New Order" to the time of "Reformation"). The Islamic rules and norms regarding women's participation are also discussed in it.

Sheikh, Khanam (2010) "New Expressions of Religiosity: Al-Huda International and the Expansion of Islamic Education for Pakistani Muslim Women". *Women and Islam*. Ed: Zayn R. Kassam. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger. Print.

This book is a collection of essays by various scholars on the contemporary experiences of Muslim women in context of religion and culture. It talks about the challenges faced by these women and how

they overcome those challenges. Khanam Sheikh writes about a particular organization called Al-Huda that works to impart Islamic education to women in Pakistan. Sheikh lays out the criticisms against Al-Huda. It is explained how this organization is firmly anchored in hetero-normative societal roles that places women in the domestic sphere and men in the public.

Shiloah, Amnon (1995) *Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-cultural study*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. Print.

Starting with pre-Islamic music of the Bedouins, this book describes the history and development of the music that various parts of the Muslim world identify with today. As Muslims conquered new lands, the music began to merge with native music of those areas. Today the music that Muslims, from Turkey to Iran to South and Central Asia, identify with is a mixture of many different styles. The author also describes the theory and practice of this music.