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Ecstasy and Enlightenment

*The Ismaili Devotional Literature
of South Asia*

ALI S. ASANI

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53. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, p. 41.
54. Derryl Maclean, *Religion and Society in Arab Sind* (Leiden, 1989), p. 149.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
56. Ivanow, 'Satpanth,' p. 22.
57. See translations in Kassam, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance*, pp. 320-70.
58. Wladimir Ivanow, 'The Sect of Imam Shah in Gujrat,' *JBBRAS*, New Series, 14 (1936), p. 60.
59. Ivanow, 'Satpanth,' p. 22.
60. Nanji, *The Nizārī Ismā'īlī Tradition*, p. 101.
61. Sachedina Nanjiani, *Khojā vrttant* (Ahmedabad, 1918), p. 14.
62. Maclean, *Religion and Society in Arab Sind*, p. 151, where he defines adhesion 'as the adding on of additional beliefs to the converts' original system of beliefs or rituals.'
63. Dominique-Sila Khan, *Conversions and Shifting Identities*, p. 163.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 164-7.
65. See Asani, 'The Khojahs of South Asia: Defining a Space of their Own.'
66. Peter Hardy, 'Modern European and Muslim Explanations of Conversion to Islam in South Asia: A Preliminary Survey of the Literature,' in Nehemia Levtzion, ed., *Conversion to Islam* (New York, London, 1979), p. 70.
67. For a detailed description and critique of these theories, see Hardy, 'Modern European and Muslim Explanations of Conversion to Islam in South Asia,' pp. 68-99 and Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier* (Berkeley, London, 1993) pp. 113-34.
68. Carl Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, pp. 166-8.
69. Richard Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700* (Princeton, NJ, 1978), pp. 172-3.
70. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, p. 310.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-303.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

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The *Gināns* as Devotional Literature: Their Origins, Characteristics and Themes*

*Ginān bolore nit nūre bhareā;
evo haide tamāre harakh na mājeji.*

Recite continually the *gināns* which are filled with light;
boundless will be the joy in your heart.¹

In this manner does a verse explain the importance of the *gināns*, the collection of hymn-like poems belonging to the Nizari Ismaili community of the Indian subcontinent. The verse in Gujarati cited above suggests that the *gināns* are perceived as containing 'light'—specifically, the light of knowledge that leads to enlightenment by banishing the darkness of ignorance. Indeed, the very term *ginān* is derived from the Sanskrit *jnāna* for contemplative knowledge.² The *gināns* are the focus of intense veneration, being regarded as the repository of spiritual knowledge and wisdom, which transmit in the vernacular the essential teachings of the Arabic Qur'an, the primary scripture of Islam. Although popularly believed to be medieval in origin, the *gināns* continue to play, to our day, a central role in the community's religious life. They are recited daily whenever members congregate for ritual prayers in their *jamā'at-khānas* (houses of congregation). And with the community's

'diaspora' within the last hundred years, these devotional poems are now also recited in many areas outside the subcontinent, such as East Africa, Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States.

The Nizari Ismailis of the subcontinent employ the term *ginān* to designate and distinguish a special type of poetic composition: specifically, a composition whose authorship is attributed to Ismaili *pīrs* or preacher-saints who, according to the community's traditions, came to the region as early as the 5th/11th century to propagate the Ismaili form of Islam. It was during their proselytizing activities that these Iranian *pīrs* are believed to have composed the several hundred poems of varying length known as the *gināns* which have come down to us. Through the poetic medium of the *gināns*, the *pīrs* provided guidance on a variety of doctrinal, ethical and mystical themes for the edification of their followers.³ In common with many of their Sufi contemporaries, the Ismaili *pīrs* adopted an approach that stressed indigenization of Islam to the local Indic linguistic and cultural milieu. For this purpose, they employed not only the indigenous languages of Gujarat, Sind and Punjab where they operated – tradition claims, rather exaggeratedly, the use of thirty-six languages – together with indigenous poetic forms and metres, but also their musical modes, for like most medieval Indian vernacular poetry the *gināns* are meant to be recited and sung. Not surprisingly, in their literary forms, symbols and manner of recitation, the *gināns* are reminiscent, on the one hand, of the *padas* and *bhajans* of the north Indian *bhakti* and *sant* traditions and, on the other, of Sufi poetry in the Indic vernaculars. On account of their distinctive linguistic and cultural background, the *gināns* represent an important regional and ethnic element in a broader corpus of Ismaili devotional literature that includes works in Arabic, Persian and even Burushaski, a language of the northern areas of Pakistan.⁴

The Role of *Gināns* in Ismaili Religious Life

Before examining the historical background and principal features of the *ginān* literature, it will be useful to discuss briefly its role within the context of the Khoja Ismaili community's religious

life and in individual piety, that is, the interaction between these texts and the people who memorize them, recite them and listen to them. The intention here, therefore, is to focus on the 'relational, contextual, or functional quality'⁵ of the *ginān* literature.

Although initially associated with the preaching of Ismaili doctrines and ideas, today, several centuries later, the *gināns* continue to exercise a significant influence in the religious life of the Nizari Ismailis, not only in the subcontinent but also in other parts of the world where they have immigrated. When Wladimir Ivanow, the Russian orientalist, was conducting his researches on the Ismailis of India in the early part of the 20th century, he noted 'the strange fascination, the majestic pathos and beauty' of the *gināns* as they were being recited, and observed further that their 'mystical appeal equals, if not exceeds that exercised by the Coran on the Arabic-speaking peoples.'⁶

The reverence shown to the *ginān* as written word should not, however, mislead us. Though they have been embodied in a written textual form, the *gināns* are primarily an oral tradition.⁷ Their greatest impact is through the ear. They are intended to be chanted and recited aloud according to prescribed *rāgas* (melodies) and folk tunes. Singing *gināns*, alongside the performance of ritual prayers, is one of the mainstays of the worship service in the mornings and evenings when the community congregates in the *jamā' at-khāna* for prayers. Memorization of at least a few *gināns* and their tunes constitutes an essential part of the religious education of Khoja Ismaili children. In fact, like much Indian devotional poetry, the *gināns*, through much of their history, were transmitted orally and only committed to writing rather late. As I have shown elsewhere, even after being recorded in Khojki, the community's special script, oral knowledge of *ginān* texts was still necessary to ensure correct reading of an ambiguous alphabet.⁸ Nowadays, the oral and memorized text continues to be functionally more important than the written text, which appears to be more of an *aide-mémoire* for the man or woman who leads the congregation in recitation.

While the recitation of one or more *gināns* constitutes an important ritual in itself, individual *ginān* verses or sometimes entire

gināns are also an integral part of other rituals of worship. Consequently, manuscripts, lithographs or books containing *gināns* are frequently classified and arranged according to ritual usage. There are entire genres of *gināns* intended for recitation with specific prayers and religious ceremonies held in the mornings or evenings. For instance, before the faithful begin their early sessions of morning meditation, a selection of verses on aspects of the mystical experience are recited in order to evoke the appropriate mental and spiritual disposition within the meditators. Some *gināns* are heard only on certain religious festivals and holidays: the *ginān Sāt swargnā kāīm khuliyā che dwār* (*The Doors of the Seven Heavens have Swung Open*) on the birthday of Prophet Muḥammad; *Dhan dhan ājno dahado* (*Happy and Blessed is this Day*) on the birthday of the Imam; and *Navaroznā dīn sohāmaṇā* (*On this Auspicious Day of Navrūz*) at the beginning of the Persian New Year. Finally, on a night of special spiritual significance such as *Laylat al-Qadr* on which the Qur'an was first revealed, appropriate *ginān* verses alternate with the names of God and other religious formulas in an entrancing meditative chant called the *zīkr* (Arabic, *dhikr*).

