

University of Alberta

Sound and Recitation of Khoja Ismaili Ginans: Tradition and Transformation

by

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Dedication

To my beloved *Imam-e-Zaman* (Imam of the Time), H. H. Prince Karim Aga Khan, and the Khoja Ismaili *Pirs* and *Sayyeds*; who through the soulful songs of ginans shared the teachings of love and devotion of Shia Islam in South Asia.

To my ever-loving mother Malek Nooruddin Gillani, who has always instilled in me how to connect with the divine through the rich music of ginan, and introduced me to singing through the devotional rhymes of ginan.

To my soul mate Shazia, and our son Raafi; they both are the sunshine of my life. I acknowledge that they have both missed me during the countless evenings and weekends that I spent during my studies at the University. Indeed, without their utmost love, hugs and support, this work would not have been possible.

Abstract

For several centuries ginans have played an integral part of the Khoja Ismaili tradition. Community members learn, memorize, and sing ginans as part of their daily lives. Thus far, ginans have been studied mostly from textual and historical perspectives, however, it is through hearing, reciting and performing that one connects with spiritual and cultural origins. This is the first detailed ethnomusicological study that situates ginans within the wider context of Muslim piety in general and within the South Asian poetic and musical contexts in particular.

The field research employs tools from both ethnomusicology and religious studies. The research is based extensively on dialogical approaches i.e. oral sources, participative observations, performances and interviews. Through musical structure and poetic meter the research shows the close cultural proximity of ginans with other known musical genres like *Kafi*, *Wai*, *Bait* and *Dhal* traditions of Sind, Punjab and Gujarat.

This dissertation also explores the layers of meaning that devotees communicate through tunes of the ginans associated with particular rituals and specific ceremonies. This heightens the experience of individual and communal prayer. Personal encounters in the research show that ginans are not merely devotional literature. For many they are a way of life. Through the tunes and the sounds people are able to connect with the divine.

This research also examines the musical journey of individuals and the community, simultaneously examining tradition, transmission and transformation. Challenges and opportunities arise as a result of migration, in this case into Canada. Traditional and innovative approaches of individuals are highlighted. Tensions between new and old become apparent in the re-creation, re-shaping and re-identification of one's own meaning to the performance. This dissertation highlights that ginan is one of the most significant living musical heritages of Khoja Satpanth Ismaili *Pirs* and *Sayyeds* from South Asia.

Preface

*Varanan chatris sur, betali bhakhia,
Beda kane na sunan ho jire bhai¹*

*Though thirty-six melodies (Surs) and forty-two dialects
the deaf have no ears to hear, O brother!*

This dissertation is the outcome of a long period of my research on the music of Ismaili ginan. It is mainly based on ethnographic oral sources, my aspiration to be an original contributor to the subject, as well as to provide a synthesis of previous scholarly work available in the field. When I was first conducting my field research, it may have appeared to some as a specialized study on folk, regional or just a community devotional music, which may be of limited interest to a broader readership. However, as I gradually linked my research with the profound musical and poetic traditions of India and Pakistan, it shifted to demonstrate how these musical and cultural traditions were shared, evolved, and developed over a period of time thus becoming more relevant to a broader audience. This study offers a fresh perspective, which looks at both, the past and the present at the same time. On one hand, this study explores the ginan music, which is deeply rooted in the historical and cultural traditions of South Asia. On the other hand, it shows how the Ismaili community today carries and maintains this tradition and practice both in its liturgical as well as in its contemporary environment.

Initially, this study was developed mainly for two reasons, first and foremost, due to my personal affinity and keen interest on the spiritual sounds of ginan. This started at home with my mother, who always prayed through these tuneful songs of ginan, and encouraged me to learn and recite these in the Ismaili

¹ Tajdin Pir, *Ginan Sharif with Translation*, vol II, 1992, pp. 101- 102. Also see translation from Kamaluddin Zarina and Muhammad Ali Kamaluddin (compiled by), vol II, 2007, pp. 115-116. “O brother! I have said ginans in 36 musical modes and in 42 dialects, but the deaf do not hear with ears”.

Jamatkhana (house of congregation). Thus, it was at home where I first heard, felt and carried the emotion of ginan in my heart and memory. Later, I developed my academic and performance interest in the religious schools and in local *Jamatkhanas* where ginans play an important functional role. My home was always full of books, as my brother, who is a brilliant writer and poet, collected enormous literature and poetry of mainly Indo-Pakistan, from Ghalib to Faiz, from Sachal Sarmast to Shah Latif, from Rumi to Hafiz, Mohammad Iqbal and others. My mother, being Sindhi, was well versed in various local songs and poems, indigenous stories and expressions. She always had a remarkable sense of humor to share this literature with us in such a profound manner that I often cherish those precious moments. At home we used to have discussions after supper on various socio-cultural and religious issues. I still recall those evenings with great inspiration; perhaps those precious moments indeed have shaped my thinking of giving significance to our rich local heritage, cultural expressions, religious beliefs, poetry, music and above all ginans.

The second reason for developing this study was related to the dispute that took place around mid 90s in Karachi, regarding the standardization of the tunes of Ismaili ginan. Some groups were powerful in their attempt because of their institutional connections and some worked independently. During that time, I was the student in Grade 11 at the Ismaili religious Centre. I still remember my final oral exam, when I was required to recite one of the ginans from the religious school's curriculum. Before I began reciting the ginan, I was asked, which tune are you reciting this ginan on: The "Traditional" or "Old" tunes, in other words "Zarina Kamaluddin's traditional ginan tunes" or "Jafersadiq's new ragas"? I was quite shocked and puzzled, because I was not ready to hear this kind of query right in the beginning of my oral exam. In a straightforward manner, I replied to the teacher that I will recite ginan the way I had learned from my mother at home, and literally I do not know where I can situate her rendition between 'traditional' or 'new'. After hearing my response, my

examiner was kind enough to allow me to recite the ginan the way I had learned at home. This was my first official encounter with the varying tunes of Ismaili ginans.

Since that day, I started to conduct my own personal research on the music or tunes of Ismaili ginans. I have learned and composed devotional songs in various indigenous styles of poetry, attended both Zarina Kamaluddin and Jafersadiq Surmawala's classes in Karachi. I also met Dr. Hyder Alidina, who had released an album of "Standardizing Ginan" based on the Hindustani classical music, and had discussions with him in great detail about his findings and ginan's connection with the Hindustani classical music. I also spent innumerable hours of discussions with Professor Ghulam Ali Allana, a former chancellor of Sind University at his residence. In 2000, the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), London, UK, granted me a full scholarship for its graduate program in Islamic studies and Humanities. IIS provided me a springboard to further investigate my musical inquiry on the Ismaili ginan as well as other Sufi musical traditions of South Asia. When I started attending the Ismaili *Jamatkhana* in London, I was amazed to witness the diversity within the ginan tradition, as some of the renditions were quite different from what I used to hear back in Karachi.

The East African Ismaili community members were singing these ginans. Their ethnic roots are deeply connected to the Indian subcontinent and their ancestors migrated to East Africa as early as the nineteenth century. Thus, I experienced a fascinating musical journey of ginan through the East African Ismaili community, who were once part of the larger Indian Subcontinent Khoja Satpanth² Ismaili community. After more than a hundred years of diaspora in East Africa, many of them migrated to Europe and North America, which is a

² The term *Satpanth* is an indigenous term used for the *Khoja* Ismailis from South Asia, the term 'Sat' means truth and 'panth' means path, so *Satpanth* means true or straight path, which is the exact translation of the Quranic term *Sirat-ul-Mustaqim*.

further diaspora. These migrations provided opportunities to re-unite and re-connect themselves with many other Khoja Ismailis from India and Pakistan.

It is intriguing to note how communities carry music and culture in their hearts and memory for centuries, how music travels from one tradition and culture to another, how communities are communicatively connected to their religious and spiritual performances, and how religious music becomes a tool to unite and share communities after centuries of geographical distance. Therefore, this study of gnan provides a broader holistic approach towards gnan and its journey through its reciters' hearts and memories. In this work, the sounds and recitation of gnan are not only studied in their traditional settings and contexts, but also demonstrate how the traditions evolve, change, shape and re-shape according to the broader socio-cultural, anthropological and religious contexts.

During the last year of my studies at the IIS in 2002, I undertook field research and wrote a project on the "Sufi Music of Multan: A City of Saints" and first came to know the exceptional ethnomusicological work on qawwali by Professor Regula Qureshi. Since then, it was my aspiration to study under her supervision. I had two main reasons for conducting my field research in Multan. First, I wanted to study the four key Sufi shrines of Multan and explore the role and function of qawwali music in these shrines. Second, to explore the Ismail *Pirs* and their contribution to this part of Pakistan. As I knew the Fatimid Ismailis had once ruled Multan, so it would not be difficult to trace their history and religious influences. The shrines of the great Ismaili Pirs such as Pir Shams Sabzwari, Pir Hassan Kabirdin and Pir Sadardin are located in Multan and the surrounding areas. The old Ismaili community, called Shamsi, has lived there for centuries.

Therefore, I visited and interviewed the *ghadi nashin* (shrine keepers) and conducted detailed research in these areas. After returning from my first

ethnographic fieldwork, I was fortunate to take a course on ‘Islam in South Asia: Satpanth Ismaili Muslims and Ginan’ from Professor Ali Asani. Subsequent to having a discussion with him regarding my interest in the music of Sufi and Ismaili ginan, he greatly recommended me to further explore this unknown area of sounds and music of Ismaili ginan especially from an ethnomusicological perspective, under the guidance of Professor Regula Qureshi at the University of Alberta. Since then my formal journey of exploring the ethnomusicological study of ginan began at the University of Alberta, in the heart of Edmonton, Canada.

It has now been more or less 10 years that I have been working on this area of research. During my interdisciplinary M.A. in Music and Religious Studies at the University of Alberta, my thesis entitled “Ginan: A Musical Heritage of Ismaili Muslim from India and Pakistan” has provided me a foundation towards my PhD research. Indeed, it is because of an utmost labor of love to spiritual and musical heritage of ginan, that I have devoted my time and energy. I can say that to date, it has been a long, but a very satisfactory and fulfilling journey of learning, researching, performing and exploring this unique heritage of Ismaili ginan.

Various interviews and ethnographic field research tools have been used to conduct this vast research to explore the function and role of music in the practices of Ismaili ginan. This study is a humble scholarly attempt to explore the wonderful tradition of Ismaili ginan, which has been a central part of the Khoja Ismaili cultural and spiritual practices for centuries.

Acknowledgments

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I would like to personally acknowledge all the renowned ginan teachers, community experts Al-waiz (preachers, or missionaries) and musicians/reciters from the Ismaili community who have generously shared their valuable time and knowledge with me including, Dr. Hyder Alidina, the late Jafer Sadiq Surmawala, Al-waiz Kamaluddin Ali Muhammad, Al-waiza Zarina Kamaluddin, Al-waiz Zainulabeddin Pyar Ali, Sheikh Mohammed Iqbal, Mumtaz Ali Tajddin, the late Dr. Abu Ali A. Aziz, Khursheed Nurali, Shamsuddin Jamal, Taufiq Karmali, the late Dr. Gulshan Merchant, the late Al-waiz Hassan Nazar Ali, the late Mukhi Kassam Juma, Alijah Mohammed Ali, Farzand Ali Asad, Nasir Shamsi, Shafik Lalani, Hussein Janmohammad, Zulfiqar Mulji, Nargis Balolia, Taj Qavi, Sheryar Nizar, Shams Soomar, Zaheed Dhamani, Shabnam Merali and many reciters of the community.

My gratitude is also due to the professional and trained musicians including renowned Sufi musician Abida Parveen, Sayen Faqir Juman, Sher Ali Miandad, Sudhir Narain, Raageshwari Lomba, Trilok Singh Lomba, Darbari Qawwals of Pir Shams Sabzwari, Shah Rukn-e-Alam, Bahauddin Zakria Multani, Shah Abdul Latif, Abdullah Shah Gazi, Data Ganj Baksh, Sultan Bahu, Bulleh Shah, Shah Inayat and Shah Jamal. I have also spent almost ten

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Musical transcription for the various different styles and types of ginans was a tedious job but also challenging at some stage, as some of *Venti* ginans do not follow the regular rhythmic cycles and they are more or less based on improvisation. I received immense assistance from my colleagues Ameera Nimjee and Patrick Smith as well as my Dr. Regula Qureshi on various aspects of musical transcriptions. I would like to thank them all for their generosity of time, knowledge and support. This dissertation has gone through various editorial changes. Therefore, I would like to kindly thank Ms. Almas Murji for her editing throughout the course of this dissertation. I express my humble gratitude and immense prayers for her kindness and dedication towards this voluntary service. I am indebted to Shamas Nanji for his untiring assistance and support towards my work. I also owe my special gratitude to Mr. Nawazali Jiwa (School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta) for his guidance towards my bibliography.

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Figure 1: Indicating *dawa* (religious mission) of Ismaili *Pirs*, *Dais* and *Sayyeds* mainly in Persia (Iran), Sind, and Hind (India)³

³ Schakle and Moir, *An Introduction to Ismaili hymns from South Asia*, xiii, 1992.

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Chapter One

Introduction

“Reading poetry is one thing, but when you sing with understanding, then that’s when you get that inspiration, that’s when you get the *chandan* and *loban*, (meaning a true essence that connects you with the divine).”⁴

Purpose of the Study

The above quotation is from one of my interviewees, Zulfiqar Mulji, who believes that reading poetry has its own importance. However it is through singing or reciting with proper understanding that one is able to connect with the divine. It is the sound, which expresses human emotions to the text; it is the musical expression and performance, which brings out the meaning and sentiments of its reciter.

This dissertation explores the role of sounds of ginan in the daily life of the Khoja Ismaili community. In liturgical as well as non-liturgical contexts, how have ginan tunes been used for practicing the faith across centuries and continents? This is the first academic study of the music of ginan, using both ethnomusicological and religious studies tools to explore various dimensions related to the sounds and performance of Ismaili ginan. I have explored the role of music and its function in the ginan performance. Where did these ginan tunes come from? What are the roots of this tradition? How can we situate ginan within the larger Muslim context in general and South Asian cultural context in particular? How are ginans practiced in their ritual context? Finally, what happens when people migrate from one geographic location to another? How does the transmission of ginans impact their meaning in the Western context?

⁴ Mulji, Zulfiqar, who lives in Vancouver, Canada; I interviewed him both in Vancouver in 2005 and in Edmonton 2009.

In this study, I will use ethnographic tools to place emphasis on the “process” which includes the manner of performance, and music as a process of culture rather than just a text. Anthropologists who have undertaken similar studies include Turner⁵, Rappaport⁶ and Tambiah⁷. Linguistic anthropologists, including Bauman⁸ and Briggs⁹, have addressed the nature of the verbal performance. Quite a few ethnomusicologists use this kind of performative approach to reveal a musical process; most of these studies often use the term “ethnography of musical performance”, among them Blacking¹⁰, Behague¹¹, Qureshi¹², and Seeger¹³ are prominent.

My own interest in ginan recitation was ignited by the power of the sound itself. I always aspired to understand how sound worked and what its effects are. One of my primary discoveries, which has remained vital to this study, is that while ginan texts or poetry have always been transmitted and carefully published in various community ginan books, melodic structure and tunes were mostly undocumented. Preservation of ginan manuscripts has been given priority since the early twentieth century within the Ismaili community. However, the melodies were hardly discussed. Scholars wrote the history of ginans and *Pirs* but the significance of the music and its affect on the community at large was completely neglected.

⁵ Turner, Victor W. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 1969.

⁶ Rappaport, Roy A. “The Obvious Aspects of Ritual.” *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*, 1979.

⁷ Tambiah, Stanley J. “A Performative Approach to Ritual.” 1979.

⁸ Bauman, Richard, *Verbal Art as Performance*, 1977.

⁹ Bauman, Richard, and Charles L. Briggs, “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life.” 1990.

¹⁰ Blacking, John, “Summaries of the Papers Presented: The Ethnography of Musical Performances.” 1977.

¹¹ Behague, Gerard, *Performance Practice: Ethnomusicological Perspective*, 1984.

¹² Qureshi, Regula B, “Musical Sound and Contextual Input: A Performance Model for Musical Analysis”, 1987.

¹³ Seeger, Anthony, *Why Suya Sing: A Musical Anthropology of an Amazonian People*, 1988.

So far the poetry of gnan has been studied mostly in a textual manner, but the majority of scholars have been unable to realize that the entire gnan text or poetry is based on the musical and poetic system of Sind, Punjab and Gujarat, in which these ginans were originally composed. Hence it is a form of poetry, which is rooted in musical meters so that across centuries and continents, the community can collectively perform as a part of their daily devotion. Similar ideas can be seen in many practices among Sufi, Hindu, and Sikhs. The majority of ginans with their repeated refrains, mostly sung after the stanza, witness this model of performance, with innate roots within the *Kafi*, *Wai*, *Bait*, and *Dhal* musical genres. I was amazed when I went through a few hundred gnan texts and analyzed them according to the poetic and musical model mentioned above to determine why to begin with, ginans were set according to these musical genres. Since these are performative genres, commonly used by all known poets of these regions, from Shah Latif to Bulleh Shah, individuals as well as communities can easily participate in the communal settings. Furthermore, these were the existing poetic and musical genres utilizing the Ismaili *dawa* (missionary), so naturally Ismaili Pirs have adopted these regional musical styles and composed ginans in vernacular languages so it appeals to the masses.