Beyond their role in worship, the *gināns* permeate in many ways communal and individual life. At a communal level, the commencement of any function or meeting, be it religious or secular, is marked by a short Qur'an recitation followed by one from the *gināns*. The intent of such recitations is to bestow auspiciousness on the occasion. During sermons, religious discussions and in religious education materials, *ginān* verses are often cited as proof-texts. Occasionally, a special concert called *ginān mehfil* or *mushā'iro* takes place, much like the *qawwālī* and other Sufi devotional recitations, during which professional and amateur singers sing *gināns* with musical accompaniment. In deference to the reluctance among orthodox-minded Muslims to permit the use of musical instruments in explicitly religious contexts, such concerts are not usually held within the premises of *jamā'at-khānas*. Again, outside the context of formal worship or liturgy, community institutions responsible for religious education may sponsor *ginān* competitions in which participants are judged on their ability to sing and properly enunciate *ginān* texts. Such competitions are a popular

method among religious educators to encourage the learning of *gināns* among young students and adults. At a personal and family level, too, *gināns* are used in many different contexts: individual verses can be quoted as proverbs; verses can be recited in homes to bring *baraka*, spiritual and material blessing; housewives, in a usage that stresses the links between the *gināns* and folk tradition, often recite them while working or as lullabies; audio cassettes with *gināns* sung by 'star' singers or recordings of *ginān mehfil*s can be found in many an Ismaili home and even their cars!

That the *gināns*, a literary corpus originating within a folk tradition, should have attained a devotional role is by no means unprecedented in the history of north Indian vernacular literatures. Poems and hymns attributed to prominent religious personalities associated with the *bhakti*, *sant*, Sufi as well as the Sikh traditions have come to play a pivotal role in the devotional life of religious communities all over north India. What is unusual in the case of the *ginān* literature are the questions raised, both within and outside the community, regarding the 'Islamic' character of this literary corpus and its relationship with the Qur'an, as the primary scripture of the Islamic tradition. The need to clarify these issues became urgent in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

From this time onwards, on account of a complex interaction of political and historical factors, questions of religious identity became crucial for Ismaili and other Muslim communities who practised forms of Islam which did not correspond with the assumed standards of Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy.⁹ Furthermore, in this period, lines between Hindu and Muslim groups were gradually being firmly delineated, with different facets of South Asian culture increasingly coming to be viewed from the perspective of religious communalism. Language, literature, music, dance, architecture, etc., became variously politicized within the realms of colonial or nationalist discourse as elites tried to preserve their privilege in the colonial and post-colonial state through the manipulation of symbols which had mass appeal.¹⁰ The twin processes of Islamization – defined as the adoption of Perso-Arabic cultural elements and mores – among Muslims and

Sanskritization among Hindus resulted in cultural distancing between Muslims and Hindus. Several regions of the subcontinent, including Bengal, home to the majority of the Muslim population, witnessed the emergence of grass-roots Muslim reformers, such as the Faraizis, who targeted a whole range of practices, customs and ideas prevalent among Muslims and recognized as local or indigenous and, therefore, decidedly 'un-Islamic' in their opinion.¹¹ In such an atmosphere, Muslim literatures in indigenous Indic languages, particularly those that displayed characteristics considered to be syncretistic, stood in danger of being regarded with suspicion and branded as 'Hindu' and 'non-Islamic.'¹²

The response of the Nizari Ismailis of the subcontinent to these developments has been a complex one. First, as noted, the *gināns* literature came to be perceived within the community as a kind of commentary on the Qur'an. This was the clarification given by Şulţan Muĥammad Şāh Aga Khan III, the 48th Imam of the Ismailis, in his pronouncement giving guidance on this issue: 'In the *gināns* which Pīr Sadardin has composed for you, he has explained the gist of the Qur'an in the language of Hindustan.'¹³ According to this interpretation, the *gināns* serve as secondary texts generated in the vernacular for transmission of the teachings of a primary scripture, the Qur'an, for non-Arabic speaking peoples. It is therefore commonly believed in the community, reflecting the traditional preoccupation of the Ismailis with the esoteric, that the *gināns* serve to penetrate to the inner (*bātin*) signification of the Qur'an rather than the external (*zāhir*) aspects.

In this manner, while affirming the primacy of the Qur'an in its theology, the community has been able to preserve a significant role for the *gināns*. Viewed within the context of Islamic religious literature, the community's perception of the *gināns* as playing a mediating role between the faithful and the Qur'an is not without its parallels. In parts of the Islamic world influenced by Persian culture, Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, popularly called the 'Qur'an in Persian,' is regarded as a vast esoteric commentary on the Qur'an, many of its verses being interpreted as translations of Qur'anic verses into Persian poetry. Similar

interpretations exist about the poetic masterpiece so influential among Sindhi-speakers – Şāh 'Abdu'l Latīf's *Risālo*, the 'sacred book for Sindhis, admired and memorized by Muslims and Hindus equally.'¹⁴

In a second development, terms and idioms within the *gināns* that could be perceived as 'Hinduistic', and hence likely to provoke questions regarding their identity as Islamic literature,¹⁵ have been replaced by Perso-Arabic ones considered to be more in consonance with the greater Islamic tradition. In recent editions of *ginān* texts published by community institutions, for example, the word 'Harī' is replaced by 'Alī', and so on. *Gināns* in which the *pīrs* elucidate Ismaili concepts through reformulations of Hindu mythologies are recited less frequently, such as the *Dasa Avatāra* (*The Ten Avatāras*), a central, early text of the Satpanthi tradition.¹⁶ Such changes, while generally accepted within the community, have also generated much debate on the appropriateness of interpolations of texts which presumably have been handed down intact through the centuries. They also raise the question of what constitutes a 'Hindu' element as opposed to an 'Islamic' one, especially when terms from Indic languages with no specific theological connection to the Hindu tradition have been replaced by Perso-Arabic ones. Such questioning and debate, symptomatic of tensions between localized, ethnic, or vernacular expressions of Islam and pan-Islamic forces, reveals the strength of the Nizari Ismaili community's attachment to the *gināns*. While their functions may change and evolve over time, they will nevertheless remain a part of the communal religious life. They provide us with a particularly vivid and powerful reminder of the significant, and unfortunately underestimated, role played by Indic vernacular literatures in the development of Indo-Muslim civilization.

Origins of the *Gināns*

The origins of these religious poems, as is the case with much *bhakti* and *sant* poetry, are so hopelessly entangled in historical obscurities that there are simply too many questions for which we

cannot provide satisfactory answers. The community's legendary accounts and traditional histories assert that these *gināns* were composed by a series of preacher-saints or *pīrs* sent to the subcontinent from Iran by the community's Imams for the express purpose of propagating the Ismaili form of Islam in Gujarat, Sind and Punjab. According to these traditions, the *pīrs*' mission began in the 5th/11th or 6th/12th century. This would mean that the *gināns* were not associated with the earlier attempts, in the 4th/10th century, to establish Ismaili political dominion in the subcontinent, specifically in Sind and Multan.¹⁷ We do, in fact, have archaeological and other evidence to support the existence of a long-standing relationship between the Ismaili Imams in Iran and their communities in India,¹⁸ making it quite plausible that some of these *pīrs* did come from Iran or at least had some sort of a connection with that region. In any case, a critical aspect of the *pīrs*' activities was the creation of a new literature – the *ginān* literature – geared for those embarking on *satpanth* (the true path), the Indic vernacular term utilized by the *pīrs* to refer to Ismaili Islam.¹⁹

We possess remarkably little reliable information about these *pīrs* who are believed to be the authors of the *gināns*. Since they very likely maintained a low profile in order to avoid undue attention and possible persecution, works by contemporary Muslim historians and travellers contain no direct references to them or their adherents. Ismaili accounts, some of them incorporated in the *ginān* literature, surround them with layers of myth, legend and hagiography that have been compounded by centuries of transmission.²⁰ Nevertheless, in these accounts, the *pīrs* stand out as figures of dominating importance who are accorded reverence not unlike that accorded to a Hindu *guru* or a Sufi *shaykh*. They are depicted as mystical teachers leading their followers to the truth. In an environment permeated by Sufi *taṛīqas* and *bhakti* groups revolving around religious personalities, the Ismaili *pīrs* must have been quite inconspicuous.²¹

For our purposes here, it suffices to be acquainted with some of the most important figures to whom the *gināns* are attributed. Pīr Satgūr Nūr, regarded in the traditions as the earliest *pīr*, is

believed to have worked mostly in Sind and Gujarat. The tombstone at the shrine dedicated to him at Navsari in Gujarat gives his death date as 487/1094. However, this information is not very useful for the shrine itself is a much later development. There are, in fact, many enigmatic and perplexing questions about this earliest of the *pīrs* who is supposed to have composed at least nine short *gināns* as well as a *granth*, that is, a long *ginān* with a title. He was followed by Pīr Shams, a preacher associated with the Ismaili Imam Qāsim Shāh (c.710–772/c.1310–1370). Popular tradition has identified Pīr Shams, who possesses a shrine in Multan, with Shams-i Tabrīzī, the mysterious mentor of the great Muslim mystic, Maulānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273).²² To this *pīr* are attributed 108 short *gināns* as well as ten *granth*s, many of which are in various Punjabi dialects. Pīrs Satgūr Nūr and Shams laid the foundation of the community, the consolidation of which is associated with a later figure, Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn. His mausoleum is near Uchh in present-day Pakistan.

Placed by the Russian orientalist W. Ivanow between the second half of the 8th/14th century and the beginning of the 9th/15th century, Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn is the most well-known among the *pīrs*. The number of works ascribed to him is linguistically diverse and extremely large (218 *gināns* and 18 *granth*s),²³ leading Ivanow to comment that only God knows how far this attribution is correct.²⁴ He contributed in various ways to developing the community's organization: he is believed to have established the first *jamā'at-khānas* and given the title *khawāja* (lord, master) to his followers. The term *Khoja*, by which Nizari Ismailis are popularly known in the subcontinent, is a corruption of this title. Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn was succeeded by his son, Ḥasan Kabīr al-Dīn (d. c. 875/1470?), renowned in the community for his emotional poems in which he passionately expresses his yearnings for beatific vision. To this religious figure are attributed at least 79 short *gināns* and seven *granth*s. On the death of Pīr Ḥasan Kabīr al-Dīn there was considerable dissension within his family over the succession to the office of *pīr*. His brother, Pīr Tāj al-Dīn who was actually the nominated successor, was rejected by a section of the community in favour of Ḥasan Kabīr al-Dīn's son, Imām-Shāh. Tāj al-Dīn's

mysterious death plunged the community into a crisis leading to the secession and declaration of autonomy by Nar Muḥammad Shāh (d.c. 941/1534), a son of Imam-Shāh (d. 919/1513), who organized the Imām-Shāhī sect. Both father and son composed *gināns*: Imām-Shāh has fifteen *granth*s and 162 short *gināns* while Nar Muḥammad Shāh has two important *granth*s to his name. On account of the schism, the Imam repudiated the Imām-Shāhīs and sent a Persian text, the *Pandiyāt-i jawānmardī* (*The Counsels of Chivalry*) in place of a *pīr* to guide those who remained loyal to him (see Plate v).²⁵ The mainstream Khoja faction, though continuing to recite the compositions of Imām-Shāh and his son, regard them as less authoritative works. With the resolution of the Imām-Shāhī crisis, the age of the great *pīrs* comes to an end. However, *gināns* continued to be composed till the early 20th century by persons known as *sayyids*.²⁶ The most notable of these is a woman saint, Sayyida Imām-Begum (d. 1283/1866), whose ten *gināns* are extremely popular today.²⁷ She is buried in the Mian Shah cemetery in Karachi, next to the grave of her suitor.

In the absence of concrete evidence, much of the attribution based on the community's traditions cannot be authenticated. The *gināns*, like much medieval Indian devotional poetry, were initially transmitted largely through oral tradition. They appear to have been put into writing only much later in their history, giving rise to vexing questions concerning their authorship as well as their transmission. Indeed, for many *gināns*, the traditional attribution of authorship can be challenged on linguistic and literary grounds. Ivanow feels that in some cases the attribution of a *ginān* to a certain *pīr* may, in fact, reflect that it is a work written by later devotees about the *pīr* rather than by him.²⁸ Azim Nanji, too, suggests that sometimes the actual composition of a *ginān* may have been the work of later disciples.²⁹ It is, therefore, quite possible that composers of some *gināns* may have attributed them to their favourite *pīr* as a way of spiritually identifying themselves with their mentors. Whatever the case may be, clearly more research needs to be undertaken before we can clarify the origins of these religious poems and answer questions that seem at present to be unanswerable.³⁰

However important questions of origins and authenticity of the *ginān* literature may be to the scholar, the community has never approached the issue with the same 'scientific' concerns. Naturally, for most adherents, authorship by a recognized *pīr* is crucial to the validity of a *ginān* as well as its teachings. However, for them, authorship is determined solely on the basis of community tradition. Ultimately, as is the case with medieval Indian *bhakti* and *sant* poetry, the communal attribution of a certain composition to a particular author depended upon the inherited consensus of the audience of this literature. Once a piece was in circulation and acknowledged as 'religious', it belonged to its audience which made of it what it willed.³¹

General Characteristics

Viewed within the context of Islamic civilization in the subcontinent, the *gināns* clearly belong to a larger corpus of Indo-Muslim literatures, 'popular' or 'folk' in orientation and utilizing Indic vernacular languages. Studies of South Asian Islam clearly demonstrate that vernacular literatures in the folk idiom, rather than literature in classical Islamic languages, Arabic and Persian, were responsible for spreading Islamic precepts in the region.³² Literatures in the vernaculars were instrumental in explaining fundamental Islamic concepts to the native populations in terms that were familiar and accessible to them.³³ The subcontinent's many languages, folk songs, metres, poetic idioms, symbols and traditional music were all harnessed for this task. In the process, the authors who formulated these literatures, indigenized the Islamic tradition to the local Indian cultural environment.

The Ismaili *pīrs*, too, seem to have adopted a similar approach in their interaction with native populations, presenting Islam, in its Nizari Ismaili form, in a manner that would be accessible to their predominantly Hindu audiences. They utilized myths and concepts prevalent in the Indian religious milieu in order to provide a locally intelligible expression to fundamental Ismaili principles.³⁴ For example, through a process of mythopoesis, they created an ostensible correspondence between the Vaishnava

Hindu concept of *avatāra* and the Ismaili concept of the Imam. Such mythopoesis is found in other local Indo-Muslim traditions as, for example, in Bengali *puṭhī* literature. The tenth *avatāra* of Vishnu, renamed in the tradition as Nakalankī, 'the stainless one,' was identified with 'Alī, the first Shi'ī Imam. Other basic Hindu figures were redirected to Islamic personalities: Brahmā, for example, was identified with the Prophet Muḥammad, while the Prophet's daughter, Fātima, was identified with Shakti and Sarasvatī.³⁵ Typically, in *gināns*, such as the 'classic' *Dasa Avatāra*, the *pīrs*, many of whom even took on local Indian names, represented themselves as guides who knew the whereabouts of the awaited tenth *avatāra* of Vishnu, meaning the Ismaili Imam.³⁶ Thus, their concern for facilitating a smooth transition and a continuum from one religion to another led the *pīrs* to portray Ismaili Islam as the completion or culmination of the Hindu tradition.³⁷ Strange as it may appear, this approach was not unparalleled in Islamic theology for, in another cultural environment, namely the Middle East, Islam had already been represented as the fulfilment of Judaism and Christianity.