Dissertation Roadmap

This dissertation is based on five key areas related to the wider key terms of “Tradition” and Transformation”. These terms do not conflict with each other. Hence, in the case of gnan recitation it shows how the traditional recitation of ginans has been practiced and standardized within its liturgical and ritual contexts. However, it is in the non-liturgical context, where ginans are mostly evolving. Therefore we need to know what role modernity is playing in the contemporary practices of gnan recitation. Especially when communities migrate from one part of the world to another, the cultural and linguistic contexts marginally shift. In other words, how has the recitation of gnan has been evolved in the last century and how has gnan transmission been

influenced by various cultural and regional contexts? Thus this study explores the indigenous local cultural roots of gnan, as well as its transmission and transformation. Interestingly, both in traditional and modern contexts, the poetry remain the same, as most of the texts/poetry of gnan have been historically documented and widely published, so one can see very few changes.¹⁴ However, it is the sound, which changes according to its various socio-cultural contexts. In other words, music provides opportunity for various creative expressions, so the traditional can be transmitted and transformed into modern interpretations. This is a fascinating area of study which has affected many types of sonic performances from Quranic¹⁵ recitation to qawwali,¹⁶ a struggle between tradition and modernity, continuity and change, make this study of gnan extremely meaningful.

The first chapter provides an introduction and purpose of this ethnomusicological research, and shed light on the various approaches and methodologies, especially dialogical approach that was heavily used during the vast ethnographic fieldwork.

The second chapter entitled “Gnan: Hearing and Reciting within the Indo-Muslim Cultural Context” situates gnan within the larger framework of Muslim piety in general and explores the significance of hearing, reciting and performance practices within the Indo-Muslim context in particular. This chapter suggests that the *gnans* are a kind of *dhikr* (remembrance) through which religious and communal ideas and values are shared. Gnan is a

¹⁴ Based on its socio-cultural environment, such as in Pakistan due to various religious extremist many terms which employ Indic or Hindu religious ideas such as *Hari* (Hindu God) were changed to Ali (the first Shia Imam).

¹⁵ See Nelson Kristina, *the Art of Reciting the Quran*, where she explores the different styles of Quran recitations, which one is authentic, Saudi style or Egyptian.

¹⁶ The original genre of qawwali can be also seen in Bollywood style music, although one can argue that the traditional qawwali style may be dying, but on the other hand there are various other forms of music influenced by the qawwali genre are coming to the scene such as popular qawwali, disco qawwali, rock qawwali or Bollywood qawwali, see the work of Asani, “Propagating the Message: Popular Sufi Songs and Spiritual Transformation in South Asia”, 1996.

communal performance that represents a “collective memory” of Khoja Ismailis. Using Maurice Halbwach’s theory of “Collective Memory,”¹⁷ I explore that the Khoja Sathpanth Ismailis, under the guidance of their Imams, *Pirs*, and later *Sayyeds* had developed a particular understanding of their history, in which they perhaps drew both the rich Islamic Sufi, and the Indic culture of Northern India. I also shed light on how and why the Khoja Ismaili communities have kept ginan as a source of living performance tradition throughout the many centuries. What role does performance play in the identity of the Khoja Ismaili community? Bauman argues in his commentary against scholars such as linguistic anthropologists who mainly focus on how communities are communicatively constituted “the performance forms of a community tend to be among the most memorable, repeatable, reflexively accessible forms of discourses in its communicative repertoire”.¹⁸ In other words, the communities are mostly connected through some form of interaction, dialogue and performances in a designated space. Therefore, in this chapter, I will explore how for centuries ginan has evolved as a significant form of living performance tradition that has allowed the community to collectively interact with each other through hymns or songs as part of their daily religious practice.

The third chapter entitled “Poetic and Musical Contexts of Ismaili Ginan,” I will first explore the musical and poetic structures of Khoja Satpanth Ismaili ginans and rethink the musical categories often used in academia. Second, I will highlight a few major ginan manuscripts to find various embedded methods of preserving the tunes over the last many centuries. Third, I will examine ginan music and its poetic styles within the wider cultural and historical contexts. What kind of musical and poetic meters have Ismaili *Pirs* used in the past to compose ginans? Why were ginan composed according to the musical meters of Sind, Punjab and Gujarat? Fourth, I will explore various

¹⁷ Halbwachs Maurice, *On Collective Memory* (translated), 1992.

¹⁸ Bauman, R, “Commentary:indirect indexicality, identity, performance”, 2005, p. 149.

references of music mentioned in the ginan repertoire. Also various illustrations, musical details and the Western notation of various styles of ginans will be provided. Finally, I will critically examine the issues related to the standardization of Ismaili ginan through a case study in Karachi, the most populated urban center of Pakistan.

The fourth chapter situates ginan within its ritual context; both manuscripts and living tradition suggest that ginans have been set according to their ritual context and ceremonies both in *Sandya* (evening) and *Sobah* (morning) practices in the *Jamatkhana* (house of congregation). As we know, sonic performances play a constructive role in building ritual spaces of many religions. In most cases, however, the function of religious musical practices and performances are not scripturally defined. In the context of *Satpanth*¹⁹, ginans come to life when they are sung, and reciters sing ginans as devotional prayer. As a result, many questions arise, including, what role does recitation or sound play in the religious ritual of devotion? How do space and sound affect each other in the context of Ismaili ritual? For many centuries, Ismaili ginans have played an integral part in Ismaili ritual, piety and prayers. For almost all Ismaili ritual occasions, there are specific ginans that invoke sentiments and share layers of symbolic and cultural meaning through recitation and performance.

The final chapter entitled “Music beyond boundaries: Migration and Transformation” deals with the issue of the process of migration and globalization. The old memories and culture once practiced widely in a given domain move to new shores where people face new challenges and opportunities. As soon as the migratory journey begins, the music of one’s childhood and the music that one might associate with ‘home’ often takes on new and important meanings. I would like to explore how ginans change their

¹⁹ The term *Satpanth* is an indigenous term used for the *Khoja* Ismailis from South Asia, the term ‘*Sat*’ means truth and ‘*panth*’ means path, so *Satpanth* means true or straight path, which is the exact translation of the Quranic term *Sirat-ul-Mustaqim*.

meaning and context when their reciters travel from one geographic and cultural location to another. How does the transmission of ginans impact their meaning in the Western context? What creative and innovative ways have community members initiated in the Western diaspora to retain the ginanic tradition? What role does modern media and technology play in the transmission of ginans? Why do some diaspora youth like to modify ginanic tunes according to their own contemporary popular music styles? I will also explore how the performance of ginans from a liturgical to a social context may affect on its meaning and transmission.

Dialogical Ethnomusicology

It was challenging to develop a framework for exploring the sounds and recitation of Ismaili gnan within the ethnomusicological perspective. One of the reasons for this was scarcity of scholarship available in the field of music and gnan. Therefore, it was mandatory to create the foundational work employing the method of knowledge-based search of dialogical ethnomusicology, where interviews, life stories, language performance (LP),²⁰ ritual participation, observation, informal discussion and even arguments and debates become important sources of knowledge. In other words, the singer's, reciter's/musician's words are more than just interviews elicited for the purpose of appropriate representation in this scholarship. They are information and knowledge negotiated through verbal interaction. All these "speech acts" are exchanges between individual musical experience and for someone who is trying to learn something from them.

The concept "dialogic anthropology" was coined by Dennis Tedlock, who included full published dialogues occurring face to face between ethnographers and informants, hence to give readers uncompromised access to the texts that

²⁰ Frishkopf, Michael, *Sufism, Ritual, and Modernity in Egypt: Language Performance as an Adaptive Strategy*, 1999.

from the basis of authorial interpretation in the first place.²¹ This kind of access allows readers to focus reinterpretation on the words of the ethnographic subjects rather than interpretation by the ethnographer.²²

This exploration of the study of the music of ginan is not entirely dependent on interpretative scholarship. In fact, it offers a strategy explicitly formulated about musicians speaking themselves, expressing their views and emotions regarding their personal life, music and tradition. I have employed a different strategy of including the voices of my informants.²³ The oral sources are not easily available; you can only learn when you are with the person who is familiar with the text. It is difficult to separate the person from the knowledge. There are almost no sources on the music of Ismaili ginan; as a result oral sources such as interviews are primarily an important part of my bibliography. Interviews can also be turned into a collage of primary source material on an artistic practice, as envisioned by the author who makes the mosaic.²⁴



Illustration No 1: The Shia Imami Ismaili religious centre students reciting ginan in Multan, Pakistan, 2007

²¹ Tedlock, D. and Mannheim, B, *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*, 1995, p 262.

²² Ibid. p 257.

²³ Qureshi, Regula B, *Master Musicians of India: Hereditary Sarangi Players Speak*, 2007.

²⁴ Berliner, P.F., *Thinking in Jazz: the Infinite Art of Improvisation*, 1993.

Among contemporary religious studies scholars of Sufi traditions, Earle Waugh in his pioneering works entitled “The Munshidin of Egypt”²⁵ and “Memory, Music and Religion”²⁶ approached the subject of *dhikr* performances in the heart of Egypt and Morocco, relying heavily on a dialogical approach in his use of social research, observation, formal interviews and informal conversations, as well as textual analysis and spiritual themes. Waugh examines the respective functions of words, music and movement in the *dhikr* in an insightful analysis. He describes how the munshidin use both religious and secular love poetry to deliver a spiritual message to the “*dhikrees*” to “make present” the saint whose day is being celebrated.²⁷ In his book *Memory, Music and Religion*, Waugh inquires questions to its readers such as, Why do some kinds of music find a continuing place in worship while others seem to lose their appeal? He explores how through rituals of *dhikr*, the traditional sonic performance where words and performance becomes one. His work effectively demonstrates how the mystical and powerful tradition of music nurtures the Muslim soul and sheds light on the extraordinarily rich role that memory plays in religion. Indeed, in his recent work he offers relevant insights to the study of the religious function of memory, which is remarkably understudied. Waugh’s pioneering works both in Egypt and Morocco clearly demonstrated the significance of dialogical tools and approaches which he has employed during his field research.²⁸

A large number of Western debates over agency and appropriate representation have been mainly focused on individuals, perhaps may be artifact of the individually located sense of Western subjectivity.²⁹ To argue the quasi-scientific practice that considers informants as “a case of the general,”

²⁵ Waugh, Earle, *The Munshidin of Egypt*, 1989.

²⁶ Waugh, Earle, *Memory, Music, and Religion: Morocco’s Mystical Chanters*, 2005.

²⁷ Waugh, Earle, *The Munshidin of Egypt*, 1989.

²⁸ Waugh, Earle, *Memory, Music, and Religion*, 2005.

²⁹ Crapanzano, V., *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*, 1980. Also see Dumont, J. P., *The Headman and I: Ambiguity and Ambivalence in the Fieldworking Experience*, 1978

ethnographers are moving towards portrayals, calling for new forms of writing to convey the particulars of individual lives.³⁰ Therefore, one can say that the most direct reply to the concern for agency has been a search for new strategies towards having research partners speak for themselves.

There has been a significant shift initiated by sociolinguists to treat the textual representation of what informants say to ethnographers as speech events somewhat as depersonalized and timeless cultural materials.³¹ Searching language performance, the “ethnography of speaking” is focused on the dialogical approaches more than on individually unique verbal features. Capturing the particular performance in its specific context is very important; hence it introduced local, temporal contexts into speech documents. As a result, it opened a view of dialogue as ethnographic process involving all participants, performers and scholars included.³²

The only way to learn about the sounds and recitation of Ismaili ginan is to spend time with those individuals who have contributed to the field. Therefore, it was mandatory to engage with them on many levels. This knowledge is based on the oral sources, which cannot be learned from books or manuscripts as it stays with musicians in their memory and performance. I have decided not to put my own authority on top of what these contributors shared with me. I am the scholar and respect their knowledge as much as my own. Therefore, I would like to include their voices. This is why I used the interview transcriptions as a big portion of my ethnographic research. The interview texts actually provided me with much more than just the facts, they shared with me their emotions, feelings, subtle nuances of how a person responds to his/her musical experience, meaning and how the person is connected to music in various cultural and religious contexts.

³⁰ Abu-Lughod, L., *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, 1991, pp.137-162

³¹ Bauman, r. and Sherzer, J, “Introduction”, 1989, pp. 6-14

³² Darnell, R., “The shaping of artistic structures in performance: introduction”, 1989, pp. 311-314.

Using informant voices conveys to the reader the rich diversity of how the community members experience gnan as performers, listeners, as preservers of tradition, and as individuals seeking transformation. These are their voices, not just interviews. I am sharing their voices; this is a new way of doing research, which encourages collaboration with performers. It is another direction in ethnomusicology, a collaboration that I would like to communicate as the spirit of pluralism. I am approaching the subject with great respect and humility; respect for the subject, and respect for those people who are the members of the Ismaili community, who are listening, reciting, performing, and preserving this unique heritage of gnan. Qureshi writes in her fascinating ethnographic work on the Master Musicians of India “by invoking our personal encounters with the living sources of ethnographic knowledge, we refamiliarize that knowledge. As an anthropologist, I see this as completing a process that began with de-familiarization, a deliberate move away from personally and intuitively based interaction with cultural others by suspending judgements, a distancing that creates space for otherness to reveal itself on its own terms”.³³

Research Method

I have conducted detailed field research in various parts of Pakistan, Canada, the USA and the United Kingdom. The field methods employed for this study were mainly ethnographic in nature as well as based on my own musical performance background. I employed the model of dialogical ethnomusicology, social interaction, performances and participant observation, in which I invited opinions, explanations, arguments and life stories.

My choice of Pakistan, United Kingdom, USA and Canada as the places to conduct the ethnographic field research was for various reasons. First, I was born and raised in Pakistan and knew quite well indigenous languages such as

³³ Qureshi, Regula, *Master Musicians of India: Hereditary Sarangi Players Speak*, 2007, p.9.

Sindhi, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Kutchi and Gujarati. Moreover, being an insider, and also a graduate of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, UK, I was able to work closely with the Ismaili institutions such as the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Boards for Pakistan (ITREB). Not only did they provide me assistance in my various aspects of field research, they were also well connected with the local and regional communities of both Sind and Punjab.

Apart from Pakistan, most of my field research was conducted in Canada, my second home, where I have attended various ritual ceremonies, participated in numerous musical gnan performances, and conducted a range of ethnographic interviews with school and university students, professional and amateur musicians, *Waizen* (religious preachers), academicians, reciters and community scholars. I have also performed and conducted interviews in USA, especially in Chicago and Dallas and in London, UK and Edinburgh.

After obtaining preliminary information about the Ismaili settlement in Pakistan from some of the local Ismaili scholars, I conducted ethnographic field research in the cities of Punjab, Multan, Lahore, Gujranwala, Kasoor, Talwandi, Sahiwal, Sialkot, and in Sind, Hyderabad, Khyber, Bhit Shah, Mir Pur Khas, and Karachi. Upon conducting various interviews, I gathered a large number of gnan recordings and additional information from reciters, community experts, scholars, shrine keepers, and local musicians.

My interviews were conducted mostly in three groups: The first group was made up of religious centre's students,³⁴ ages ranging from 15 to 25 years. The second group was made up of teachers or community experts *Al-Waizs* (Ismaili missionaries) and academics for ages ranging from 25 to 60+years. The final

³⁴ The Ismaili community gives immense importance to the religious education, therefore the religious centres, night schools or *Bait-ul ilm* (the door of knowledge) are offered in almost all over the world, where Ismailis live. These religious classes have standard religious curriculum, set in their own local languages. In India and Pakistan the religious centres are operated during the evening hours, and in North America and Europe the religious classes are operated during the weekends.

group was composed of musicians, performers, reciters, and organizers. I have conducted over three hundred interviews with individuals of various linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, I have critically examined, substantially a large number of ginan recordings from Pakistan, India, East Africa, Europe and North America.

Performance in the Field

Being a singer and performer of various kinds of South Asian devotional music including *Kafi*, *Wai*, Ginan, Qawwali, *Qasidas*, *Bhajans*, *Ghazals* and various Folk and classical music, I was always overwhelmed by the nature of ginan poetic structure and its music. It moved me as to how their beautiful ginan music was composed in the first place. What were the socio-cultural and religious influences that inspired Ismaili *Pirs* and *Sayyeds* to compose the tunes of ginans? What were the regional and local influences, which have affected Ismaili *Pirs* and their compositions? What were musical, poetic and rhythmic patterns in which ginan had been composed?

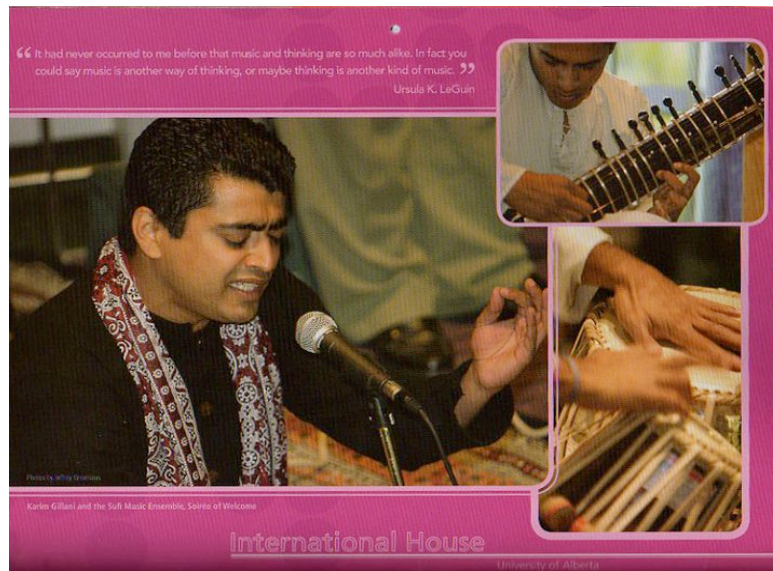


Illustration 2: Performing ginan at the annual International House Celebration, Calender, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 2007-08

As a musician and performer of Ismaili ginan, as well as a doctoral candidate of music and religious studies, I had the privilege of a dual background (academic and performance), which allowed me to easily enter into the two so-called different worlds, to interact with amateur musicians, professional musicians as well as religious missionaries and professional academicians. I was able to gain access to many local musicians, spoke to them in their own indigenous languages, performed with them on various occasions at *mehfils* (musical performances) at shrines, home and ritual ceremonies, so I could freely ask them about their personal experiences related to their music. I was also able to increased understanding of the wider cultural, psychological and emotional attachment to this form of music. I believe, it was mutual musical exchange that allowed me to enter their personal lives, become a part of them, so I could be seen as someone who recognizes them, belongs to them, and values their contribution. I assume that if I were not a performer of Ismaili ginan tradition without a doubt I would not have been able to find ginan connections with various indigenous poetic and musical traditions, as it was

through performance that I came to realize the structures of various sounds and melodic patterns, rhythms and poetry.