In keeping with the emphasis on indigenization, the *gināns*, the literary vehicles which the *pīrs* utilized for their preaching, exhibit many characteristics typical of medieval Indian devotional literatures. Indeed, the similarities are so strong that it is very likely that works could have been appropriated from one tradition to another, resulting in the phenomenon of 'portability' (discussed in the introductory chapter).³⁸ The structural features of the *gināns* may be summarized as follows.

Language and Vocabulary

The *gināns* favour the subcontinent's vernacular languages as appropriate expressions of faith. Although the composers of the *gināns* were of Iranian origin, not a single *ginān* can be found in Persian. Although Ismaili tradition claims the use of 36 Indian languages in the *gināns*, we can discern, in fact, only six major languages with several of their dialects: Punjabi, Multani (Saraiki), Sindhi, Kachchi, Hindustani/Hindi and Gujarati. Generally, these

languages occur in their medieval form, making comprehension difficult for the contemporary audience. In fact, some *gināns* in archaic Sindhi may represent the earliest surviving examples of the language that have come down to us.³⁹ On the other hand, many *gināns* contain idioms and expressions that are clearly too 'modern' to have been used by the saint to whom they are attributed. Such anachronisms are the result of the vagaries of transmission during which works of folk literature are notoriously prone to distortion and interpolation.

In this regard, we should note that a substantial portion of the *ginān* literature, as we know it now, underwent 'editing' before being printed in the Gujarati script at the beginning of the 20th century. During this process, the vocabulary of many *gināns* seems to have incorporated elements from Gujarati, the language spoken by a substantial segment of the community.⁴⁰ The use of two or more Indic languages in a single *ginān*, may also indicate that, as they spread, *gināns* originating in a certain area were probably translated entirely or suitably adapted to the needs of a new linguistic region. Vocabulary from one North Indian language, it seems, was replaced by synonyms from another. For example, the *ginān* which begins *Amar te āyo more shāhājjo* (*The Command has come from my Master*) has, in one version, all its Sindhi elements changed to Punjabi equivalents so that it begins *Hukam āeā mede shāhadā*.⁴¹ Consequently, in such cases, the original text or language of a *ginān* becomes difficult, if not impossible, to determine. The theological vocabulary, too, tends to be mostly Indic in origin. For example, indigenous Indian terms, such as *nīranjan*, *hari*, *nīrākār*, *rām*, occur frequently in reference to God instead of the Arabic 'Allah.' Arabic and Persian theological terms, though they occur, tend to be limited. Frequently, however, they appear in strangely distorted forms. As noted, in more recent times, certain expressions in the *gināns* have also been altered so that they are more in consonance with changes in the community's religious identity. Thus, as the community identifies itself more closely with the larger Islamic world, vocabulary items of Indic or Sanskrit origin perceived to be of 'Hinduistic' origin have gradually been

replaced by Perso-Arabic ones that are considered to be more compatible with an 'Islamic' character.

Prosody and Verse-forms

Alongside the use of Indic languages, the *gināns* make use of traditional Indian prosody in which verse forms, metrics and musical beat (*tāl*) are closely allied. Like much North Indian verse, the poetry in the *gināns* belongs to the class of *jāti chand* in which scanning is based on the number of long and short *mātrās* (metrical instants) in a line.⁴² However, as Azim Nanji correctly points out, ginanic prosody 'suffers from great inexactitude owing to negligence in transmission and linguistic acculturation.'⁴³ The most popular metres in the *gināns* are the *dohā*, the *caupāī*, the *sorathā*, all employed in verse-forms of the same name.⁴⁴ In lengthier *gināns*, usually of a more didactic nature, the *dohā* and *caupāī* are frequently used together in the same work. This combination is entirely in keeping with Indian literary conventions – it is found in works attributed to luminaries such as Kabīr, Mūḥammad Jaisī, Tulsīdās and Sūrdās.⁴⁵ The *sloka*, the epic stanza with two verses of sixteen *mātrās*, also occurs with great frequency.

In addition to the verse forms we have just described, others have been adopted from the realm of folk poetry: the *sī ḥarfī* or *chautisa* in which each verse begins with a letter of the alphabet; the *kāpāūtī*, a type of folk song sung by women to accompany their work at the spinning wheel; the *kāfī*, a typically Sindhi form involving the repetition of the initial verse after each succeeding verse. From Gujarati folk culture was adopted the *garbī*, traditionally associated with the worship of the mother-goddess among Hindu Gujaratis. Combining both verse and dance,⁴⁶ the *garbī* was especially favoured by Pīr Shams, who is credited with at least 28 compositions in this genre.

Regardless of the verse-forms used, most *gināns* also have a refrain, usually called a *tek* or *varaṇī*, the constant repetition of which is integral to holding together the different ideas expressed in the various verses of a *ginān*. If a *ginān* does not possess a formal refrain, then, as is the case with *bhakti* and *sant* poetry, the first

verse is used for this purpose. The last verse of most *gināns* usually contains a *bhanitā* (sometimes called *chāp*) or signature line, which identifies the composer of the work. Though reminiscent of the *takhalluṣ* of Persian poetry, the *bhanitā* is, in fact, a characteristic feature of medieval North Indian poetry.⁴⁷

The number of verses in a *ginān* varies tremendously: the shorter compositions may contain four to ten stanzas while the longer ones may comprise of over five hundred. Usually the short *gināns* do not possess a title; in such cases, the first verse or refrain often serves as a title equivalent for identification purposes. The longer *gināns*, however, have individual titles that may reflect the central theme or subject of the work. For example, a long mystical poem on the spiritual quest of the soul is appropriately titled *Būjh Nirānjan* (*Knowledge of the Attributeless Deity*) and a didactic piece giving instruction in moral and religious matters is called *Moman Chetāmanī* (*A Warning for the Believer*). These titled *gināns*, popularly designated *granth*s to distinguish them from the short untitled compositions, may in some cases exist in minor (*nāno*, *ninḍo*) and major (*moṭo*, *vaḍho*) versions. However, in quite a few cases the minor version's relation to the major is simply in title.⁴⁸ Again, some *granth*s may possess a sort of an appendix or addendum, commonly called *vel* (lit. creeper).

Though they are poems, the *gināns* exhibit a great variety in style. Many, like the *Būjh Nirānjan*, are didactic in tone, imparting instruction on religious and other matters. Others are narratives, containing hagiographic and legendary accounts of the *pīrs*.⁴⁹ Several are in the form of parables or stories that are meant to be interpreted mystically: the *ginān* called *Kesrī sīnh swarūp bhulāyo* (*The Lion Forgot his Lion-form*) for example, describes a lion who has forgotten its true identity on account of its upbringing among a flock of sheep, while the *granth* called *Hans Hansī nī Vartā* (*The Parable of the Goose and the Gander*) is about the mystical encounter of a male and female goose. Some are dialogues: the *Bāī Budhāī* (*Lady Budhāī*) are a series of poems comprising the conversation of Pīr Imām-Shāh with his sister Budhāī on religious and theosophic subjects, and the *granth* *Hasan Kabīr-adīn ane Kānīpā no Samvād* (*The Conversation between Hasan Kabīr al-Dīn and Kānīpā*)

records the discussion of the Ismaili *pīr* with Kānipā, a Hindu sage and ascetic, on various religious issues. Yet others are short ecstatic compositions describing the joys and agonies of mystical love.