Similarly, *Waizeen* (missionaries) have enormous knowledge of the oral traditions of Ismaili ginans. Therefore, as a graduate student of IIS, I was able to get an easy access with them and understand their own training and background. Among them many renowned missionaries have already passed away, but I still appreciate those hundreds of hours, which they generously spent with me. Similarly, my position as a Ph.D candidate of music and religious studies has also given me a kind of recognition, so I could conduct academic interviews with scholars, intellectuals and musicians in the field of Sufi music and ginan, many of whom have generously shared innumerable knowledge, which further guided me to investigate this immensely significant area of research.

Chapter Two

Ginan: Hearing and Reciting within the Indo-Muslim Cultural Context

"There is no flute, yet there is melody. There is no sound, yet there is music".³⁵

This chapter will explore ginan within the larger framework of Muslim piety in general and examine the significance of hearing, reciting and performance practices within the Indo-Muslim context in particular. I will also shed light on how and why the Khoja Ismaili communities have kept ginan as a source of living tradition for many centuries.

Throughout the Muslim world, sound and sonic expressions play a vital role. From spoken words to recitation of the Quran, from devotional songs to melodic chants, from *adhan* (call to prayer) to vernacular local expressions, one can easily witness profound spirituality through sounds. Melodic shape may differ but in most cases the integrity of the words remains: "Human diversity in language and culture has for centuries found expression in sonic form, articulating faith and piety in relation to a plurality of local, historical, and social identities."³⁶ Most of these expressions of a particular community or group are deeply grounded in practices that have deep spiritual roots, aesthetic effects, and a powerful impact on faith.³⁷

Ginan is one of the vital performance traditions of an oral literature that stems from the practice of Islam in South Asia. It plays a significant role in maintaining collective and cultural memory of Khoja Sathpanth Ismailis

³⁵ Sabzwari Shams Pir, *Brahm Prakash*, (Divine Light) verse number: 71, Cited from Virani, N. Shafique, "Symphony of Gnosis: A Self-Definition of the Ismaili Ginan Tradition", 2005, p. 516.

³⁶ Qureshi, Regula, B, "Sounds and Spaces of Muslim Piety: Tradition and Transformation" conference introduction, May 1st, 2011.

³⁷ Ibid.

wherever they may live.³⁸ Khoja Ismailis in general give greater emphasis on participatory and presentational performances,³⁹ which include both reciting and singing *ginan* inside the *jamatkhana* (House of congregation) as a formal presentation as well as an embodiment of hearing, listening and reciting along with the performance outside *Jamatkhana* setting as an active participant. In many ways the performance of *ginan* differs from other Sufi devotional performances including *qawwali* where trained musicians perform and the rest participate in the process of *sama*.⁴⁰ Among Ismailis, the difference between trained and non-trained musicians does not exist; hence the importance is given to the poetical messages of *Pirs* and *Sayyeds*, which they share through performance. Whatever terms one can use such as music, recitation, reading and performance the most important element is the message, which lies inside the text. Perhaps, the only way it will be transmitted is through listening and performing that needs to be communicated. As a result, the reciter leads the *ginan* and everyone in the congregation sings along in chorus of voices in unison. As a result, both performance and participation become one.

Defining *Ginan*

Among a large number of scholars, the term '*ginan*' or its variants *gyan* or *gnan* etymologically derived from a Sanskrit word *jnana*⁴¹, which means 'knowledge' in poetic form; it may also be understood as 'hymn', which is frequently used in the basic sense of higher knowledge.⁴² "The term '*ginan*' itself has a double significance: on the one hand, it means religious knowledge or wisdom, on the other hand it means '*ghina*' in Arabic or '*gana*' in Urdu means singing or chanting".⁴³ Among one of the pioneers of the modern

³⁸ Halbwachs Maurice, *On Collective Memory*, 1992.

³⁹ For more information see Turino, Thomas, "Participatory and Presentational Performance", 1992 pp 23-65.

⁴⁰ The word 'Sama' means 'listening', which is performed in the Sufi rituals along with 'Dhikr', means 'remembrance'.

⁴¹ Virani, N, Shafique, "A Self-Definition of the Ismaili *Ginan* Tradition", 2005, p. 504.

⁴² Shackle, Christopher and Moir Zawahir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans*, p. 17.

⁴³ Kassam, Tazim R, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance*, 1995, p. 1

Ismaili studies, Wladimir Ivanow, defines the term ‘ginan’ as “it is used in the sense of the knowledge, i.e. the real and true, as the Arabic Ismaili term *haqaiq*.⁴⁴ Sayyed Hossein Nasr defines it as ‘supreme knowledge’.⁴⁵ There are innumerable examples in the ginanic literature which explain the meaning of ginan such as Pir Sadardin, who says in his ginan “*Ginan bolo re nit noray bharia*” (recite ginan which is full of divine light)”.⁴⁶

Professor Muhram Khan however, disagrees that the term ‘ginan’ has a Sanskrit root. He argues the term ‘ginan’ is derived from the Arabic term ‘*ghina*’ meaning chanting and reciting, as he believes that this word was commonly used in the lower Indus valley of Sind during the time of the Ismaili *dawa* and those Ismaili *Pirs* employed this local vernacular term and composed ginans.⁴⁷ To further support this argument, Dr. G. A. Allana, a linguist from Sind argues that phonetically also, it is outside of their phonetic inventory of the people of Sind, Punjab, Kutch and Gujarat. “to pronounce the initial cluster of sounds such as [jn] of the word ‘jnan’. Similarly the clusters of sounds such as [gn, jn, gy, py, ky, ks’ and kr] are not in their regular phonetic inventory, and all the clusters as such are separated by the speakers of these regions by inserting a short vowel [i] in between the two components of [g] and [n] or [j] and [n]”.⁴⁸ The terms for devotional hymns in Sindhi language is ‘*sureela geeta*’ (tuneful songs) or ‘*veragi kalam*’ which means (chanting hymns).⁴⁹

The above explanation of ginan also supports the idea of related local devotional musical genres and their meanings such as the ‘qawwali’ (Arabic ‘*qawl*’ means utterance and sayings), ‘Kafi’ (Arabic, means rhymes), *Shabd* (Sacred words), *Kirtan* (to praise) and *bhajan* (to serve, adore).⁵⁰ Wherever, the term ‘ginan’ originated, it is an undeniable fact among all the scholars that the

⁴⁴ Ivanow, Wladimir, ‘Satpanth’ vol. 1, p 2.

⁴⁵ Nasr, Hossein Seyyed, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 1981, pp 7, 50.

⁴⁶ Sadardin Pir, *Jawahir-e-Ginan*, verse 1, 2002, p 4.

⁴⁷ Khan, Muhram, “Qadeem Sindhi Shairi and Shaira”, 2002, p 58 and 86.

⁴⁸ Allana, G. A, *Ismaili Movement in Sindh, Multan and Gujrat*, p. 297.

⁴⁹ Khan, Muhram, “Qadeem Sindhi Shairi and Shaira”, 2002, p. 297.

⁵⁰ Gillani, Karim, *Ginan: A musical heritage of Ismaili Muslim from India and Pakistan*, p 52.

ginans are regarded as divinely inspired hymns, *waridat*, (things that come from the divine). Another Quranic term that is often used to describe mystical works, mentioned in *Sura al-Kashf* verse 65 is '*ilm laduni*'. This experience of *ilm laduni* and poetry is among one of the highest experiences of creativity, as an influential Urdu poet Ghalib (1797-1869) says in his poetry:

*Aate hain ghaib se ye mazamin khayal mein
Ghalib sareer-i-khama navaye sarosh hain*

These themes come to mind from the world unseen
Ghalib, the scratching of the pen is the voice of the heavenly angel.⁵¹

Traditionally, Pir Satgur Nur (11th-12th CE) has been recognized as the first author and composer of ginan in South Asia, followed by a series of *Pirs*, *Sayyeds* and *Dais*, who continued their Ismaili religious mission under the guidance of Nizari Ismaili Imams (Ismaili spiritual leaders). Among them Pir Shams (12th/13th CE), Pir Sadardin (13th/14th CE), Pir Hasan Kabirdin (14th/15th CE), Sayyed Imamshah (15th/16th), Sayyed Mohammad Shah (16th/17th CE) and Sayyeda Imam Begum (19th/20th) are prominent.⁵²

The history of the corpus of ginan hymns is as old as the Ismaili *dawa* (religious mission) in the Indian subcontinent. Ginan is a genre of devotional poetry rooted in the musical and poetic matrix of Indian culture. Ginans are traditionally recited during daily ritual prayers in Ismaili congregation halls (*jamatkhanas*). *Ginans* have been revered for generations among the Ismailis as sacred compositions (*shastras*).⁵³ In addition, various *Pirs* and *Dais* (missionaries) composed *ginan* hymns in several Indian languages, among which Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Siraiki and Sindhi are prominent. The ginans are powerful in imagery and symbolism drawn from the spiritual and cultural milieu of the Indian subcontinent. The entire ginan corpus consists of about

⁵¹ K.C. Kanda (edited), *Master Couplets of Urdu Poetry*, 2001, p 281, for more information also see the same page with another verse translation "Heaven inspired, Ghalib, are my poetic thoughts, The racing of my pen is the very voice of gods."

⁵² Nanji, Azim, *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, 1978, p. 39.

⁵³ Kassam, Tazim R, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance*, 1995, p. 1

one thousand poems whose lengths vary from five to five hundred verses.⁵⁴

The historical roots of the *ginan* hymns shares a close cultural promimity with South Asian Sufi, bhakti and sant devotional music.⁵⁵



Illustration No 3: Pir Sham's shrine in Multan, Pakistan, 2007

Significance of Hearing and Reciting within Muslim Context

The term 'music' in the context of Islam is often seen as debatable and it is generally assumed illicit (*haram*). Many arguments and debates have been raised for the support or rejection of the practice of music since the beginning of Islam. Hence, throughout the Muslim world devotional expressions play a pivotal role, both in its fundamental practice of Quranic chanting and in the form of various vernacular local traditions. The common elements among the Muslim *adhan* (call to prayer), the Sufi *qawwali* and the Ismaili *ginan* are that

⁵⁴ Three decades ago, based on a list compiled by Alibhai Nanji of Hyderabad, Azim Nanji in his book entitled 'The Nizari Ismaili traditions' estimated the total number of *ginans* to be about 800.

⁵⁵ Asani, Ali, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia*, 2002, p 4-5.

they all share musical sounds in order to give sonic form to the religious and textual messages of Islam. Especially among the mystics, musical sounds occupy an important place in daily rituals. For them, music is the tool to get closer to God, polishing their hearts, and purifying their souls. Among Sufis in South Asia, “music is the feast for the soul” because music serves to lift devotees into states of the mystical ecstasy and self-realization.⁵⁶

Early Islamic sources reveal that the concepts of hearing and recitation played a key role from the very first revelation of Prophet Muhammad. In fact the Quran was revealed to Prophet Mohammed through Jibrail (Gabriel) in (610 CE), not in a text form but Prophet Mohammed heard the voice of Jibrail as a command “*Iqra*” “Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth”.⁵⁷ God’s revelation was a fundamentally “aural,” an auditive, phenomenon, even when it was sometimes accompanied by visions. The Quran was heard, recited, remembered and orally transmitted before it was written down, and the term itself comes from the root ‘*QR*’, which signifies “recitation of a text”.⁵⁸ The message from God was accessible to human perception not through vision, perception or cognition, but through sound in the spoken word in Muhammad’s language, Arabic. “It should not be forgotten that the Quran denotes the event of recitation. Only subsequently did it become, in physical terms, a book. The recitation was felt and received as inspired, and inspiration suggest openness”.⁵⁹

The Prophet Mohammed received words of Quran over a considerable period of time; he kept them in his memory and transmitted them to his followers through oral recitation. As a result many companions had memorized the Quran before the time of his demise. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, he had spread the message of Quran by sending out reciters, not

⁵⁶ Qureshi, Regula, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan, Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali*, 1995.

⁵⁷ Al-Quran, Sura 96, *ayat* 1, translation by M. Pickthall.

⁵⁸ During, Jean, “Hearing and Understanding in the Islamic Gnosis”, 1997, p. 128.

⁵⁹ Esmail, Aziz, *The Poetics of Religious Experience: The Islamic Context*, 1998, p 6.

texts, and Caliph Uthman sent the standard Quranic text along with one reciter, who could transmit its message through recitation, as a result, the written words of the Quran remain inseparably connected to their utterance in recitation.⁶⁰

Prophet Muhammad may have believed that the sound of the human voice was more natural than bells;⁶¹ therefore Bilal Habshi was specifically chosen by Prophet himself for his beautiful voice to recite *Adhan* (call to Prayer). Even today it is a common practice to recite the Quran aloud as compared to reading the Quran silently so that the reciter can hear and witness the divine messages through his own ears. When a Muslim baby is born, among one of the first practices is to *tilwa* (recite) in the baby's ear so he/she can hear and experience the words of God, the Quran, through sound or recitation. In the Muslim world learning how to read the Quran means learning the sounds as well as the meaning of the words, so they can be recited, remembered and performed. Among Muslims, one of the major achievements of any child is to earn the title of *Hafiz al-Quran*, meaning to learn by heart the entire message with the aid of its sounded forms and proper delivery.⁶²

If we examine the text of the Quran carefully, it is not difficult to find rhymes, rhythmic patterns, assonance and recurring phrases, all of which enhance the understanding and meaning of the structure of the Quranic text as well as providing a deeper sonic impact. Therefore, one can easily observe that the way the text is structured in the Quran is highly suitable for recitation. Various references related to recitation can be found in the Quran itself, stating that the Quran was transmitted to Prophet Mohammed in the mode of recitation (*tartilan*) (25/31) and that the Prophet was directed to recite it in a similar manner (*wa rattilol-quran tartilan*, 74/4)⁶³ “recite the Quran according to the

⁶⁰ Nelson, Kristina, *The Art of Reciting the Quran*, 1987, p 3.

⁶¹ Waugh, Earle, *Memory, Music, and Religion*, 2005, p 143.

⁶² Qureshi, Regula, “Islam and Music” 2006, p 90.

⁶³ Ibid, p 91.

rules of *tajwid*.”⁶⁴ According to the late Mohammed Arkoun, “in the early Quranic stage, the relationship between men who hear the call and God is expressed in the context of an oral culture, outside the intervention of clerics who exercise a power of interpretation in favor of, or in opposition to, the state.”⁶⁵

The Prophet Mohammed and the Imams of his *Ahl al Bayt* (People of the House or family) gave special emphasis on reciting the Quran beautifully and understanding the beauty of sounds within the sacred text. The Prophet Mohammad said that among the creation’s greatest beauties are ‘the fine intonation of a beautiful voice (*nagh-mata’l-sawt al-hasan*)’.⁶⁶ On another occasion he said: “everything possesses its own adornment (*hilya*); and the adornment of the Quran is a beautiful voice”.⁶⁷ It has been mentioned that Imam Zayn al-Abidin (Ali b. Husayn) was very famous for his beautiful Quranic recitation, those who witnessed his voice would ‘swoon away due to the beauty of his voice (*saiq min husni sawithi*)’.⁶⁸

Reza Shah-Kazemi explains the whole process of recitational experience as “the whole being of one who is attuned to the divine ‘music’ of the Quran is opened up to the spiritual power of the revelation –the theurgic power unleashed by an inimitable symbiosis of sensible sound and intelligible light: sonoral presence of the sacred and enlightening exposition of the truth”.⁶⁹ According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “For Muslims, everything about the Quran is sacred—its sound, the very words of the Arabic language chosen by God to express His message, the letters in which it is written, and even the paper that

⁶⁴ *Tajwid* is the system of rules regulating the correct oral rendering of the Quran, used almost all over the Muslim world. For more information see “Tajwid” Nelson, Kristina, *The Art of Reciting the Quran*, 1987, pp. 14-31.

⁶⁵ Arkoun Mohammed, “Islam between its Tradition and Globalization”, 2000, p. 201.

⁶⁶ al-Kulayni, Yaqub Muhammad, *al-Usul min al-kafi*, 1997, p. 608.

⁶⁷ Ibid, vol 2, p. 608.

⁶⁸ Ibid, vol 2, p. 607.

⁶⁹ Kazemi, Reza Shah, *Spiritual Quest: Reflections on Quranic Prayer According to the Teachings of Imam Ali*, 2011, p.7.

constitutes the physical aspect of the sacred text”.⁷⁰ Hence, one has to be careful not to believe that it is only the aesthetic effect of the beautiful recitation that is so deeply stricken those who listen to it; it is the combination of enchanting musicality, profound meaning, and above all, theurgic power, that perhaps overwhelms and possibly intoxicates through the divine Word.⁷¹

Early Islamic Myths on Hearing

In the Muslim context, there are two very well known myths regarding the significance of hearing. Hearing plays a vital role because it is the first experience with which an individual is awakened. In the first myth, Adam’s soul refused to enter the body of clay molded by God. Hence, God commanded the angels to make *sama* (an assembly of remembrance) and, in the ecstasy of this music, Adam’s soul entered in the prison of his body. In another myth, one day after hearing the sweet voice of the divine Adam’s got up, the voice said, “Am I not Master? (*alastu bi rabbikum*).⁷² Then Adam replied in ecstasy with these words “All the spirits attested,” confirming the eternal Covenant (*mithaq*), which binds the entire humanity to their creator.⁷³ Parallel ideas are also associated in the oral tradition of India, as famous Indian mystic Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya once said “On the day of the covenant of souls with God, I heard God’s call to the souls “Am I not your God?” in *Purbi raga*”.⁷⁴

A similar idea was supported by the thoughts of Ahmad Tusi, N. Purjavdi regarding the experience of Adam and divine hearing:

“In fact, the first thing that God created for the descendants of Adam on the day of the Covenant was comprehension, then the auditive and enunciatory faculties (after Adam responded). Then, before the descendants of Adam were asked, the Creator presented them with these

⁷⁰ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein ‘Islam’, *Our Religion*, 1993, p. 448.

⁷¹ Schuon Frithjof, *Understanding Islam*, 1994, p. 46.

⁷² Quran: Al Aaraf, chapter 7.

⁷³ During, Jean, “Hearing and Understanding in the Islamic Gnosis”, 1997, p 129.

⁷⁴ Saleem, Agha, *Melody of Clouds: Shah Abdul Lateef Bhittai*, 2003, p. 8. Raga Purbi or Purvi is an ancient raga of Purvi thaata, which originated in the Eastern part of India. For more information Bor, Joep, *The Raga guide: A Survey of 74 Hindustani Ragas*, 2nd Edition, 2002.

three faculties or abilities; and upon the answer “yes,” all three were set into action. Although language is posterior to understanding and hearing, it is the irradiation of the verb (*alast*), which unifies understanding and hearing. If the call from the side of the Creator had not come, then neither the ear would have heard anything nor the understanding understood anything”.⁷⁵

The relation between music, the Word which creates, and (*wajd*) ecstasy that helps accompany the sensations of existing is explained in another myth by Sharh-e-ta’arraf of Bokhari (d. 1042), at the time when perhaps the *sama* practice had already expanded from Bagdad and Persia throughout the Muslim world.

“Some say that the principle of *sama* is that of the rapture produced by the sound of the creative decree; the word consists of what He had said to the world: “Be”! (Kun), and it was so. The first joy that things can attain is the joy of this world. Now that beings can be listened to, the *sama* is a form of nourishment through the memory and the perfume of this first *sama*.

The myth of *kun* Creator (fiat! Or esto!) and covenant support each other in a mutual manner and also support the practice of Sufi *sama* in the sense of a reaffirmation of the promise or pact. Music is the mirror of universal harmony: “Where this melody (the resonance of the Creator’s Word) does not exist, there the soul can understand nothing. The universe is this melody itself, so as the eternal Master played it”.⁷⁶

Concepts of *Sama* and *Dhikr*

“The True Guide says: I will come and be seated in (the heart of) such a person and there will be a lot of sounds (of celebration) in the palace. The night of this person is spent in an awakened state and that time he/she partakes in ginan (divine knowledge)”.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Purjavadi, N, *Soltan-e-tariqat. Savaneh-ye-Zendegi o shahr-e-asar-e-Ahmad-e Ghazzali*, Teheran, 1979, p 242,

⁷⁶ Ibid.: 250

⁷⁷ Sabzwari, Shams Pir, *Saloko Moto*, verse number 105, Yasmin Sher Ali (Trans), 2009.

The practice of *sama* (listening) and *dhikr* (remembrance) contributes immensely to Muslim piety and devotion. A few Islamic mainstream opinion has conceived some ritual practices of *sama* as dangerous and unlawful, but there is no direct prohibition of music in the Quran, and several recognitions are given to chanting, cultivation and cantillation of music in other religious texts as well.⁷⁸

Often these two profound Quranic concepts '*sama*' and '*dhikr*' are limited to Sufism. Although in most Sufi assemblies *sama* and *dhikr* are the primary form of ritual practices, they are not bound to only Sufis or esoteric practices of Islam. In fact, the Quran speaks of these practices again and again and reminds followers to polish their heart through remembrance. "He is successful who groweth, and remembers the name of his Lord, so prayeth."⁷⁹ Moreover, remembering thy Lord also provides peace in the heart; as the Quran says: "Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah; for without doubt, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest!"⁸⁰ In fact, according to the Quran, remembrance of Allah is the most significant practice in the eyes of the Lord, "recite that which hath been inspired in thee of the Scripture, and establish worship. Lo! Worship preserveth from lewdness and iniquity, but verily remembrance of Allah is more important. And Allah knoweth what ye do".⁸¹ The concepts of *sama* and *dhikr* signify the importance of utmost devotion and love to thy Lord. Allah says "so remember the name of thy Lord and devote thyself with a complete devotion".⁸²

How do sound affect the heart and soul of its listeners? Sound deeply affect heart and soul, as described by Ibn Sina's disciple Ibn Zaylah (d. 440/1048) "Sound produces an influence on the soul in two directions. One is on account

⁷⁸ Qureshi, Regula, *Sufi music of India and Pakistan*. p. 82.

⁷⁹ Sura 87, ayats 14-15, Pickthall, Marmanduke M, *The Meaning of the Glories Koran: An Explanatory Translation*, 1952.

⁸⁰ Ibid: Sura 13: *Ayat* 28.

⁸¹ Ibid: Sura 29: *Ayat* 45.

⁸² Ibid: Sura 73: *Ayat* 8

of its special composition (i.e., its physical content); the other on account of its being similar to the soul (i.e., its spiritual content)".⁸³

Does it depend on the listener's ability to experience the divine through sounds? Or does it depend on the performer's ability to reach the listener's heart through the performance? Dhu'l-Nun the Egyptian Sufi (d. 246/861) said:

"Listening (*al-sama*) is a divine influence which stirs the heart to see Allah; those who listen to it spiritually attain to Allah, and those who listen to it sensually fall into heresy".⁸⁴ Listening is the door through which one can stir the heart and experience the divine. In the first treatise of Sufism, *Kash al-Mahjub* (The Unveiling of the veil) Abu Hassan Ali bin usman al-Julabi Hujwiri, also known as Data Ganj Baksh (990 CE-1077 CE) said: "listening to sweet sounds produces an effervescence of the substance molded in man; true, if the substance be true, false, if the substance be false".⁸⁵

The *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa* (Brethren of Purity), whose vast encyclopedia compiled in the fourth/tenth century, contains a precious epistle on music.⁸⁶ Many contemporary Muslim historians including Heinz Halm, W. Ivanow, Farhad Daftary, Paul Casanova and Abbas Hamdani, believe that *Rasail* was written and compiled by the Fatimid Ismailis to spread the quest for an intellectual mission based on the Shia theology and philosophy during the medieval Muslim era.⁸⁷ *Rasail* contains 52 epistles on various fields of knowledge include music, mathematics, astrology, astronomy, logic, physical sciences, natural sciences, spirituality and more. *Rasail* concludes the epistle on music with the validation of the most delighted and most perfect music, which are the sounds of the sacred text and His name:

⁸³ Farmer G. H, "The Religious Music of Islam," 1952, pp 60-65.

⁸⁴ Farmer H. G, *A History of Arabian Music*, 1973, p 36.

⁸⁵ This work dates to the second half of the fifth/eleventh century, according to R.A. Nicholson, who provided an English translation of it in the E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series, vol. 17, London: Luzac, 1911; repr. 1959.

⁸⁶ Complete work includes fifty two epistles, among them the one on music is the fifth. For more information see "L'epître sur la musique des Ikhwan al-safa", 1964, p. 31,

⁸⁷ Hamdani, Abbas, "A critique of Paul Casanova's dating of the *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa*", 1996, p. 145.

“Tradition teaches that the sweetest melody which the inhabitants of paradise have at their disposal and the most beautiful song they hear is the discourse of God—great be His praise. It is thus that the Word of God Most High states, the greeting which [will welcome them] there will be peace! (Quran, 10-11). And the end of their invocation will be peace!” (Quran X, 10-11). And the end of their invocation will be: “Praise to Allah, Lord of the worlds.” It is said that Moses—peace be upon him—upon hearing the words of his Lord, was overcome with joy, with happiness and with rapture to the point of being unable to contain himself. He was overwhelmed by emotion, transported while listening to this serene melody and from that point on regarded all rhythms, all melodies, and all songs as insignificant”.⁸⁸

Ibn’ Arabi, once emphasize the significance of sound with a similar argument:

God says “[God is] Listening, Knowing” (Koran 9:98), and He says, “[God is] Listening, Seeing” (22:61). Hence He places listening before knowledge and sight. The first thing we knew from God and which became connected to us from Him was His speech (*qawl*) and our listening (*sama*)...The cosmos can have no existence without Speech on God’s part and listening on the part of the cosmos”.⁸⁹

Renowned Muslim theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (1058-1111) writes in the beginning of the long chapter of his famous book *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din* (The Revival of the Sciences of Religion), in which he provides in detail the laws and principles of spiritual *sama*:

“Hearts and inmost thoughts, song and ecstasy, are treasuries of secrets and mines of jewels. Infolded in them are their jewels like as fire is infolded in iron and stone, and concealed like as water is concealed under dust and loam. There is no way to the extracting of their hidden things save by the flint and steel of listening to music and singing, and there is no entrance to the heart save by the antechamber of the ears. So musical tones, measured and pleasing bring forth what is in it and make evident its beauties and defects. For when the heart is moved there is made evident that only which it contains like as a vessel drips only what is in it. And listening to music and singing is for the heart a true

⁸⁸ Shiloah, “L’epitre sur la musique des Ikhwan al-Safa”, Revue des etudes islamiques 33, 1966, pp. 192-93.

⁸⁹ Chittick, William C, *The Sufi path of knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, 1989, p 213.

touchstone and a speaking standard; whenever the soul of the music and singing reaches the heart, then there stirs in the heart that which in it preponderates”.⁹⁰

Sama and Dhikr within the South Asian Cultural Context

Throughout the fourteen hundred years of Muslim history, the teaching of Islam spread in various parts of the world, from Arabic speaking countries to Central Asia, South Asia, Africa, Indonesia, and encountered various languages, cultures and religions. Muslim missionaries have taken the essence of the teaching of the Quran and spread the message in various vernacular languages and cultures so the Islam does not look foreign to indigenous beliefs and practices. Similarly the concepts of *sama* and *dhikr* spread with the teaching of Islam to various parts of the world.

However, although the core remained the same, in practice it adopted and evolved according to various cultural contexts. It is a historical fact that more than conquests, Sufis and mystical practices of Islam have played a significant role in the spread of Islam in South Asia. Among Chishti Sufis, the musical style of qawwali plays a vital role during the ceremony of *sama*, and among Sindhis, followers of Shah Latif, *Wai*, *Bait* and *Kafi* are the vital forms of remembrance. Similarly among Khoja Ismailis, *ginan* is one of the most significant forms of *dhikr* and *sama*, which were composed by the Pirs and Sayyeds to share the essence and the teaching of Shia Islam in South Asia. Among many Sindhis, the respect for *Shah jo Risalo* is equalent to the Quran (not in its literal meaning but through the teaching of *Risalo*, Sindhis understood the teaching of Islam in their own vernacular language Sindhi). As Shah Abdul Latif himself said in his *risalo* “*Baita na banyo manhua, hi ayatun ahin*”, (O listeners! Do not consider my verse as merely ‘*baits*’ (devotional rhymes), they are actually the verses of the Quran-e- Sharif).⁹¹ Another famous Sufi master Baba Bulleh Shah goes further and even prefers the musical

⁹⁰ It is the eighth book of the “quarter” of the *Ihya* dealing with the “social customs” (*adat*). It has been translated into English by E. B. Macdonald, 1902, p.199.

⁹¹ Allana, G. A, *Ismaili Movement in Sindh, Multan and Gujrat*, 2010, p. 298.

instrument for *dhikr*, saying: “We sold Quran and purchased tanboor (long neck lute, musical instrument), The tanboor revealed Divine mystery unto us”.⁹²

Similarly, for many Central Asians, Rumi’s Mathnawi is the ‘Persian Quran’. Seyyed Hossain Nasr, citing one of the authorities on Rumi, Hadi Hairi’s unpublished work in which he has shown some 6000 verses of *diwan* and Mathnawi are practically direct translations of the Quranic verses into Persian Poetry.⁹³ Rumi himself called the Masnavi “the roots of the roots of the roots of the (Islamic) religion... and the explainer of the Qur'an”.⁹⁴ It does not mean in its literal sense, rather that the various underlying messages within the Rumi’s Mathnawi are regarded as a esoteric commentary of the Quran, and many of its verses are interpreted as the translations of Quranic verses into Persian.

Likewise, the teachings of ginans have esteemed respect and status among the Khoja Ismailis, as they believe that through the teachings of gnan their ancestors found the true path (*sirat-ul-mustaqim*). Therefore, it is not a mere coincidence that Khoja Ismailis give the deepest respect and sometimes almost scriptural status to gnan. Confirming these teachings for the contemporary era, the 48th Ismaili Imam Sir Sultan Mohammad Shah Aga Khan (1877-1957), on July 5th, 1899, in Zanzibar gave the following *farman* (guidance):

"Pir Sadardin has composed for you ginans by extracting the essence of the Qur'an and stating it in the language of Hindustan".⁹⁵

⁹² Saleem, Agha, *Melody of Clouds: Shah Abdul Lateef Bhittai*, 2009, p. 8

⁹³ Nasr, Hossein Seyyed, "Rumi and the Sufi Tradition," 1974, p. 183.

⁹⁴ Gamard Ibrahim (edited), *Mathnavi: Rumi and Islam*, 2004, p 6.

⁹⁵ Aga Khan III, Mohammad Shah Sir Sultan H. H., *Kalam-e- Imam e Mubin*, Part 1, 1950, p. 85.



Illustration 4: Pir Sadardin Shrine in Taranda Muhammad Panah, near by Uch Sharif, Punjab, Pakistan, 2007.

The similarities of ginan and Quran can be seen in many ways. Chapter 3 or Surah Al- Imran, verses 190-191 states “The men of intellect are those who remember Allah standing, sitting and reclining”. Similar ideas can be found in ginanic literature.

Pir Hasan Kabirdin in his ginan states, “*Eji sute bethe bahi rah chalanteji, nam sahebjiko lijiyeje*”. (O brother! While reclining, sitting and while walking keep on taking the name of your Lord).⁹⁶ In the Quranic verse 73/8, Allah says “So remember the name of thy Lord and devote thyself with a complete devotion”. Sayyed Imam Shah in His ginan says: “O brother! Keep thoughts concentrated so that an attachment of love will rise in your heart. Remember the Lord like this in every breath. O brother! Never forsake this remembrance”.⁹⁷

Among Ismailis ginan is one of the forms of *sama* and *dhikr* through which the community practice their faith. The only conceptual difference is that ginans

⁹⁶ Kabirdin Hassan Pir, “Eji Dur Desh thi ayo” verse 2, cited from *Ginans, with English Translation and Glossary*, Vol. 2, 2007, p.111.

⁹⁷ Imam Shah, Sayyed, “Eji Piyu Piyu kijiye”, *Ginans, with English Translation and Glossary*, Vol. 2, p 124.

are the utmost source towards the Imam, as all Shia Ismailis believe that the Imam is the direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammad and the rightly guided religious and spiritual authority; therefore most of the ginan themes are connected with the allegiance, love and devotion towards the Imams.

Exploring Ginan within the South Asian Musical Context

Devotional music can be heard almost everywhere in South Asia. One of the reasons is that in South Asia, music is characteristically never separated from the religion, culture and the society. Milton Singer, an anthropologist, who studied the Radha Krishna *bhajans* of Madras City in the 1960s mentions that music plays a fundamental role in the daily practice of Hindus, where myth, ritual and symbols combine together within one's devotions; it is a way of life for them. As he noted, apart from *bhajan* singing Hindus also participate in the sacred scriptures such as Mahabharata, in which devotees act and dramatize the sacred myths into reality, where devotees, walk, move, talk, and sing everything in such a way that they are living and acting in reality like their God and Goddess.⁹⁸ This is another reality of ritual drama as described by Victor Turner, in which people move from one stage of reality to another through a liminal phase, where they are neither here nor there, but are in a "between" threshold.⁹⁹ Here music becomes the tool to experience the liminal state when a listener moves from one reality to another, and sometimes travels imaginatively from a physical state to the spiritual. This particular moment can also be defined as *hal* or *wajd* (*Arabic terms meaning ecstasy and enlightenment*) where through the power of sound and performance one can experience ecstasy.

A similar expression of devotion can also be seen in the Shia Ithna-Ashari devotional ritual where Imam Hussein and his martyrdom are depicted through various forms of devotional genres include *soz*, *nuha*, *marsia*, and *matam*. The

⁹⁸ Singer, Milton, "The Radha-Krishna Bhajanas of Madras City", 1966, pp. 90-138.

⁹⁹ Turner, Victor, *The Anthropology of Performance*, 1986.

social and psychological effect is so intense that some devotees experience trance and ritual drama moves them into another reality where meta-historically they re-visit the entire war with Imam Hussein and sacrifice their lives in the service of their Imam.¹⁰⁰ All in all, devotional music plays a significant role in the daily life of South Asian religions.

It is also important to understand the concept of Sufism in its broader perspective especially in the South Asian context, where there are many misunderstanding regarding the term “Sufis”. According to two authorities on Islam, Annemarie Schimmel and Mohammed Arkoun, “the word Sufi or more correctly *tasawwuf*, (mysticism) ought to be defined more carefully because it is ridiculous to see that now so many Europeans and Americans call themselves 'Sufi' without knowing that from the 17th/18th centuries onwards, this term was used in a pejorative sense, and that the great mystical thinkers of Persia and Muslim India refused to call themselves Sufis.”¹⁰¹

They were the people of '*irfan* (gnosis) or just the Muhammadis, the ones who followed the path of the Prophet completely. Marshall Hodgson also argued that the role mysticism contributed was not strictly speaking, mystical. For him, the mystical aspect, or perhaps specifically the ecstatic moment of the mystic, was part of a moral process of civilization, “to carry with it the moral standpoint of universality”.¹⁰² Therefore, one can say that mysticism’s *dhikr* is not a closed liturgy designed for preferred adepts but a ritual with implications for everyone in society. It is a method whose implication holds the human

¹⁰⁰ Qureshi, Regula B, “Islamic Music in an Indian Environment: The Shia Majlis”, 1981, pp-41-71. Also see Schubel, Wayne, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shia Devotional Rituals in South Asia*, 1993.