Music and Recitation

Like most Indian devotional poetry, the *gināns* are meant to be sung and recited with each *ginān* having its own *rāga* or musical modes. Music is, therefore, a distinctive and integral feature of each *ginān*. For example, the *ginān* called *Āe rahem rahemān* (*Come, O Merciful, Benevolent One*) is in *rāga kāfī* with its *tāl* (beat cycle) as *dīpchandī*, that is, fourteen beats; *Ab terī mahobat lāgī* (*Stricken by Love for You*) is in *rāga kālīngrā*, *tāl kaherwā* (eight beats).⁵⁰ Given the state of our sources, we will perhaps be unable to determine whether *pīs* who composed the *gināns* were also responsible for setting them to music or whether this was the task of disciples. Tradition, however, informs us that at least one composer of *gināns* – the woman saint Sayyida Imām-Begum – was familiar with Indian music as well as an accomplished player of the *sitar* and *sarangī*.⁵¹

The use of *rāgas* in the *gināns* is essential for the evocation of moods appropriate to certain occasions, or to the theme of the work, or to the rituals of which it is part. Some *gināns*, it seems, are associated with *rāgas* appropriate to the time of day they are meant to be sung. Thus, *gināns* – such as the genre of the *prabhāṭiya* – intended for recitation early in the morning are likely to be sung in morning *rāgas*. Though some *ginān* texts, both manuscript and printed, indicate the particular *rāga* for a composition, for the most part the *rāgas* of the *gināns* are transmitted orally. As a consequence, there may be several melodic variations for a particular *ginān*, often differing from one geographical region to another. In recent years, some of these traditional *rāgas* have even been affected by melodies from popular Indian film music. But, fortunately, for the preservation of the traditional music, this trend has faded. On account of a growing awareness of the importance of singing a *ginān* properly, several individuals have attempted to record the *rāgas* of popular *gināns* for dissemination within the community.⁵²

Usually in the *jamā' at-khānas*, the recitation of a *ginān* is led by a man, woman or even a child, accompanied by the entire congregation. Those who are unfamiliar with the text of a particular composition can usually participate in the singing of the refrain, a common structural element in most *gināns*. The recitation, especially if it is well delivered, can often be very powerful in its evocation of emotional and religious feelings. Illustrative of the significance and effect of the oral/aural dimension of *ginān* recitation are the following comments by the Pakistani writer and poet G. Allana, as he reminisces about a childhood experience:

My mother Sharfibai start[s] singing a *ginān*. Her voice was unmatched. Everybody listened to her bewitching voice singing a *ginān*. No other person, as is normally customary, dare join his or her voice with hers to sing in chorus, whether she sang a stanza of a *ginān* or the refrain of the *ginān*. The fragrance of that spiritual atmosphere still lingers in my mind. One seemed to live and be so near to the presence of the Omnipotent and the Omniscient One. The weight of life's burdens dissolved.⁵³

The singing in unison of the entire congregation, which on Fridays and special religious holidays may number, in some areas, up to one thousand or more, can also be very powerful in its emotional and sensual impact. Even those who may not fully understand the meanings and significance of the words they sing may experience an emotion difficult to describe but which sometimes physically manifests itself through moist eyes or tears.

An oft-repeated story within the community concerns the penitence and redemption of Ismail Gangji, a not exactly pious individual from Junagadh, induced one evening while he was sitting in the *jamā' at-khāna* listening to the recitation of a *ginān* stanza.

He heard the stanza very attentively and tears poured through his eyes. Immediately on conclusion of the *ginān* recitation, this faithful [one] got up, went to the honourable Mukhi [a religious official], Rai Rahmatullahbhai, and sought forgiveness of all his sins. This was the moment signifying the day he started his life anew.⁵⁴

Subsequently, he became the chief minister to the *nawāb* of

Junagadh. According to one community publication, Ismail Gangji even had the unique honour, following his death in 1883, of receiving the title of *pir* from the Imam on account of his high spiritual status.

As a rule, the recitation of *gināns* in the *jamā'at-khāna* is not accompanied by musical instruments. However, basing our assumptions on the performance of poetry from literary traditions parallel to the *gināns* – the *bhakti*, *sant* and Sufi traditions – it is likely that in the past musical accompaniment may have featured in the recitation of *gināns*. As noted earlier, outside the *jamā'at-khānas*, that is, in more social gatherings called *ginān mehfil* or *mushā'iro*, the *gināns* are often recited to the accompaniment of musical instruments, usually the Indian harmonium and the *tabla* (drum).

Manuscripts and Texts

The *gināns* began as oral literature, being recorded in writing only much later in their history. Although there are many manuscripts, very few date earlier than the 12th/18th century: the earliest extant manuscript dates to 1736.⁵⁵ However, since this manuscript, like others, is mentioned as being copied from older ones, it is likely that the practice of writing *gināns* began earlier. The absence of earlier manuscripts can be explained by various factors. The subcontinent's climatic conditions as well as its prolific insect life certainly do not assist the preservation of manuscripts. Again, it was probably customary to destroy old and deteriorating manuscripts once they had been re-copied by scribes. Finally, piety itself has been no less of a problem: Ivanow remarks that in the early 20th century, after the printing of certain *ginānic* texts, 'the manuscripts from which the edition was prepared were buried in the ground!'⁵⁶

Ginān manuscripts are written in Khojkī, a script peculiar to the subcontinent's Ismaili communities. A 'proto-Nagari' script dating back to the early 2nd/8th century, Khojkī belongs to the group of *Laṇḍā* or 'clipped' alphabets found in Sind, Punjab and north-western India. These scripts were mostly used by trading communities for keeping accounts and recording transactions.

On account of their mercantile functions, these scripts tend to be crude by literary standards, often being simply a type of shorthand. They lack complete vowel systems as well as sufficient characters to represent unambiguously the full range of consonants. However, a small number of scripts – including Khojkī – actually evolved into vehicles of literary expression through refinement of their writing systems.

The use of Khojkī, a 'local' script, to record the *gināns*, was an integral part of the *pirs'* attempt to make religious literature more accessible by recording it in a script with which the local population had the greatest familiarity. That the adoption of a 'local' script for preserving religious literature may have been customary with various groups in medieval India is further evident from the Sikh adoption of Gurmukhī as an 'official' script for its religious literature. Significantly, Gurmukhī, like Khojkī, is a polished and refined version of a *Laṇḍā* alphabet whose adoption was of great significance for the Sikh community. Only by adopting a script of their own could the Sikhs develop a literary culture that was suited to their faith and language.⁵⁷

Much more was involved in the use of the Khojkī script than access to religious literature. The script, by providing an exclusive means of written expression shared by Ismailis living in three regions (Sind, Punjab and Gujarat) was instrumental in developing cohesion and group identity within a widely-scattered and linguistically diverse community. This function of the script – that is, to strengthen ties within a group – is again paralleled not only by the role of Gurmukhī in developing Sikh identity but also that of Moḍī, another clipped alphabet, in fostering and strengthening ethnic identity among Mahrattas during the time of Shivājī.⁵⁸ No doubt Khojkī facilitated the flow and the transmission of religious literature from one area to another. Use of the script may have also served to confine religious literature within the community – this precaution being necessary to avoid persecution from outsiders not in agreement with the community's doctrines and practices.