¹⁰¹ Schimmel Annemarie and Arkoun Mohammed presented papers at the same conference, organized by the Institute of Ismaili Studies in Cambridge, for more information see Schimmel, Annemarie, “Reason and Mystical Experience in Sufism”, *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, 2000, p 134. And Arkoun, Mohammed, “Islam between its Tradition and Globalization” *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, 2000, pp. 179-220.

¹⁰² Hodgson, G, S, Marshall, *Venture of Islam*, 1974, p 399.

totality in its best form. Thus the concept of remembrance involves social betterment.¹⁰³

Etymologically both terms “*Pir*” and “*Tariqah*”, commonly used by the Khoja Ismailis throughout the history and even today are borrowed from Indic Sufism. I conducted my intense field research at the tombs of great Ismaili *Pirs* including Hazrat Pir Shams Sabzwari, Pir Sadardin and Pir Hassan Kabirdin, during my interview with Sayyed Khadim Hussein Shah, the *gaddhi nashin* (shrine keeper) of Pir Sadardin, I came to know that the local community of his followers perceived as the Shia Ithna Ashri Shamsi Sufis. Hence, during Thursdays and especially during the Islamic month of Muharram one can witness the *matam* at their shrines especially at Shams Tabrez in Multan. Upon request, I was able to receive a copy of the *shajrah* (genealogy) from the Pir Sadardin *ghadi nashin*, and also took the pictures of the *shajrah* at the entrance of Pir Shams Sabzwari tomb, and was struck to see that although in general perception the Ismaili schism took place during the Imamate of Imam Ismail (Seventh Imam); however in both *shajras* (genealogy), of Pir Sadardin and Pir Shams Sabzwari’s lineage was not separated from that of the seventh Imam. Although the local followers and shrine keepers call themselves Ithn Ashari Shia Sufis, however, in their list of genealogy, they also believe that Imam Mohammad bin Ismaili as their eighth Imam, therefore, one has to question against the standard way of looking at and separating Shia and Sunni ideologies on the basis of popular discourses within Muslim literatures, as compare to the regional and local believes and practices of the communities.

¹⁰³ Waugh, Earle, *Memory, Music, and Religion*, 2005, p 21.

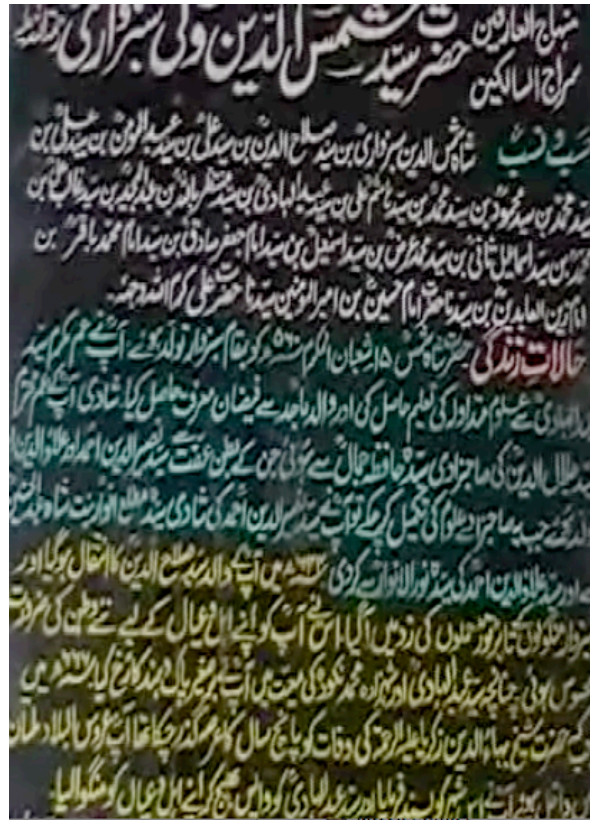


Illustration 5: *Shajra* (genealogy) signboard at the entrance of Pir Sham's tomb, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan, 2007

In South Asia the concept of *Guru-Sishya* plays a key role in the musical and religious life of people. According to oral tradition, whenever legendary Tansen's (1508-1589) soul was troubled, he always recalled his teacher Swami Haridas to provide him ease.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, in many religious practices in South Asia, it is the case that without the *guru*, *moksha* or salvation is considered impossible; Sikhism adheres to this basic principle and similar ideas can be found in the Khoja Satpanth tradition. The role of *Pirs* is equal to that of a guide or teacher who provides constant spiritual guidance to his followers regarding so that they can recognize the living Imam. The terms often used in

¹⁰⁴ Shankar Ravi, CD *Homage to Mahatma Gandhi*, liner notes written by Massey, Reginald 1978. According to the oral tradition of India, the legendary musical maestro Tansen was very close to his guru Haridas and in various troubled situations was only able to save himself through his guidance. Note: the information is extracted from the liner notes.

ginan for true guide are *satguru* or *guru*¹⁰⁵, which are similar to the terms for those used by other religious communities such as Sikhs, Sufis, Sants and Bhakti. Therefore, if one would like to analyze the ginan tradition, it is important to explore ginan within the broader context of *Guru-Sishya* framework.

All the above mentioned devotional genres share much common ground with each other, including the geographic region of Northern India, and the cultures in which these genres were written, composed and shared in the vernacular languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati, and Sindhi. Because of their regional and cultural similarities, they share more or less similar musical styles, structure of poetry, symbols of normative expressions and above all a belief system, shared among Sufis, Bhaktis and Ismailis concerning expression of longing, love, separation and humanity. If we were to closely compare that of the belief system in a spiritual guide among the Sufi *Shaikh silsila* (spiritual heirarchy) with Sikh Gurus and Ismaili Pirs and Imam; we would find common theological grounds; as a result, many of their devotional musical genres were shared among the communities.¹⁰⁶

A qawwali such as *Kirpa Karo Maharaj* (Lord have mercy be upon me) in the praise of the Sufi saint Muinuddin Chishti from 13th century, is marked by a very Indic and Hindu expression, which is accepted by Hindu and Muslim alike. Similarly Sufi poetry of Pir Shams *Das Avatar ginan*, (tenth incarnation of Vishnu), Baba Bulleh Shah, and Kabir demonstrate a wide-spread shared form of devotion among Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. The poetry and music of these poets are beyond the expression of one religious identity and specific ritual believes, which makes the devotional music of Northern India extremely unique, rich and diverse in its nature and performance. A major Sufi contribution was to “turn to the pre-existing indigenous folk-poetic tradition, a

¹⁰⁵ There are many ginans, which echo the entire theme of *Guru-Sishya* such as “*Satgur Kahe re*”, “*Eji gur sun bandan bandie*”, “*Eji gur ka kahya tamhe kijye*”, “*Gur kahe re*”.

¹⁰⁶ Asani, Ali, *The Bujh Niranjana-An Ismaili Mystical Poem*, 1991.

tradition that was mainly oral, meant to be recited or sung in a musical mode. Although it was recorded in writing only rarely (and that only at a very later stage), its simple rhyme forms made it easy to memorize”.¹⁰⁷

There are ample examples, which suggest that gnan literature was a tool to spread the Khoja Satpanth Muslim *dawa* in the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, gnan must have taken influences from indigenous cultures and religions, as questioned by various orthodox writers. For many of them, the “Arab” centered approach towards practicing Islam is the only correct version that mostly discards cultural contributions to the propagation of faith. The idea of a culture-free Islam is an abstraction from historical reality. According to Esmail, “every religious tradition creates and recreates itself through an ever-shifting synthesis of inherited and contemporary ideas.”¹⁰⁸

In the Indian subcontinent, the result has been a distinctive blend of indigenous and foreign motifs, which, once they had come together, formed a seamless whole. It is an ideological self-consciousness, which shifts among the elements, distinguishing ‘Hindu’ from ‘Muslim’. In this context, there is no need to define religious faith in hard and fast modern global categories. The need to define religious faith arises when there is a surrounding polemic in terms of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. It is a common observation that people mostly think about religion in black and white terms, right and wrong way, or maybe look at the religion from a completely strange point of view, or use modern scientific methods to explore the ancient medieval texts. Michael Foucault was among one of the first Western theorists who formulate argument against the notion of historians and scientists who follow twentieth century theoretical models to know the past events of history. Using the example of the science of biology, Foucault argues

¹⁰⁷ Asani, Ali, “*Sufi Poetry and Folk Tradition*” 1998, p. 184.

¹⁰⁸ Esmail, Aziz. *A Scent of Sandalwood, Indo-Ismaili Religious Lyrics*.p. 32.

Historians want to write histories of biology in the eighteenth century; but they do not realize that biology did not exist then, and that the pattern of knowledge that has been familiar to us for a hundred and fifty years is not valid for a previous period. And that, if biology was unknown, there was a very simple reason for it: that life itself did not exist. All that existed was living beings, which were viewed through a grid of knowledge constituted by natural history.¹⁰⁹

Foucault describes a set of implicit rules for the formation of any discourse. He emphasizes that there must be some implicit set of rules that allow such objects to arise within discourse, that provide the linguistic and conceptual space within which they are intelligible.¹¹⁰ As Esmail explains, the environment of the medieval Indian subcontinent “where such environmental pressures are absent, the conditions are more favorable to an organic vision, anchored in the mental and social realities of the people”. The ginans are one such ‘organic’ tradition”.¹¹¹ Many historians of Islam in Indian Subcontinent have made statements regarding the ways the poets into the mainstream popular culture incorporated various vernacular indigenous ideas. The important example for this case exists in the Sunnis of Bengal where the Prophet Muhammad was regarded as the ‘incarnation of God himself’.¹¹² He was the *avatar* (reincarnation) of the times. According to the Indian mytho-history, each of the *Vedas* corresponded to each of the four ages. And so popular Islam, retaining this scheme of the *yugas* and the *Vedas*, thought of the teachings of Islam as the last scripture, perfecting and superseding earlier wisdom (just as the Quran had presented itself as a successor to the God-given scriptures of the other Semitic faiths).¹¹³

Not only in Bengali Sunni Islam and the Khoja Satpanth Ismaili literature one can find various indigionious cultural concepts of Hindu and Muslim believes;

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, Michael, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, 1966, pp-127-128.

¹¹⁰ Murphy, Tim, “Discourse”, *“Guide to the study of Religion”*, 2000, pp-396-408.

¹¹¹ Esmail, Aziz. *A Scent of Sandalwood, Indo-Ismaili Religious Lyrics*, 2002, p. 28.

¹¹² Roy, Asim, *Islam in South Asia*, 1996, p. 104.

¹¹³ Roy, Asim, *Islamic Syncretistic Tradition*, 1983, pp. 136-140.

there are innumerable examples available in Sufi literatures that represent the same elements, sometimes metaphorically and esoterically used. This is notable especially in the mix of the Sufi practices and the Hindu *Bhakti* traditions. The Chisthi of Bijapur for instance, drew heavily from the *Bhakti* tradition.¹¹⁴ In this way the result was the transposition of the familiar audacities of Sufism in the Arabo-Persian-Turkish contexts to the Sub-continental context. Asim Roy points out that the ‘Bengali Muslims’ adoration of the *Pir* was ‘unqualified and Boundless’, but this is hardly news to anyone with the remotest familiarity with Sufism.¹¹⁵ The Punjabi Sufi poet, Sultan Bahu (1631-1691) said, “true lovers of God are neither Hindus nor Muslims, nor do they prostrate in mosques. With every breath they see God.”¹¹⁶ *Pir* Shams, an Ismaili missionary from the twelfth-thirteen centuries, conveys the same idea in his poetry:

*Not Hindu, nor Musalman knows my Lord.
My Lord is seated pure, immaculate.
My mind is my prayer-mat.
Allah, my qazi, my body, a mosque.
Seated within, I say my namaz (prayer).
What can the fool know of my prayer?*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*, 1978, p. 151.

¹¹⁵ Roy, Asim, *Islamic Syncretistic Tradition*, 1983, p. 159.

¹¹⁶ Lajwanti, Krishna Rama, *Punjabi Sufi Poets, A.D. 1460-1900*, 1938, pp. 33-37.

¹¹⁷ Sabzawri, Pir Shams, cited from Esmail, Aziz. *A Scent of Sandalwood, Indo-Ismaili Religious Lyrics*, p. 53.



Illustration No 6: An imaginative picture of Pir Shams Sabzwari, Multan, 2007

Wladimir Ivanow, a prominent scholar in Ismaili history, published a seminal monograph on *Satpanth* Ismailism. Ivanow investigated the reasons for the success of the Ismaili *da'wah* (religious mission) in the subcontinent, and surveyed the literature and religious practice of *Satpanth*. He attributed the success of the Ismaili preachers to the followings strategies:

Either by intuition, or sound and clever reasoning, the Nizari Ismaili missionaries devised [...] methods depending on two principles. One was their bold tactics in separating the meaning and spirit of Islam from its hard Arabic shell. The other was their concentration of efforts on a few definite castes.¹¹⁸

As Ali Asani explains, *Pirs* presented Islam in its Nizari Ismaili form, in languages, terms and concepts that were familiar to their Indic audience. For example, in an environment full of cults and sects, several *Pirs* used an indigenous Sanskrit term *panth* (path, doctrine, and sect) to refer to the religion they were preaching. In fact, their preferred term for Ismaili Islam was

¹¹⁸ Ivanow, W. *Satpanth, Indian Ismailism*, 1948.

Satpanth, the true or correct path, and a term that echoes the Quranic concept of *sirat al-mustaqum*, the right and straight path.¹¹⁹ Therefore one can say that, on one one hand, beliefs and practices from Islamic religious thought and culture came to be assimilated. On the other hand, beliefs and customs drawn from the local indigenous culture were also incorporated as a part of faith.

To better understand the various themes related to the ginan literature borrowed from vast Indic culture one has to also analyze historically how often Ismailis were brutally persecuted. For various political and religious reasons, Ismailis have adopted *taqqiyya* (dissimulation, as a protective strategy used by the Shias) to hide their own religious identities, so outsider cannot interfere with religious beliefs. Thus the motive behind the invention of the Khojki scripts by Pir Sadardin was to hide the religious text. In fact Pir Sadardin and others Pirs had various names such as Sadardin, Savdev, Gurudev, that were widely acceptable among Sufi Muslim, Bhakti, and Hindus alike. Ismailis, due to *taqqiyya*, and the specific significance given to the concept of *batin* (esoteric) have shaped a community in such a way that vital importance has always been given to personal and devotional practices such as reciting ginan and *qasidas*¹²⁰. One can imagine the situation of Ismailis, where they had no choice but to hide their religious identity due to massive persecution, furthermore, to maintain their religious connection, had perhaps to change their community outlook.

Due to *taqqiyya*, many interesting developments took place, while *taqqiyya* provided a useful and pragmatic cloak in some instances; it also allowed a language and vehicle of expression through hymns and songs within the community. In some instances, since so many generations had passed, the articulation of identity had been transformed to such an extent that Sufism or

¹¹⁹ Asani, Ali, *The Ismaili Ginans as devotional literature*, 1992.

¹²⁰ Qasida is derived from Arabic language, which is the form of lyrical and devotional poetry and performance. Among Ismailis the Central Asian community members recite qasidas of various know Ismaili dais including Sayyed Shams Tabrez and Sayyedna Nasir-i-Khusraw.

an esoteric forms of Islam and Ismailism were so interlinked and intertwine, they became one and the same, such as in the case of Persia. In India and Pakistan, the matter is much more complex in that regional nuances and experiences such as in Punjab, Sind, Rajasthan, Gujarat, socio-religious contexts have significantly affected modes of expression above and beyond religious affiliation. As a result, Sufi, Hindu, Sunni, Shi'a Muslim, Sikhism, all use similar modes of poetry and singing to express complex ideas and thoughts, and as some believe, also for purposes of conversion. In the case of South Asia, I would argue that it is part and parcel of a larger cultural idiom that allows these things to happen, especially in environments in which that we would today refer to as "identity" less rigid and more fluid.



Illustration 7: Late Mukhi Juma Kassam (Multan) (Left), Sheikh Murad Ali (Talwandi) (Center), and Aziza Begum (Lahore) (Right) , 2007

In conclusion, this chapter has identified relevant contexts for an understanding of ginan and its relevance to sonic practices of performance. First, we have conceptualized the significance of hearing and reciting within the larger framework of Muslim Piety, beginning from the recitation of Quran, we discussed the concepts of *sama* (listening) and *dhikr* (remembering) and situated ginan within the wider Indo-Muslim cultural contexts. Second, we have identified that the medieval poets employed the regional mode of music

as a cultural idiom to express religious teachings in vernacular form. Third, we explored various themes and concepts, which were shared among Sufis, Ismailis and Bhaktis in a more pluralistic indigenous cultural environment, rather than in the very strict form of Arab Islam. And finally, we have explored the role of *taqqiyya* (dissimulation) in the practice of Ismaili teaching. History shows that orthodox Sunni rulers challenged Khoja Ismailis religious identities many times in the past and as a result, many times Ismailis were brutally massacred. Therefore, to secure their religious identity and also practice their faith regularly, powerful oral tools, such as songs or hymns (ginan), played a momentous role in terms of preserving the tradition in their memory for centuries. Even today one can witness that many older community members try to remember at least a large numbers of ginans by heart and use them in their daily life, and above all, it is because of the soulfulness of the tunes that passed down through the centuries. I will end this chapter with a brief quotation from an interview by late Sheikh Murad Ali from Talwandi, “I don’t know how to read and write, even my old eyes are unable to see anymore, hence I am able to sing hundreds of ginans, if I am able to recall the right tunes. Once I know the right tunes then I can sing for hours, ginan is a form of prayer to me”.¹²¹

¹²¹ The Late Juma Mukhi Kassam, Multan, I interviewed him during my visit in 2007.