Important as Khojkī was to the preservation and recording of *ginānic* manuscripts, it was gradually abandoned in favour of the

Gujarati script. For all practical purposes, Khojki is no longer a 'living script' and few of the community's younger members even know of its existence. There were several factors behind this move which we have discussed elsewhere.⁵⁹ In the first decades of the 20th century, as collections of the *ginān* literature began to be printed, Khojki texts were switched to the Gujarati alphabet. At the same time, the *gināns* themselves were edited. For this purpose, manuscripts were for the first time collected at community-wide level, and their texts collated.⁶⁰ However, the goals and the methods of this editing were very different from those of scholarly textual criticism, for very often the religious outlook of the editors would inspire changes in the texts. Finally, these edited texts were printed at the community's central press, the Ismaili Printing Press (also known then as the Khoja Sindhi Press) in Bombay.

Although the *gināns* continue to be printed in the Gujarati script to this day, changes in the community's linguistic status in different areas of the world have made the use of other alphabets also necessary. Since many younger members of the diasporic community in East Africa and in the West cannot read Gujarati, *ginān* texts are often transliterated into the Latin alphabet. The transliteration systems are, however, quite chaotic and sometimes inaccurate. Again, with the growing stress on Urdu in Pakistan, young Pakistani Ismailis are now familiar only with the Urdu script, making it imperative for Pakistani *ginān* publications to use that script.

Themes and Motifs

Unlike Ismaili literature in Arabic and Persian, the *ginān* literature is not overly concerned with lengthy and learned expositions of theological and doctrinal issues. Nor is it concerned with philosophical and intellectual controversies and the systematic refutations of false doctrines. Its character tends to be 'popular' rather than pedantic or scholarly. Its themes are many and diverse, ranging from descriptions about the beginnings of creation and laments of the soul as it proceeds on a spiritual quest, to ethical precepts concerning proper business practice. These themes

cannot be too rigorously separated from each other for, typically, in a single *ginān* they mingle and blend together. Nevertheless, in order to better understand the nature of the literature, it may be useful to isolate some major motifs.

The first category of motifs relates to the overall portrayal of Islam, specifically in its Nizari Ismaili form, as the culmination of the Vaishnava Hindu tradition. The 'classic' of the tradition, the *Dasa avatāra*, which represents the integration of Ismaili thought within a Vaishnava framework, is permeated with motifs from this category.⁶¹ Within this category may also be included *gināns* that deal with accounts of traditional figures of Hindu mythology. Figures such as Harishcandra, Draupadī and the Pāndava brothers have served Hindus as models of proper behaviour and conduct. In order that some of these figures might be of benefit to the new converts, they were assimilated into the Ismaili tradition by being re-interpreted with Ismaili perspectives. For example, the *ginān* called *Amar te āyo* (*The Command has Come*) Harishcandra is carried over from the Hindu tradition, where he is a model of righteousness and *dharma*, into the *ginān* tradition, where he becomes the paradigm of the true Muslim who is ready to sacrifice everything for his religion. Finally, we also include here *gināns* that are hagiographic accounts of the great Ismaili *pīrs* and their activities. The *granths*, *Satgūr nā Vivā* (*The Wedding of Satgūr*) and *Putlā* (*The Idols*) are accounts of the conversion activities of Pīr Satgūr Nūr, while some of the *garbīs* describe the travels and activities of Pīr Shams.

The second category of motifs addresses a variety of cosmological and eschatological themes. To mention a few, the *granth* *Bāvān Ghāṭī* (*Fifty-two Passes*) deals with the questioning of the soul as it passes through fifty-two stages in the afterlife; another *granth* *Brahmā Gāyantri* deals with the creative process from a pre-eternal divine light (an integration of Hindu creation myths into an Ismaili context);⁶² the *Nakalank Gītā* (*The Hymn of Naklank*) is a mystical cosmogony; and *Ūnch thī āyo* (*Coming from an Exalted Place*) is a lament of the soul's fate in the material world and a plea for the intercession of Prophet Muḥammad.

The third category consists of motifs of an ethical or a moralistic

nature, providing instruction for the proper conduct of worldly life. The most important *gināns* exemplifying these motifs include *Soh Kiriya* (*One Hundred Obligatory Acts*); *Bāvan Boḍh* (*Fifty-two Advices*) and *Moman Chetāmanī* (*A Warning for the Believer*). The last of these also incorporates parables and stories of a number of Prophets from the Qur'an.

The fourth category relates to motifs concerning a wide variety of religious rituals and festivals. There are, for example, *gināns* that are recited on specific occasions such as the birthdays of the Prophet and the Imam, the beginning of the New Year with the Iranian festival of *Navrūz*, or at certain religious ceremonies such as funerals, etc.

The fifth and perhaps the most important category include motifs related to mysticism and the spiritual life among the Ismailis. The Ismailis have been notable in Islamic thought for the emphasis they give to the *bāṭin*, the esoteric or spiritual aspects of the faith, to complement the *zāhir*, the exoteric or external. Ismaili literature has been concerned throughout its development with the spiritual life of the human soul, especially its search to transcend the shackles of material bondage. The ultimate destiny of the soul is to return to its origins in the transcendent and ineffable God. Such a journey becomes feasible by means of the spiritual relationship that exists between the individual believer and the Imam. As keeper of the mysteries of the *bāṭin* (the esoteric), the Imam becomes the supreme guide in the spiritual quest.⁶³

Naturally, these mystical aspects of the faith made their appearance in the *gināns*. There are, for example, compositions that are guides for an individual's spiritual progress being composed in the same vein as Sufi manuals. The most important examples are two *granths*, the *Būjh Nirānjan* (*Knowledge of the Attributeless Deity*)⁶⁴ and the *Brahmā Prakāsh* (*Divine Illumination*), both of which include descriptions of mystical stages and advice on how to attain them. Other *gināns* are literary expressions of mystical experiences, comparable to poems written by Sufi mystics on spiritual stages and states. Such *gināns* are very popular in the community on account of their appeal to the individual's spiritual development. And finally there are *gināns* that are basically petitions or

supplications (*ventīs*) for spiritual enlightenment and vision (*darshan*, *dīdār*). These *ventīs*, incidentally, are analogous to the petitionary genre called *vinaya* so popular among the *bhakti* and *sant* poets, as well as the long tradition of devotional prayer and poetry in Shi'ism.⁶⁵

It is in those *gināns* dealing with mystical themes where we encounter the greatest number of similarities to the poetry of the *bhakti*, *sant*, Indian Sufi and Shi'i traditions. The similarities are most prominent in the common set of symbols and metaphors employed in these literatures. In mystical *gināns*, for example, the soul is always represented in the feminine mode as a wife anxious for the return of her husband or a bride awaiting her bridegroom. The woman-soul symbol, as is well-known, is a conventional feature in most North Indian devotional poetry written in vernacular languages.⁶⁶ Again, like *sant* and Sufi poetry, the *gināns* draw on a host of symbols taken from the world of nature, agriculture or folk culture to garb their message with a material form. Thus, for example, in the *ginān* called *Huñ re pīāsī tere darshan kī* (*I Thirst for a Vision of You*) the symbol of the fish writhing in agony outside its home in water, is used to underline the importance of love, symbolized by water, as the emotive principle of existence (see Appendix, v). On a thematic level, the concept of *viraha*, 'longing-in-separation,' that is so common in *bhakti* and *sant* poetry, also plays a prominent role in the *gināns* where the Imam represents the longed-for beloved. The emphasis on interior religion, personal experience and the efficacy of an inner mode of worship against the mindless performance of rituals – themes characteristic of *sant*⁶⁷ and Sufi literature – are also conspicuous in the *gināns*. In this regard, the *gināns* stress the efficacy of love as a force on the mystical path as opposed to barren learning and intellectualism, ideas that are generally prevalent in medieval Indian devotional poetry. Their anti-intellectual bias often takes the form of attacks on *mullās* and *paṇḍits* who symbolize dry, fossilized learning. In contrast, the *gināns* extol the virtues of the *pīr* as a spiritual guide or preceptor on the path to enlightenment, echoing yet again the importance of the *guru* or *shaykh* in Hindu and Islamic mystical thought.

Our survey of the *ginān* literature and its characteristics and themes is of considerable importance in placing this genre within the context of the Indo-Muslim literary tradition. The significant similarities and parallelisms to which we have alluded serve to reveal the intimate connection of the *gināns* to the religious and literary milieu from which they emerged. They do not necessarily imply direct borrowing, but merely emphasize the interaction that was going on at the various levels of Indian society at the time. The assimilative character of the *ginān* literature is, in fact, illustrative of the nature of Nizari Ismailism as a whole: a religious tradition with a remarkable ability to integrate disparate elements from a variety of cultural contexts as a means of elaborating its own universal concepts.

Notes

* This chapter is a revised version of 'The Ginān Literature of the Ismailis of Indo-Pakistan,' first published in D. Eck and F. Mallison, ed., *Devotion Divine. Folk Sources of the Bhakti Tradition*. Gröningen and Paris, 1991, and incorporates some passages from 'The Ismaili *Gināns* as Devotional Literature,' in R.S. McGregor, ed., *Devotional Literature in South Asia: Current Research, 1985-88*. Cambridge, 1992.

1. From *Mahān Ismā'īlī sant pīr Sadaradīn racit gīnānono saṅgrah (Collection of Gināns Composed by the Great Ismaili Pir Sadruddin)*, (Bombay, 1969), p. 61 (English translation mine).

2. An alternative, though highly unlikely, derivation from the Arabic *ghanna* (to sing) is mentioned by G. Khakee, 'The Dasa Avatāra of the Satpanthi Ismailis and the Imam Shahis of Indo-Pakistan' (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1972), p. 3.

3. For a summary of the main themes in the *ginān* literature, see my article 'Ginān' in Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York, 1987).

4. The Nizari Ismaili community of Northern Pakistan, in particular Hunza, Gilgit and Chitral, possesses its own literary tradition of devotional poetry known generically as *manqabāt*. For a survey of Ismaili devotional literature in Arabic and Persian, see Faquir M. Hunzai, trans., and Kutub Kassam, ed., *Shimmering Light: An Anthology of Ismaili Poetry* (London, 1996).

5. I borrow this expression from William A. Graham's study of sacred

texts, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (New York, 1987).

6. W. Ivanow, 'The Sect of Imam Shah in Gujrat,' *JBBRAS*, New Series 12 (1936), p. 68.

7. The *gināns* provide a particularly strong case for religious texts functioning as oral phenomena. The significance of the oral-aural dimensions of the written word for the history of religions has been most ably explored by Graham in *Beyond the Written Word* and his article 'Scripture,' in Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion*.

8. Ali S. Asani, 'The Khojki Script: A Legacy of Ismaili Islam in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent,' *JAOS*, 107 (1987), pp. 439-49. [Chapter 6 of this volume].

9. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Ali S. Asani, 'The Khojahs of South Asia: Defining a Space of Their Own,' *Cultural Dynamics* 13, (2001), pp. 155-68.

10. See Paul Brass, 'Ethnic Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity among Muslims of South Asia,' in D. Taylor and M. Yapp, ed., *Political Identity in South Asia* (London and Dublin, 1979), pp. 35-77.

11. For a discussion of the reformist Faraizi movement in Bengal, see Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity* (Delhi, 1981) pp. 39-105.

12. See Ali S. Asani, 'Muslims in South Asia: Defining Community and the "Other,"' *BRIIS*, 2 (2001), pp. 108-10.

13. Quoted in *Gināne Sharīf: Ismā'īlī pīroe āpel pāk dīnnī roshnī* (Karachi, 1966), p. [2], (original in Gujarati; my translation).

14. Annemarie Schimmel, 'Sindhi Literature' in J. Gonda, ed., *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. 8, pt. 2 (Wiesbaden, 1974), p. 14.

15. Aziz Ahmad, for example, judges the 'literary personality' of the *gināns* to be 'un-Islamic,' in his *An Intellectual History of Islam in India* (Edinburgh, 1969), p. 126.

16. Writing in the early years of this century, Menant observes: 'Le *Desavatar* est le livre le plus sacré de la littérature religieuse des Khodjas: on en récite des passages au lit de mort des fidèles; au *Jamat Khana* quand on commence la lecture du dixième chapitre la congrégation se lève et reste debout en s'inclinant chaque fois que le nom d'Ali est prononcé.' 'Les Khodjas du Guzarate,' *Revue du Monde Musulman*, 10 (1910), p. 224.

17. See S.M. Stern, 'Ismā'īlī Propaganda and Fatimid Rule in Sind,' *Islamic Culture*, 23 (1949), pp. 298-307, and Abbas Hamadani, *The Beginnings of the Ismā'īlī Da'wa in Northern India* (Cairo, 1956).

18. The Iranian town of Kahak, which once served as a centre for the Ismaili Imams, contains in its cemetery the graves of several Indian Ismailis who died during their pilgrimage to see the Imam. See W. Ivanow, 'Tombs of some Persian Ismaili Imams,' *JBBRAS*, New Series 14 (1938), p. 57.

19. The term *panth*, an Indic term meaning path, doctrine or sect, is popularly used in the names of groups that crystallized around the different religious personalities of medieval India. For example, followers of the poet Dādū call their movement *Dādūpanth*, while those of Kabir use the term *Kabirpanth*. The term *satpanth* used by the Ismaili *pīrs* echoes the Qur'anic concept of *ṣirāt al-mustaqīm* (the right path).

20. For a discussion of the 'historicity' of these *pīrs* and the use of *gināns* as sources of information concerning the arrival and establishment of Nizari Ismaili Islam in the subcontinent, see Azim Nanji, *The Nizārī Ismā'īlī Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (New York, 1978), pp. 33-96.

21. Some of the *pīrs* were so successful representing themselves as spiritual leaders that today the non-Ismailis of Punjab and Sind revere them as Sufi masters of Sunni persuasion. W. Ivanow, 'Satpanth (Indian Ismailism),' in *Collectanea*, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1948), p. 10.

22. See Nanji, *The Nizārī Ismā'īlī Tradition*, pp. 61-5; and W. Ivanow, 'Shams Tabriz of Multan,' in S.M. Abdallah, ed., *Professor Muḥammad Shafi Presentation Volume* (Lahore, 1955), pp. 109-18. Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddīn Rumi* (rev. ed., London, 1980), p. 22, cites information provided by Rūmī's biographer, Aflākī, as well as recent discoveries by Mehmet Onder, the former director of the Mevlana Muzesi in Konya, which indicate that the real Shams-i Tabrīz was murdered by some people, with the connivance of Rūmī's son 'Alā' al-Dīn, in a fit of jealousy and then hastily buried.

23. See Zawahir Noorally, *Ginans, Our Wonderful Tradition* (Canada, n.d.), [p. 7], and Ismail K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature* (Malibu, Calif., 1977), pp. 302-3.

24. W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963), p. 177.

25. For a detailed discussion of this text, see W. Ivanow, ed. and trans., *Pandiyāt-i jawānmardī* or 'Advices of Manliness' (Leiden, 1953).

26. Particularly prominent among the *sayyids* were the Kadiwālā Sayyids, so-called since they resided in the village of Kadi in Cutch. The Kadiwālā Sayyids are said to be descendants of Pīr Ḥasan Kabīr al-Dīn through his son Raḥmatullāh Shāh (d. 925/1519). Mumtaz Ali Tajddin

Sadik Ali, 'Sayyida Bibi Imam Begum,' *Hidayat* (July, 1989), p. 16.