Chapter Three

Musical and Poetic Contexts of Ismaili Ginan

“Play the spiritual instrument of the dhikr (remembrance) given by the true guide within your being and adorn your thought with it.

Sing without mouth, hear without the ear and play the rhythm without the hands.

Play the rhythm on pakhvaj¹²², mridang¹²³ and keep on praising without the tongue”.¹²⁴

Over the centuries South Asia have played host to a variety of religious groups, each with its own unique musical expressions, practices and beliefs. The close cultural proximity of these religions promoted an increasing exchange of ideas and influences. Nowhere is this interchange and amalgamation of belief more apparent than in the devotional poetry and music historically produced and continuously practiced among various communities. Blends of various indigenous expressions through various vernacular styles of poems, so-called Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh beliefs permeate these devotional songs in such a way that the messages goes beyond the boundaries of one particular faith – the emphasis shifts to the essential nature of love and devotion.

The intimate connection between words and melody is still a living reality in the consciousness of the people in Indo-Pakistan. Devotional poems are hardly read but always sung, or at least chanted. Owing to the fact that the entire community of South Asia is rooted in religion, the circumstance that such an

¹²² *Pakhawaj* is essentially a north Indian version of the *mridangam* and is the most common north Indian representative of the class of barrel shaped drums known as *mridang*.

¹²³ *Mridang* or *mridangam* is two-sided drum; it is usually longer than the dholak and is considered to be one of the oldest instruments. The left side is larger and coated with material, even wet flour in the most basic instruments, to produce the heavier sound.

¹²⁴ Begum, Imam Syeda, “Eji Hardam Japo Pirshah nu jap”, vol. 2, 2007, pp 175-176.

overwhelming number of vernacular songs give expression to religious and mystical feelings will cause little surprise.¹²⁵

Rethinking Musical Categories

It is common practice in the study of any musical tradition to categorize it in the few known ways available to the field. Is *ginan* based on folk tradition or on classical music? Does it belong to semi-classical or popular traditions? What are the criteria used to explain the above-mentioned terms? Sometimes these modern categories are not entirely useful to completely comprehend the medieval poetry of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, or perhaps these categories were not as important during the time of their inception, or sometimes we use modern tools to discover ancient cultures, a practice which may or may not be fully justified.

Dividing Indo-Pakistani music into various categories is a standard practice that has its own classificatory utility. At the same time, the divisions this practice creates are debatable. As argued by scholars like the late Nazir Jirazbhoy, Edward O. Henry, Gordon Thompson, Carol Babiracki, Regula Qureshi and Amy Catlin, this distinction between folk and classical, and devotional and light classical, is perhaps the result of Western scholarship and colonization. This applies particularly to the Western division between classical, popular, devotional and folk music. Indeed, the boundary between classical and folk, or other categories such as tribal, *lok or desi* (folk), devotional, semi-classical and others overlap so much with classical and light classical and particularly devotional music that defining each one separately is problematic.

For example, there are many classical ragas that were inspired by folk tunes such as the *rag ahir* (a melody named after a tribe), *raga kanda* (a tune named after Karnataka, Kanada region), *raga jaunpuri* (a melody named after the

¹²⁵ Bake Arnold, "Indian Folk-Music" 1936, p 69.

town of Jaunpur), *raga gujari* (a famous tune from Gujarat), *raga desh* (which means country, and refer to the folk song of Rajasthan), *raga pahari* (the foothills of the Himalayas in the north west), *raga mand* (folk tune from Rajasthan) to name a few.¹²⁶ Another example is *raga Sindhi bhairvi*, a traditional melodic pattern of Sind resembling the ancient *raga bhairavi* and based on the ancient *sur*¹²⁷ of *marui*,¹²⁸ found in *Shah-jo-Risalo*, which was used to sing the folk epic *Umar Marui*. This melody pattern has recently found its way into classical music, specifically Sindhi *raga bhairvi*.¹²⁹ Furthermore, some of the earlier folk instruments that still play a major part in local traditions, such as Sarangi (Rajasthan and Sind), Bansuri (Indo-Pakistan flute, found in almost every region), and the hammered Santoor (a Kashmiri zither) have been established as classical instruments in their own right.¹³⁰ Therefore, one can perhaps argue that the classical music is not based on strict rules of framework, but continues to draw upon from various sources of regional, indigenous and local traditions. Likewise the devotional music continues to draws from Hindustani ragas and many other local and regional influences.

Exploring various ways into Ginanic music

a) Ginan manuscripts and their connection with music:

How can one explore the musical and poetic structures of ginan? As we know, ginans have been sung throughout the centuries, have always been performed both in a liturgical as well as non-liturgical contexts. Therefore, one can argue that musical structure such as both rhythm and melodic mode, which are already embedded in the way the poetry was initially composed. In that case the “message” which is the poetry, and the “medium” a sonic structure or musical patterns are not separable. Thus, in trying to understand the ‘potential

¹²⁶ Catlin, Amy, “Folk Music” *South Asian Folklore*, 2003, p.208. Also see the article by Ken Hunt and Simon Broughton, “Folk and Advasi Music”, 2000.

¹²⁷ The compilation of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai’s poetry was composed in a specific form of music called “*Sur*” music.

¹²⁸ The “*Umar marui*” is a very famous folk epic of Sind region, Pakistan.

¹²⁹ Baloch Aziz, “Spanish Cante Jondo and its Origin in Sindhi Music”, 1981, p. 36.

¹³⁰ Hunt Ken and Broughton Simon, “Folk and Adivasi Music: everything is left behind”, 2000, p. 94.

intent of the ginan performers' and the 'tradition of singing ginans', a knowledge of the literary forms is required by which the Khoja Ismaili express themselves. "Ginans are intended to be chanted aloud according to prescribed ragas (melodies) and folk tunes. Singing ginans, alongside the performance of ritual prayers, is one of the mainstays of worship service in the mornings and evenings when community congregates in the *jamatkhanas* for prayers. Memorization of at least a few ginans and their tunes constitutes an essential part of the religious education of Khoja Ismaili children".¹³¹

Upon carefully exploring the range of manuscripts available in the catalogues of Ismaili ginan, it is difficult to find the names of the ragas/modes/sur/tunes mentioned in the ginans. Very few Harvard collections of manuscripts mentioned the musical description of ginan, such as garbi ginan, which is not the raga of any musical system but one of the categories of Gujarati regional music, and is mostly accompanied by a rhythm cycle of 6:8 suited for Garaba dance. Another example from the Harvard manuscript collection is the ginan "*Gure kadhi che paval*" which is also a garbi ginan, but it was categorized under raga *thal/dhal*.¹³²

After meticulously studying the Hindustani musical system, I could not retrieve any raga under the above-mentioned name. However, if one studies the regional Gujarati musical tradition called *dhal*, which has its own separate system of music and that sometimes is influenced by Hindustani ragas as well as regional tunes, perhaps one would realize that the term *dhal* used in the manuscript is derived from the regional music of Gujarat. The word *dhal* also means "*dhun*" or tune. Gordon R. Thompson's research on the *dhal* music of Gujarat revealed some answers concerning the same issues. According to

¹³¹ Asani, A. S. *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia*, 2002, p 27

¹³² Asani, A. S, *The Harvard collection of Ismaili literature in Indic languages : a descriptive catalog and finding aid*, 1992, p. 329.

Thompson, the traditional musicians of Gujarati-speaking Western India use several terms to describe melody, with each word referenced by its context.

The words “*dhun*” (tune) and “*raga*” are common in many parts of northern India and are part of the vocabulary of almost all professional musicians in Gujarat. While the word “*dhun*” implies to a fixed tune, a number of prominent instrumentalists in the Hindustani classical music have created raga-like interpretations called “*dhuns*” based upon regional tunes.¹³³ The term “*dhal*” (melody) seems to be specific to Gujarati-speaking people. The *dhal* tradition seems closely tied to the Hindu devotional singing of *bhajans*, hymns that are commonly sung communally, but which are also vehicles for solo performance like *ginans*. Some *dhals* are specified for particular days and times such as *sandhya* (evening) and *parabhat* (morning). Again, the same criteria apply to the recitation of *ginans*. Theoretically Thompson’s explanation of *dhal* music from Gujarat shows some of its similarities with the Ismaili *ginans*.

According to anthropologist Susan Wadely, “The North Indian folksong genres with which I am familiar almost always have distinct textural and melodic patterns. Song genres are melody-specific (songs are based on single melody)”.¹³⁴ As far as *ginans* are concerned, it is extremely difficult to say that *ginans* are only based on one form of musical system of Indo-Pakistan. Similarly, some other *ragas* are also mentioned in the manuscripts such as *ginan Dasavatar*, on the top of that manuscript, it is indicated that it should be sung in the *raga* “*kedara*” or “*kedaro*”.¹³⁵ In the Hindustani classical *ragas*, one *raga* is called “*kedar*” but not “*kedara*” or “*kedaro*”. Interestingly, Shah Abdul Latf Bhitai (18 C.E) in his *Shah Jo Rasalo* had used his composition in “*sur*

¹³³ For example see Vilayat Khan, Imran Khan, Bismillah Khan’s “*Chaiti Dhun*”, 1967, and Shankar, Ravi, and Alla Rakha, *Sound of the Sitar*, (Lp), 1966, for more information see, Thompson Gordon R, “What’s in a Dhal? Evidence of Raga-Like Approaches in a Gujarati Musical Tradition”, Fall 1995.

¹³⁴ Wadley, Susan, “Folk Literature in Karimpur” 1991, p 215.

¹³⁵ Sabzwari, Shams, *Dasa Avatara* MS 25 folio 249, mentioned, “*raga Khedharo mein bolaje*” (sing in *raga* *Kedaro*). Also see G. Khaki paper on in *Sindh Through Centuries*, p.43

kedaro". The poetic theme is based on Imam Hussein's martyrdom, and is similar to the Shia Ithna Ashri tradition of *marsia*.

It is noted here that *Dasa Avatar* ginan also used to be performed as a part of Ismaili death ceremony,¹³⁶ so one can imagine that *sur kedaro* or *raga kedaro* carries *rasa* (*bhav*, emotions or feelings) which are intense or emotional or *soz* (used to express pain), for a specific occasion. According to Regula Qureshi, *raga kedara* or *sur kedaro* is derived from folk epics and later became an integral part of Indian classical music.¹³⁷ Furthermore, some other references are also made in manuscripts such as in the Harvard Collection "*raga dohoro, raga cal, cal valan, raga calti, raga dhal* (mentioned in various places), *vivano ginan, satgurno, dhol, jhankar, garbi raga*."¹³⁸ After cautiously examining the above-mentioned names of *ragas*, it was almost impossible to match any of these categories with existing Hindustani classical ragas; nevertheless, one can believe that they are perhaps various regional expressions of musical styles.

John Gumperz, a linguist, expressed a similar view about the Indian village music systems. "The village system, however, is much more limited (than classical Indian music). Melodies as a rule are few and well known and rarely present a new esthetic experience. Ragas are usually associated with certain themes: the *holi rag* or the *biaahi rag* sung at weddings is associated with festivals, the *malhar* is sung in the rainy season; the *shair* is suitable for love themes, the *ragni* for ballads, and the bhajan for devotional songs".¹³⁹

Gumperz's examples clearly show that the word 'raga' in the vernacular is often used in a very loose manner, which has perhaps more to do with the occasion and ritual rather than Hindustani classical music.

¹³⁶ The *Das avatar ginan* has been discontinued for recital within the Khoja Ismaili rituals.

¹³⁷ Qureshi Regula, "Music and Culture in Sind", 1981, p. 240.

¹³⁸ Asani, A. S, *The Harvard collection of Ismaili literature in Indic languages : a descriptive catalog and finding aid*, 1992, Pp. 328-329, 338-341.

¹³⁹ Gumperz, John, "Religion and Social Communication in Village North India", 1964, p. 94.

Moreover, there is another very important old ginan manuscript based on a collection of almost one thousand small and large ginan manuscripts that were systematically catalogued by Mrs. Zawahir Moir, while she was working at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, UK. According to this large collection of manuscripts, there was only a handful manuscript, perhaps just two to three, in which one can find the hint of *ragas*.¹⁴⁰ For example, MS 25, folio 132, and MS 31, folio 46 have the ginan Das Avatara of Pir Sadardin and the description of music contains “*Raga Sobh mein bolaje*” (sung in *raga Sobh*, *sobh* also means morning).¹⁴¹

b) Prabhatio or Subuh Sadiq jo (morning), Sandya or Sanji jo (evening)

Ginans:

The question comes to mind then, as to what kind of musical system Ismailis have followed to keep the tradition of singing ginans alive for centuries? How were devotees able to retain the correct tunes of the ginan? As we know music in South Asia is a part of an oral tradition, especially the devotional music, where devotees memorize hundreds of tunes by heart, one can argue that some methodologies must have been in place for centuries to retain the musical features of ginan. To answer these questions, first of all, we need to go back to the manuscripts and see what other footprints and signs are available pertaining to the music of ginan. During my research, I was able to find other important clues, which were widely mentioned in the manuscripts and these processes are being used even today, both as a daily part of ritual and as communal performance.

As we know, ginan was used as a vehicle of esoteric religious knowledge, and one of its main functions was to be recited within its liturgical and ritual

¹⁴⁰ A special thank to Moir, Zawahir, a series of interviews was taken with her, and she has kindly shared valuable information related to the *ragas* and the manuscripts of the Ismaili ginan. Noorally, Zawahir, A Catalogue of the Khojki Manuscripts in the Library of the Institute of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1985.

¹⁴¹ For the manuscripts where the *ragas* are indicated for specific ginans, see Catalogue, MS.25, fols. 132 and 249, and MS. 31, fol. 54. Noorally, Zawahir, A Catalogue of the Khojki Manuscripts in the Library of the Institute of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1985.

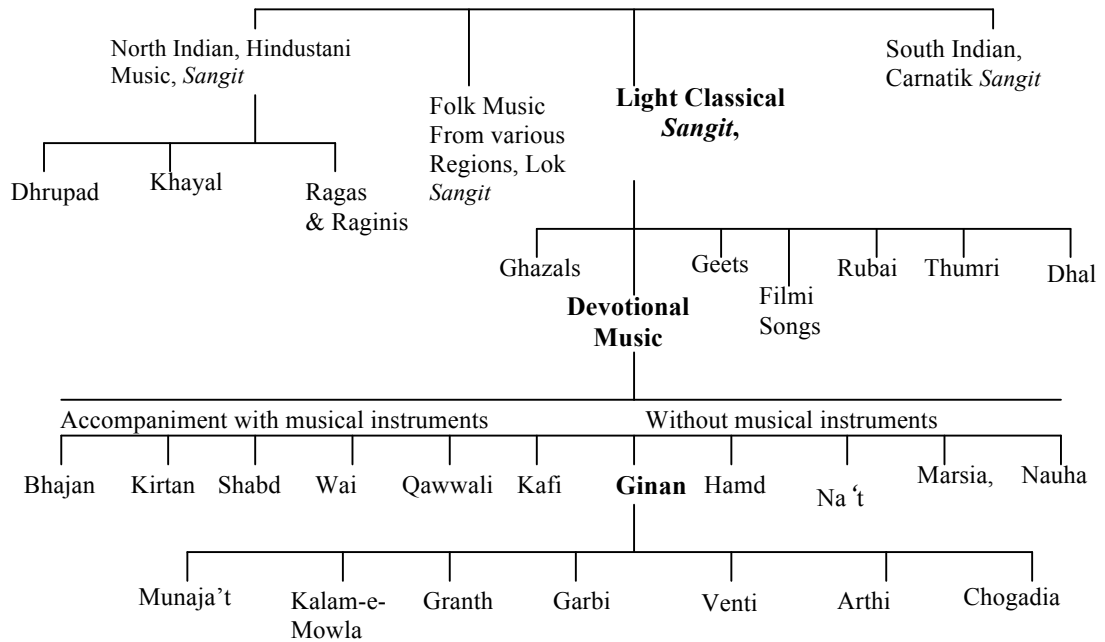
context. Therefore, a large number of manuscripts show specific time of performance based on its ritual function, such as “*Prabhatio ginan*” (early morning ginan) or “*Subuhja ginan*” (morning ginans) and *Sandya or Sanji jo (evening) Ginans*, because these are the two specific times allocated to Ismaili ritual ceremony that takes place in *Jamatkhana*.

“Some ginans, it seems are associated with ragas appropriate to the time of the day they are meant to be sung. Thus ginans – such as the genre of the *prabhatiya* intended for recitation early in the morning are likely to be sung in morning ragas. Though some ginan text, both manuscript and printed, indicate the particular *raga* for a composition, for the most part the *ragas* of the ginans are transmitted orally. As a consequence, there may be several melodic variations for a particular ginan, often differing from one geographical region to another”.¹⁴²

Interestingly, the same system can be found in other regional and religious communities such as Gujarat’s devotional music of *dhal*, and Sikh’s *Shabad*, as they both contain hymns, mainly based on their ritual performances and liturgical context. To further support this analysis, ginans have also been categorized according to specific rituals, although we do not know whether this methodology is a recent phenomenon or an ancient one. But, we do know that almost all the handwritten manuscripts have witnessed this method of classification of ginan according to specific rituals, such as “*Abe-Shafa nu ginan*” (water for cure ginan), *Akharatno ginan* (Life after death ginan), *Khushali ginan* (special celebratory occasions ginan).¹⁴³ Now, that one could determine that analyzing ginan based on only one musical category can be seriously problematic, because as in most of the ginan manuscripts, emphasis is on the ritual context and time of performance, and music itself is rarely mentioned. Thus, I argue, one cannot retrieve ginan musical connection in referring to only one form of the musical system.

¹⁴² Asani, A. S. *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia*, 2002, p. 40.