27. Sadik Ali notes that he came across a manuscript with at least 32 compositions attributed to Sayyida Imām-Begum in Lassi, a neighbourhood of greater Karachi. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

28. Ivanow, 'Satpanth,' p. 41.

29. Nanji, *The Nizārī Ismā'īlī Tradition*, p. 62.

30. For detailed discussion concerning the authorship of the *gināns*, see Ali S. Asani, 'The Ismaili *gināns*: Reflections on Authority and Authorship,' in F. Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Ismā'īlī History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996) pp. 265-80 [Chapter 5 of this volume].

31. Faisal F. Devji, 'Conversion to Islam: The Khojachs,' unpublished paper submitted to the University of Chicago, 1987, p. 9.

32. See Annemarie Schimmel, 'Reflections on Popular Muslim Poetry,' *Contributions to Asian Studies*, 17 (1982), pp. 17-26; Richard Eaton, 'Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Islam,' *History of Religions*, 14, no. 2 (1974-75), pp. 115-27; and Ali S. Asani, 'Sufi Poetry in the Folk Tradition of Indo-Pakistan,' *Religion and Literature*, 20 (1988), pp. 81-94.

33. Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York, 1982), p. 136. This role of vernacular literatures is evident in many regions of the subcontinent. For example, Richard Eaton in his *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700* (Princeton, NJ, 1978, p. 174) points out that folk literature in Dakhini Urdu composed by Chishti Sufis played a profound role in the gradual acculturation of the region's lower classes to the Islamic tradition. Likewise, Asim Roy talks of the masses of Muslim believers in Bengal who would have been debarred from the Islamic tradition had it not been for the 'cultural mediators' of the 16th and 17th centuries who made available the religious tradition to Muslim folk in familiar and intelligible terms in the Bengali language. Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton, 1983), p. 72.

34. Aziz Esmail and Azim Nanji, 'The Ismā'īlīs in History,' in S.H. Nasr, ed., *Ismā'īlī Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Tehran, 1977), p. 252.

35. For a discussion of the mythopoeic character of the *ginān* literature, see Nanji, *The Nizārī Ismā'īlī Tradition*, pp. 110-20.

36. For a translation and transliteration of the *Dasa Avatāra*, see G. Khakee, 'The Dasa Avatāra of the Satpanthi Ismailis and Imam Shahis of Indo-Pakistan' (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1972).

37. The *pīrs*' manner of representing the relationship between Islam and the Hindu tradition echoes the traditional Muslim conception of Islam as the culmination of the Judaeo-Christian religion. The Ismaili *pīrs* were by no means unique in expressing such a formulation. For

parallel developments in Bengali Islam, see Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition*, pp. 87-110.

38. We have some evidence that at least one *ginān*, the *Būjh Nirānjan*, was originally a Sufi poem that was appropriated into the Ismaili tradition. See Ali S. Asani, *The Būjh Nirānjan: An Ismaili Mystical Poem* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), pp. 19-46.

39. Schimmel, *Sindhi Literature*, pp. 4-5.

40. See Asani, 'The Khojki Script,' for a discussion of the linguistic composition of the *gināns*.

41. For the Punjabi version of this *ginān*, consult manuscript Ms Ism K 22, ff. 327r-327v, in the Harvard collection of Ismaili literature in Indic languages. See also Ivanow, 'Satpanth,' p. 40.

42. S.H. Kellogg, *A Grammar of the Hindi Language* (3rd ed., London, 1938).

43. Nanji, *The Nizārī Ismā'īlī Tradition*, p. 20.

44. The *caupāī* metre consists of a quatrain each of whose four lines comprises 16 *mātrās*. These 16 *mātrās* are arranged into four 'feet' each containing a fixed number of *mātrās*. The *caupāī*'s rhyme scheme follows the pattern A A A A or A A B B. The *dohā*, a much admired metre in North Indian poetry, consists of two lines, each containing 24 *mātrās*. Each of the two lines is sub-divided into two *carans* (divisions) of 13 and 11 *mātrās*. An important feature of the *dohā* is the pause *viram* which may occur as a harmonic pause or caesura after *carans* of 13 *mātrās* or a sentential pause after the 11 *mātrā carans*. The *sorāṭha* is simply an inverted *dohā*, that is, the first *caran* consists of 11 *mātrās* while the second possesses 13.

45. M.S. Mahesh, *The Historical Development of Medieval Hindi Prosody* (Bhagalpur, India, 1964).

46. According to Gujarati custom, participants in the *garbī* revolve in a circle, maintaining rhythm by clapping. If the *garbī* is being performed as part of a devotional practice, then a pot (*garbo*) containing offerings is usually placed in the centre.

47. Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabir*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1974).

48. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature*, p. 174.

49. The *granths Satgūr nā Vivā* and *Putlā*, for example, describe the activities of Pīr Satgūr Nūr, one of the tradition's earliest *pīrs*.

50. See G. Hyder Alidina, *Standardized Ginans* (unpublished monograph, Karachi, 1985), pp. 2-5. To compensate for differences between the poetic and musical metre of a *ginān*, extra syllables such as 're' and 'ejī' are often inserted during recitation.

51. Sadik Ali, 'Sayida Bibi Imam Begum,' p. 17.

52. Foremost in these attempts is Dr G. Hyder Alidina of Karachi who has almost single-handedly undertaken the monumental project of researching and recording *rāgas* of *gināns*. He has produced cassette recordings of these, under the title of 'Standardized Ginans.'

53. G. Allana, *Ginans of Ismaili Pirs* (Karachi, 1984), vol. 1, p. 2.

54. *The Great Ismaili Heroes* (Karachi, 1973), pp. 98-9. The verse that was effective in bringing about Ismail Gangji's 'conversion' is reputed to be one from the Gujarati *ginān*, attributed to Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn: *Sheṭh kahe tame sām̄bhaḍo vānotar* (*The Chief Merchant Says to the Traders*).

55. Nanji, *The Nizārī Ismā'īlī Tradition*, pp. 9-11, and Zawahir Noorally, *Catalogue of the Khojki Manuscripts in the Collection of the Ismailia Association for Pakistan*. Unpublished paper (Karachi, 1971), MS 25.

56. Ivanow, 'Satpanth,' p. 40.

57. S.S. Gandhi, *The Sikh Gurus* (New Delhi, 1978), pp. 174-5, quoting Gokal Chand Narang.

58. B.A. Gupte, 'The Modi Character,' in *Indian Antiquary*, 34 (1905), pp. 27-30.

59. Asani, 'The Khojki Script.'

60. Azim Nanji mentions in *The Nizārī Ismā'īlī Tradition*, p. 10, that he was given information to the effect that Aga Khan II (d. 1885) had assigned the task of collecting manuscripts to some of his followers in order that the *gināns* be properly preserved.

61. For an analysis of this text, see Khakee, 'The Dasa Avatāra'.

62. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature*, p. 179.

63. For an overview of spirituality among the Ismailis, see Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, trans. R. Mannheim and J.W. Morris, (London, 1983); also Azim Nanji, 'Ismā'īlism,' in S.H. Nasr, ed., *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (New York, 1987), p. 185.

64. For critical edition and translation of this text, see Asani, *The Būjh Nirānjan*.

65. J. Hawley and M. Jurgensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India* (Oxford, 1988), p. 6.

66. J. Hawley, 'Images of Gender in the Poetry of Krishna,' in Caroline Bynum et al., ed., *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (Boston, 1986), pp. 231-56.

67. See, for example, Charlotte Vaudeville, 'Kabir and the Interior Religion,' *History of Religions*, 3, 2 (1964).