¹⁴³ Asani, A. S, *The Harvard collection of Ismaili literature in Indic languages : a descriptive catalog and finding aid*, 1992, pp. 569-582.

Table 2: **Indo- Pakistan Musical Categories**

c) Rag Mala: Garland of Ragas (tunes)

Apart from the above-mentioned musical system based on ritual context, one can also find another significant musical system within the gnan manuscripts. In fact after the compilation of five volumes of Khojki Gnan by Lalji Bhai Devraj, he also published a brief book in Khojki script entitled “*Rag Mala*” (garland of ragas), which was later translated in Gujarati. The first publication was in 1905 by Devraj, which briefly mentioned a few symbols and signs related to the tunes of *granth* (longer gnan).¹⁴⁴ The Gujarati edition was kept in the same order but in the footnotes those signs are given with more explanation. The main purpose behind publishing this book was to inform its reader about the tunes of longer gnan that are called *granth*s. The system of

¹⁴⁴ Laljibhai Devraj formed a Text-Book Committee to provide textbooks to students. Master Hashim Bogha and Manji Ghulam Hussain assisted him in his initiative. Master Hashim Bogha published “Ragmala” in 1906 to enable the students to learn the *raga* of the gnan. Also see, Tajddin, Mumtaz Ali Sadik Ali, 2003, p 281.

retaining gnan within the community is called the *jodilo ginans*, those *ginan* that are combined together on the basis of their melodic modes and poetic themes.

Lalji Bhai Devraj's gave a brief description in the preface of *Rag-Mala* indicating a few known granths ginans and how they should be sung according to various symbols. The systems of symbols were adopted to demonstrate the *jodilo* (stock tunes) patterns of gnan.

Some of the important symbols are as follows:

- 1) *
- 2) +
- 3) **
- 4) ++
- 5) ::
- 6) x x
- 7) ==
- 8) **++

A few examples are as follows:

* *Ginan Anant Akhado* and *Anant na Nau Chuga* have that symbol, that means both ginans should be sung in a same tune.

** ++ *Ginan Moman Citvarni*, *Moman citavani*, *Saloko moto* and *Saloko nano* should be sung in a same tune.

= *Ginan Bujh Niranjani*, *Candhrabhan vel*, *Surbhan vel*; *Satveni moti*, *Satveni nani*, *Si-harfi*, *Satveni ni vel*, *Satvarani vadi*, *Satsamjani vadi*, all of them are mentioned under the same symbol and should be sung according to the similar *jodilo* (stock) tune.

++ *Ginan Brahm Prakash*, and *So Kriya* should be sung in a similar tune.

Ginans are rarely titled; the first line of the poem mostly identifies them. The main reason behind publishing this book, *Raga-mala* was to provide significant details regarding the tunes of longer *granth*s to the community so this tradition could be continuously transmitted for generations to come. Interestingly, as the title of the book is *Ragmala* one would wonder whether this book would contain information regarding the known system of Hindustani classical or folk music, such as that found in Shah Latif's work titled 'Shah jo Risalo' or Sikh scriptures 'Guru Granth Sahab'. However none of the information related to the standard music system is available except to show a sample of each *granth* ginans and under its *jodilo* (parallel or ginan employing stock tunes) categories.

The idea of having the *jodilo* tunes can also be seen in other traditions. In fact using the common tunes to un-common poetry is a standard practice and even today can be seen in the Indo-Pakistan musical scene. The main purpose of having *jodilo* ginan especially for the longer *granth* could be so that the reciters would easily memorize, learn and perform together in a communal setting. One also needs to know that some of the titles of these long *granth*s such as *Bujh Niranjan*, *Soloko Moto*, *Girbha vali* are based on deep mystical themes and in the past they were even considered equal to some the main religious scriptures such as *Puranas*, *Vedas* (Hindu scriptures) and even the Quran. In fact, because of their high spiritual significance the community members have religiously written them down for centuries, which still gain immense satisfaction from the preservation of this wonderful tradition.

As far as the *Jodilo* ginans is concerned, I remember a few years ago, I asked Zarina Kamaluddin from Karachi, "What are the methodologies you have used to find tunes for all 600 hundred ginans"? Were you able to find the tunes for all of them? She replied, "No after searching for ginan tunes for a while, I was

only able to find tunes for about 200 ginans”. Then, I asked further. But you have recorded about 600 ginans, so where were you able to find tunes? What were the methodologies you used to compose new ginan tunes? She said, “I had discussed this idea with some of my seniors and al-waizs (missionaries), and they all agreed that, if the tunes are not available from any sources then one can use the exsisting tunes available in the ginans and apply to those which do not have tunes. Therefore, I use these existing tunes of about 200 to 250 ginans and used their existing tunes to re-compose the new ones”.¹⁴⁵ Surely, this methodology offers a new perspective on the tunes of Ismaili ginan but also opens up various issues and challenges pertaining to *ragas*, as someone can argue that perhaps tunes are available but Zarina Kamaluddin was unable to find them, or tunes are related to the emotion of the text, therefore, only those who understand the musical language and text are able to make that judgment. The idea of *jodilo* or stock tunes can also be seen in a genre called “*rasiya*” in the Braj region of Western Uttar Pardesh. Peter Manuel noted:

“There are around twenty stock melodies (*tarz, bahr, dhun*) which are common in *rasiya*, and several more which occasionally are encountered. The core melodies are used equally in all forms of *rasiya*, whether sung by village women in the courtyard, Hathrasi *akhara-bazis* (members of competitive preceptor-disciple [*guru-chela*] lineages), cassette singers, or others. The less familiar melodies are more likely to be employed in the more cultivated *rasila* or Hathrasi styles. Some of the tunes are attributed to known twentieth-century musicians, while most are of anonymous folk origin”.¹⁴⁶

As far as retaining the same tunes and changing the poetry is concerned, one can find parallel ideas in various genres of music. For instance, George Grierson, who studied Bhojpuri folk songs, suggests that each song genre was matched with a single melody. He further states that his forty-two examples of *biraha* (similar to the genre today called *khari birha*) were “all sung to the

¹⁴⁵ Interview was conducted with Kamaluddin Zarina and Muhammad Ali Kamaluddin in Summar 2005, at their residence in Garden East, Karachi.

¹⁴⁶ Manuel, Peter, “Syncretism and Adaptation in Rasiya, A Braj Folksong Genre,” 1994, p 48.

same melody,” that “every mill-song must be sung to the melody called ‘*jat sar*’,” and that “In the country districts, I never heard of a new tune being invented. There seems to be a certain stock of melodies ready made, to which the words of every new song must be fitted”.¹⁴⁷

Similar ideas can also be seen in Bulleh Shah’s famous qawwali “*Mera piya ghar aya*”¹⁴⁸ (my beloved has arrived home) tune which is so popular that many musicians have copied, and used it for their own requirements, such as in Bollywood Hindi cinema one can hear the popular song, sung in a similar tune “*Mera piya ghar aya ho Ramji*”¹⁴⁹ (oh my beloved has arrived, however this time the God is Ramji, a Hindu God instead of the original Lalin, Sufi Saint). Another very famous Sufi folk song “*Lal meri Pat*” attributed to the 12th century Sufi Lal Shahbaz Qalandar’s tune has been used in many songs; among them Abida Parveen’s rendition is quite popular.¹⁵⁰ One can even hear the Hindu *bhajan* on this tune under the title of (*Maa Meri Pat* referred to mother Hindu Goddess Durga).¹⁵¹ Also, the popular Ismaili geet based on the same tune “*Ali Antar ma mara*” (Ali is in my soul) sung by the famous Khursheed Nurali that became very famous during the Silver Jubilee of H. H Prince Karim Aga Khan in 1982 was based on stock tune.¹⁵² The qawwali genre seems to follow the same pattern of stock tunes or jodilo tunes under the titles of ‘old’ and ‘new’ tunes, as described by Qureshi:

¹⁴⁷ Grierson, George, “Some Bhoj’ puri Folk-Songs,” 1886, pp 209-211

¹⁴⁸ This famous qawwali composed by Bulleh Shah and sung by late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan can be found in many of his cassettes and Cds, including, Khan Fateh Ali, Nusrat Ustad, “*Mera piya ghar aya*”, 2001.

¹⁴⁹ Hindi movie titled *Yaraana* (friendship), director David Dewan, Music Director Anu Malik, 1995.

¹⁵⁰ Parveen, Abida, *The Best of Abida Parveen*, India, 2003.

¹⁵¹ Bhajan from Hindi Films Vol 4, released unknown,
http://music.raag.fm/Bhakti_Sangeet/songs-10380-Bhajans_From_Hindi_Films_Vol_4-Various

¹⁵² Nurali Khursheed, East Pakistan, 1967.

“I recorded 433 performances of 261 songs with 179 different tunes....there is first of all a stock of standard tunes, most of which are associated with standard poems. This tune repertoire encompasses what Qawwals call ‘old’ tunes...In addition to the old stock repertoire there is an expanding repertoire of what are called ‘tunes of nowadays’...Nizamuddin Auliya Qawwals are always on the lookout for new tunes, ‘picking them up’ (*urana* – to snatch) from listening to performances, or, more rarely, making them up”.¹⁵³

“Sur” vs. “Raga”

Apart from the above various musical models, one also needs to see ginan repertoire and search if any information related to music is given. As far as ginan poetry is concerned, the word raga is not mentioned, various names of musical instruments are mentioned such as *pakhvaj* (drum), *mardhang* (drum), and as far as the melodic mode is concerned, the word “Sur” is used instead of raga:

*Varanan chatris sur, betali bhakhia,
Beda kane na sunan ho jire bhai*¹⁵⁴

*Though thirty-six melodies (Surs) and forty-two dialects
the deaf have no ears to hear, O brother.*

The term ‘Sur’ is slightly different than the term raga; in fact Shah Latif in his poetry used the term ‘Sur’. This term is based on more or less fixed tunes, as there are very distinctive tunes of Shah Latif poetry in which devotees perform. Also, during my field research and specifically in rural Sind and Punjab, I came across the word ‘Sur’ associated with the ginans rather than the raga, as many of my informants were able to recollect the tunes of ginans right away, and majority of them had no clue whatsoever regarding the Hindustani ragas. They were able to sing as many as three hundred ginan tunes, but if I asked them specific questions related to the Hindustani classical ragas, then they had

¹⁵³ Qureshi, Regula, B, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali*, 1995, pp. 14 and 19

¹⁵⁴ Tajdin Pir, *Ginan Sharif with Translation*, 1992, pp. 101- 102. Also see translation from Kamaluddin Zarina and Muhammad Ali Kamaluddin (compiled by), 2007, pp. 115-116. “O brother! I have said ginans in 36 musical modes and in 42 dialects, but the deaf do not hear with ears”.

no clue. One can argue that most of my informants were not trained musicians therefore they were unable to know the melodic modes of ragas. However, with the Ismaili system of retaining and performing gnan, there is no need to know about the ragas, as long as they are aware of its melodic structure based on fixed tunes, then they are able to perform them individually as well as within the *Jamatkhana* setting where the entire community participates and performs.

If we critically see the above stanza of the gnan by Pir Tajdin, we wonder why *Pir* has mentioned only 36 *Surs* but not any other number. It could be any number, since if he is talking about the Hindustani ragas, then it can be as many as a few hundred, or if he is particularly discussing about the *thaat* (parental scale) then it could be ten. As we know that Shah Latif also composed his poetry, based on 36 *Surs*. Infact, out of 36 *Surs*, 30 were used exclusively for singing Shah's own poetry, while six were used for singing other compositions, as he mentioned in his *Risalo*. Perhaps the selection of just 36 surs indicates Shah's intention to retain the symbolic continuity of the classical tradition of medieval times where there were six main ragas and 36 *raginis*.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Baloch, A. N, "Shah Abdul Latif, the founder of a new music tradition" Pakistan, p 66. Also see Nawab Ali Khan Mohammad, *Mairaf-ul-naghmat*, vol 1, year not mentioned. In ancient time the raga-ragini was aligned with 6 'male' ragas or *that* (parental ragas) each with 6 wives, raagnis, 6x6= 36.



Illustration 8: Faqir Juman Saeen, interviewed at Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai's Shrine, Bhit Shah, 2007

Situating Ginan within its Cultural Context

Before analyzing the musical modes and rhythms of Ismaili ginan, it is important to critically examine the geographical locations where Ismaili mission work took place and compare them with their regional, cultural and religious music with ginans. As we know, ginans were composed in various languages including Sindhi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Siraiki, Hindi, and there is a large collection of poems and repertoire.

The Ismaili mission work began as early as in 965 CE when Jalam b. Shayban brought to an end the dynastic rule of the Banu Sama, secured Fatimid rule in Multan, and openly proclaimed the sovereignty of al-Muizz.¹⁵⁶ For four decades (965-1005 C.E) the *khutba* (Friday sermon) in Multan was recited in the name of the Fatimid caliphs.¹⁵⁷ However, after the brutal attack of

¹⁵⁶ Stern, *Ismaili Propaganda and Fatimid Rule in Sind*, 1949, p. 301

¹⁵⁷ Al-Hamdani, Abbas, *The Beginning of the Ismaili Dawa in Northern India*, 1965, p. 3.

Mahmood Gaznavi in 1006 CE, when hundreds of Ismailis were slaughtered,¹⁵⁸ Ismailis observed dissimulation (*taqqiyya*) and migrated to al-Mansura or the southern parts of India including Sind, Rajisthan, Kutch, Katiawar and Gujarat.¹⁵⁹

The Ismaili *dawa* activity restarted in the early 12th century when the Ismaili *Pirs* came to the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and shared their messages through the musical genre called *ginan*. The first known Ismaili Pir in Indo-Pakistan subcontinent was Pir Satgur Nur, followed by a series of Pirs. The well known among them include Pir Satgur Nur, Pir Shams Sabzwari, Pir Sadradin, Pir Hasan Kabirudin and many *Sayyeds*. These Pirs adopted local cultures, languages, and musical systems and shared them in the Shia Ismaili vision of Islam through ‘*ginan*’. The *dawa* activity was mostly concentrated in Punjab, Sind, Kutch, Katiawar and Gujarat. Therefore, it is necessary to know the medieval regional and local musical systems of these areas, especially devotional music and its influences.

I have conducted detailed field research in Punjab and Sind and apart from the Ismaili Pirs’ shrines (Pir Shams in Multan, Pir Sadardin and Pir Hasan Kabiruddin (Uch Sharif) as well as in local Ismaili communities; I have also conducted intense field research in the local Sufi shrines of these areas and studied their rich music including Shah Inayat, Bulleh Shah, Shah Rukn-e-Alam, Bahuddin Zikaria Multani, Maadu Lal, Shah Hussain, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, Gardezi Pak, Hazrat Data Ganj Baksh. After carefully studying the poetic and musical meters of the above-mentioned poets and also attending their ritual ceremonies and performances, I have found various parallel themes and musical similarities with *ginans*.

¹⁵⁸ Muhammad Nazim, *The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna*, 1931, and C. Bosworth, *The Ghaznawids*, 1963, p. 52. A reference to the massacre is also to be found in al-Baghadadi, *Moslem Schisms and Sects*, 1953, p. 130.

¹⁵⁹ Hamdani, Abbas, *The Beginning of the Ismaili dawa in Northern India*, 1956 pp.7-8, and also Stern, S, M, *Ismaili Propaganda and Fatimid rule in Sind*, 1949 p. 303

In this section, I would like to explore poetic and musical systems of the above-mentioned areas and their similarities with the gnan tradition. The Sindhi poetical meters are different from the Persian one called “Chand Vidya” which is connected to the musical system of Sind. Therefore, most of these compositions are mostly performed with the rhythm. There are three forms of musical styles well known in Sindhi and Punjabi devotional poetry, namely *Bait*, *Wai*, and *Kafi*, along with Garba music of Gujarat. As Ismaili history has shown, in the early phase of Ismaili *dawa*, the regions of Multan and Sind played a very significant role and later on the *dawa* was shifted more towards the Southern parts including Sind, Kutch, and Gujarat.

In fact, according to one of the Granth titled *Jannatpuri* by Sayed Imam Shah was situated in one of the earliest *Jamatkhana* in a place by the name of Kotda (perhaps it is Kotri) in Sind.¹⁶⁰ The earliest form of Sindhi language was also written in the Khojki script. Moreover, most of the major Ismaili Pirs including Pir Shams, Pir Sadardin, Pir Hasan Kabirdin, Pir Tajdin and Sayyeda Imam Begum, spent most of their *dawa* activity around Sind and Punjab regions and their tombs are witnesses of their activities. Therefore, it would be appropriate to critically analyze the poetic and musical styles of Sind, Punjab as well as Gujarat, Kutch, and Kathiawar.

Professor Abdul Jabbar Junejo, a distinguished scholar of Pakistani literature is of the view that “The study of Pir Sadr al-Din’s composition indicates that he was well versed in various prosodic forms of classical Sindhi poetry and cultural traditions of Sind. That is why his compositions are based on ‘Metric Chand System’, and the poetic tradition of Sindhi”.¹⁶¹ To further support the above argument, I have looked at the various information related to the poetic and musical aspects of Ismaili manuscripts, and I was amazed to find that some

¹⁶⁰ Imamshah Sayyed, *Jannatpuri*, Bombay, 1905, verse 84.

¹⁶¹ Junejo Jabbar Abdul, “Poetic form of Pir Sadardin”, 2001, p. 34.

of the ginan were titled under the categories of *Baits*, *Wai*, *Kafi*, *Ghazals*, *Dhal*, *Garbi*, and *Bhajans*¹⁶².

Although, many of our contemporary scholars are not aware of these poetic musical styles, if one can critically study the above styles and analyze the ginan poetry according to the mentioned styles of music, one would be admire to see the incredible contribution of Ismaili Pirs to the cultural footprints of Indo-Pakistan literature. In fact, many Pakistani historians believe that Pir Shams was among one of the first poets of Punjabi and Siriaki language, and the oldest *Kafi*, *Wai* and *Bait* poet and musician. In the following section, I will demonstrate various indigenous styles of poetry and music including those of the Sind, Punjab and Gujarat regions and will show how these ginans were set according to their highly sophisticated and developed system of vernacular literature.

Bait

Bait literally means *kalam* or devotional poem. It is a poetical form and follows the combination of both Persian and Hindi poetical systems as it takes the Hindi *doha* system as well as regional poetry system of Sind. According to Aga Saleem, both Persian and Hindi *dohas* follow the strict rules of poetic meters of each line and stanza. However in Sindhi *Bait* the musical meters are more important than poetry, and one can easily see that some of the lines are not balanced according to their poetic meters. However, when someone performs, it does fit appropriately with the poetry. Specialized training is required to sing *Bait*, which is mostly based on indigenous tunes. None of the rhythmic instruments are used while performing *Bait*, drone instruments including tanbura¹⁶³ or tanpura are used. A similar idea is used in the Indian classical

¹⁶² The following terms can be seen both in the Harvard collection as well as the Institute of Ismaili Studies collection.

¹⁶³ According to the Sindhi culture the tanbura was invented by Shah Latif, which has five main strings. It looks very close to Tanpura however, it is bigger in size and also it used both to play melody as well as drone.

alap (improvisation at the beginning), or Qawwali *alap* (the first part of the qawwali), and *Venti* Ginans, which are full of intensity and sublime devotion and hardly performed with any rhythmic instruments.

A famous *Venti* “*Eji hun re piyasi*” by Mera Sayyed Khan is also based on *Bait* meters. Also ginan “*Eji Nur vera Nur Piyo*” by Pir Sadardin which often recited during the *gatpat* (water for cure) ceremony is based on the *bait* meters; See the example below:

*Eji nur vera nur piyu, kariu man **anand ji***
*Pop vera rakho shah, pir sun **samband ji***

Refrain

*Tame jago jago bahiran, rahen viya **niya ji***
*Tame cheto momin **bahi ji**, rahen viya **niya ji***¹⁶⁴

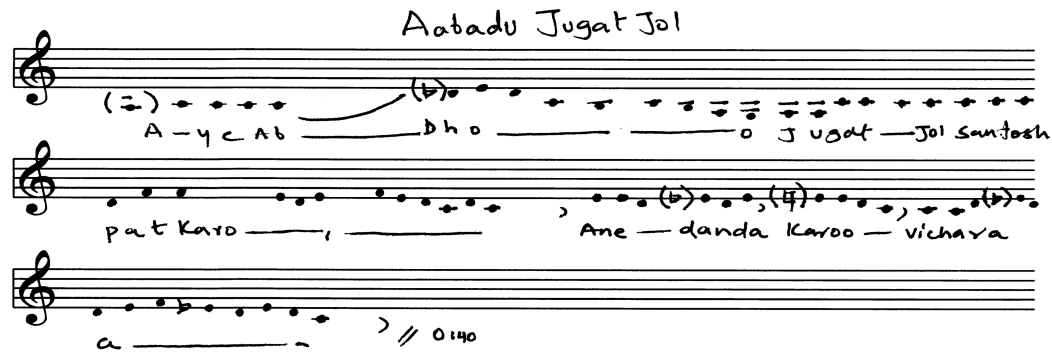
Translation: O brother! Obtain light in the morning and bring happiness in your heart and establish relation with your Lord in the early hours of the morning. O brother! Awake! The night is coming to end, O momin¹⁶⁵! Watch out! The night is coming to end.¹⁶⁶

Other examples based on the *Bait* meters include the munajat, *Ya Ali khub majalis*, *Eji Navroz na din* by Seyed Fateh Ali Shah, and “*Abadu*” by Pir Shams.

¹⁶⁴ Sadardin, Pir, *Ginans: With English Translation and Glossary*, 2007, p. 39.

¹⁶⁵ A word momin means a pious and devoted Muslim or devoted Muslim.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p.40.



Transcription 1: Sabzwari Shams Pir, “Abadu Jugat jol”, sung by the late Al-waiz Shamsuddin Haji Bandali, 1984

Ginan: *Abadhu Jugat jol santoash patra karo, ane danda karo vichar; Khamiya dayaki doe mundra pahero, Ginan karjo achar*

Translation: O saint (ascetic)! Make the methods of Bandagi your pouch, contentment your vessel and thoughts your staff. Adorn the earrings of forgiveness and compassion, and make knowledge your food.¹⁶⁷

Although so far most of the ginanic scholars have shown only *dohas* (couplet), *chopai* (four lines poems) in the wide collection of ginanic literature, there are so many unique poetic and musical patterns used in the large repertoire of ginan; this indicate that they were heavily influenced by the regional and cultural environment.

Wai

Wai is one of the oldest forms of Sindhi poetry, the word “*Wai*” means “utterance” similar to the Arabic word “*qawl*” which reminds us of another devotional genre called qawwali. It is interesting to note that the *Wai* may have some connection with the Hindu *Vani*¹⁶⁸ or *Bani* as they are all meant to be sung in a devotional context, expressing a longing and yearning for the

¹⁶⁷ Sabzwari, Shams, Pir, *Ginan with English Translation*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁶⁸ Asani, A. S. *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia*, 2002.

Supreme Being. *Wai*'s poetical structure is unique as it is based on a one-line poem. It is divided into two parts, the end of the one-part is based on rhyme, and no rhyme is used at the end of second line. However, refrain is used right after the end of second part to continue the song so that the refrain repeats each time at the end of each line. *Wai* is closely connected with the musical mode, as it is often performed musically. An example of *Wai* is as follows:

Aye megh malhar, mei rangoon chez yadhani
Kalay badratan par dhapey, barsun laaga yaar
*mei rangoon chez yadhani*¹⁶⁹

If we use the above-mentioned example and apply to one of the very famous *ginan* by Sayyeda Imam Begam's famous *ginan Aye rahem, rehman*, we would see that it falls under the category of *Wai*:

Ae rahem raheman, ab tu rahem karoge
 1) *Eji, tan man dhan guru arapan kije, tu ginane ginane ginan*
 Refrain:
Ab tu rahem karoge
 2) *Eji daan sakhavat har-dam kije, to dane dane dan*
 Refrain:
*Ab tu rahem karoge*¹⁷⁰

Translation

Refrain: Should mercy touch You, Kindly Lord,
 Will You now mercy show?
 1. O, if all I have I give the Guide,
 His knowledge helps me know.
 2. O, for those who ever freely give,
 His gifts will overflow.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Saleem, Aga, "Risala Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai with Urdu Translation", 2000, p. 19.

¹⁷⁰ Shackle Christopher, Moir Zawahir, *Ismaili Hymns From South Asia: An Introduction To The Ginans*, 1984, p. 24.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 24.

NADIM AMIR ALI GĪNAN: AYE RAHEMAN, (Raga Mishra Kafi)

Pakhto tala

A - Ye - Raheman Rahe ma - na

a - ba to - Raheman - Ka - ro - ge

A - Ye - Rahe man Raheman

Eji ta-na mana dhana Guva Ku

Ara - pa - na Ki - je

Tan a ma-na dhana Guva Kun

A - va - pana Ki - je

to gi - na - ne gi - na - ne gi na - ne

a - ba - to ya - he man Ka ro - ge

A - Ye - Rahe - man Rahe man

Transcription 2: Begum Imam, Sayyeda, "Aye Reheman", sung by Nadim Amir ali, an example of *Wai* musical genre of Sind, 1998.

It is not a coincidence that the above ginan “Ae Rahem Rehman” follows the same meter as Sindhi *Wai*, as Sayyeda Imam Begum, who was born in Kutch around 1785 CE, spent most of her life in Sind, and died in Karachi at around 1860 CE. She was an accomplished player of Sarangi (bow instrument) and used to accompany herself while performing ginan. She was the last known family member of *Kadiwal Sayyed* (lineage connected to the chain of *Pirs*), who was entitled to compose ginans. There is no doubt that she must have been influenced by the regional and local musics of Sind and she used this poetic and musical form in her ginans. “It is difficult to determine whether *Pirs* who composed the ginans were also responsible for setting them to music or whether this was the task of disciples”.¹⁷² Asani further states “Tradition, however informs us that at least one composer of ginans the woman saint *Sayyeda Imam Begam* (1866) was familiar with Indian music as well as an accomplished player of the ‘Sitar’ and ‘Sarangi’”.¹⁷³ Zawahir Moir and Christopher Shackle both agreed that “Although we have not considered it to lie with our competence to describe the musical tradition associated with the ginans here, it may be noted in passing that Imam Begam (d. 1866 A.D) herself was a noted singer of ginans, though she incurred official disapproval for her use of instrumental accompaniment.”¹⁷⁴

Other ginans which can also fit within the similar patterns and framework of *Wai* include “*Satgur milya mune aaj*”, “*Eji hardam karo abhias*”, “*Eji marna hai re zaroor*” by Imam Begum “*Ab teri Muhabbat lagi*” by Pir Shams, “*Tariye tu taran*” by Pir Sadardin, “*Eji satana sarovar*” by Pir Sadardin, “*Eji moman man*” by Pir Hasan Kabirudin, “*Eji aval tun hi*” by Pir Sadardin. Although one can argue that many of the above-mentioned ginan are based on *doha* poetical meter, however, after carefully examining some of these ginans, in the way they are performed, the musical structure and the use of tunes are

¹⁷² Asani, A. S. *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia*, 2002, p.40.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p.40.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p.40.

deeply connected with the musical rhymes and rhythms. In fact, both *Wai* and *Bait* forms can be found in many of the ginans, especially in the case of repetition of refrain after every stanza as it provides logical musical rhymes. The ginan *Ae Raheman* was composed in raga Kafi and Rupak (7 beat) cycle, however, its performance style is entirely based on Sindhi *Wai*. According to Ghulam Ali Allana, “Pir Sadr al-Din composed some of his ginans in more than one hundred stanzas. The second line of the first stanza, the refrain of every ginan is repeated after every new stanza, as it happens in the forms of ‘*Wai*’, ‘*Kafi*’ or ‘*Jhulna*’.”¹⁷⁵

Kafi

Kafi is the most popular form of singing style in both Sind and Punjab. The word ‘*Kafi*’ has resemblance to the Hindustani raga *Kafi*. However, it is not the same melodic mode as used in Hindustani raga; it is a completely different style of music based on regional musical and poetic meters. The word *Kafi* is derived from the Arabic term “*qawafi*” which means rhymes; it is certainly true that the *Kafi* fairly bristles with rhymes.¹⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that in Punjab the musical style of *Wai* is also called *Kafi* and both are sung in a similar way. However in Sind, *Wai* and *Kafi* are two separate forms of musical and poetic styles and are sung in a different way. Most of the *Kafis* contain the messages of God, Prophet Mohammad, Hazrat Ali and Auliya-din (Sufi saints), and therefore many times the *Kafi* performers are called *Zikirs* (the Arabic word ‘*dhikr*’ means remembrance). During the time of Mughal emperor Akbar, *Kafi* was very popular. Abu al-Fazl wrote in his *Ayen-e-Akbari* that the rags of Sind is *Kafi*:

“In Dakan people sing in *Chand*, in Talanga and Karnataka sing in *Dhoro*, in Bangal they sing in *Bangla*, in Jonpur *Catkla*, in Delhi *Qawl* and *Taranas* are popular, in Mithra *Bashn Pad*, in Agra *Dharpa* is famous, around Lahore *Chand* is quite known, in

¹⁷⁵ Allana A. G, *Ismaili Movement in Sindh, Multan and Gujarat*, 2010, p. 302.

¹⁷⁶ Shackle, Christopher, *Fifty Poems of Khawaja Farid*, 1983, xiii.

Gujarat *raga Zikri* and in Sind *raga Kami (Kafi)* is popular in which divine love is shared”.¹⁷⁷

Here once again we can see the term “raga” is used in a very general form; and it does not mean the Hindustani mode of raga, rather the specific type or genre of music.

Aga Saleem in his introduction to his monumental Urdu work on Shah Abdul Latif poetry noted that:

“When Ismaili *dais* (missionaries) came to Sind they used Indic Hindu metaphors to propagate the essential messages of the faith of Islam, and carefully chose vernacular languages to compose a vast repertoire called Ginan. If we carefully analyze the poetical meters of Pir Sadardin’s ginan, we would know that they are mostly based on *Kafi* style. Instead of Persian poetical forms, they are essentially written in musical and rhythmic meters of Sind. These ginans used to be sung in various tunes and even today *Kafis* are sung in various forms of ragas”.¹⁷⁸

The last line of each verse always has the same rhyme as the refrain. Since rhyme has such an important place in the formal scheme of the *Kafi*, according to Dr. Gullam Ali Allana:

“Pir Sadr al-Din was the most prominent Sufi and *dai* of Satpanth tradition of the Nizari Ismaili *Tariqa*. He also composed ginans in great numbers in the same prosodic form, i. e. in the form developed by Pir Shams, which was later known as ‘Kafi’ and ‘Jhulna’ in the vernaculars of the regions where he preached the Satpanth tradition of the Nizari Ismaili *Tariqa*. Other *Pirs* and *Sayyeds* who followed *Pir Sadr al-Din* also composed ginans in the same form which is now known as *Kafi*”.¹⁷⁹

Professor Junejo further supports his ideas and said:

“Pir Sadr al-Din composed his ginans in ‘*doha*’ and other varieties. Not only this, but some of his compositions are based on Sindhi-

¹⁷⁷ Saleem Aga, *Risala Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai*, 2000, p 24

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 24

¹⁷⁹ Allana A. G, *Ismaili Movement in Sind, Multan and Gujarat*, 2010, p.302.

Punjabi popular form ‘Kafi’. This poetic form is well connected with Indian classical music. The starting stanza is called ‘*Thalh*’ and the rest ‘*Band*’. ‘*Thal*’ (the starting stanza) is repeated after every ‘band’. Thus, this is a unique contribution by Pir Sadr al-Din, because the ‘Kafi’ is not mentioned in the history of Sindhi literature till 17th century A.D. For instance Pir Sadr al-Din’s popular ginan in “*Eji Uthi Allah*” is in the form of *Kafi*”. Dr. Junejo further said: “This ginan contains about five ‘bands’ and each band is of two stanzas, which is followed by *thaat* (the starting band) repeatedly (refrain). This is a ‘*Kafi*’. This also can be compared to ‘*Thumri*’ in classical music. Many more ginans and ‘*Ventis*’ are composed in this form. It is evident from the composition of the Ismaili *dai* that ‘*Venti*’ is also a popular form of expression. So far as singing is concerned, the position of ‘*Venti*’ is same as ‘*Wai*’ in Shah jo Risalo”.¹⁸⁰

Some historians trace back the history of Kafi tradition to the famous Sufi saint Bahuddin Zakria Multani, *Zikiris* used to sing Kafis in his spiritual *Sama*. However, we do not have any historical proof. Pir Shams Sabzawari was contemporary to the Bahauddin Zakaria Multani, has composed many ginans in the Kafis forms, which are still sung by the Khoja Ismailis in their ritual practice. Please see below Pir Shams’ famous ginan *Eji uncha thi Aayu* in Sindhi/Siraiki language, in popular Kafi form.

1) *Eji uncha thi aayu bande niche kiyun diavay*
Char din rehna bande jhota kiyun kamavay
Isa ra gune bande kia phal pavay
Bharme mat bhulu re bahi nami chalo marna

Refrain:

Shafaat rasul ki shafaat pegumbar ki
Jhoth su darna bahi juth su darna
*Bharme mat bhulu re bahi nami nami calna*¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Junejo Jabbar Abdul, “Poetic form of Pir Sadardin”, 2001, p. 34.

¹⁸¹ Shams, Sabzwari Pir, *Ginans: With English Translation and Glossary*, vol. 1, 2007, p. 5.

Translation:

O brother! You have come from high (an exalted place), then why incline towards the low? In this world you will live for only four days then why earn the false? What will you gain by this sin?

Refrain: O brother! Do not forget in the illusion of this world but be humble because you will have to die. (On the day of Judgement) Prophet Muhammad will intercede. Therefore, fear the false and do not forget in the illusion of this world but be humble because you will have to die.¹⁸²



Transcription 3: Sabzwari Shams, Pir, “Eji uncha thi”, sung by Al-waiz Shamsuddin Haji Bandali, Edmonton, 1984.

Other famous ginans based on Sindhi and Kafi style include “*Eji Authi Allah na gure banda*” one of the oldest and most famous Sindhi ginan by Pir Sadardin, a famous *Venti* ginan “*Eji Uuncha re kot*” by Pir Hasan Kabiruddin, “*Eji tum chet man mera*” by Sayyeda Imam Begum is in *Kafi* musical genre.

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 6.

Music as Cultural Performance

It has to be noted that the above-mentioned saints were not only great poets who have written masterpieces based on regional poetic and musical system; but also they were great performers. As tradition says that Shah Latif himself composed his poetry into various *Surs*, having taken inspiration from both existing Hindustani and folk music, and performed his poetry accompanied by Tanbur, a drone instrument. According to Elias Isqi, Shah Abdul Latif had sought the help of two specialists from Delhi to compose ragas for his *Risalo*, even now various types of *Surs* are associated with various poems. There is no doubt about whether the present mode of singing is akin to the original *Surs*, and it is thought that in the course of time, changes have taken place.¹⁸³ Even today when someone visits the shrine of Shah Latif, particularly on Thursday, they would see that various ensemble of *fakirs* (musicians ascetics) wait for their turn to pay homage through performance at the shrine. When I interviewed Fakir Sayeen Juman after his performance on Thursday evening at the shrine of Shah Latif, he stated:

“Our ancestors have understood Islam through Latif sayeen’s music, this is the music of the soul which Shah Latif has composed for us. Tanbur was the invention of Shah Latif, He is the only saint in the entire world who has not only invented the Tanbura but he was a complete musician, he is the one who has written the poetry, he is the one who has invented various tunes, and he is the one who used to accompany his instrument, wore black cloths like a faqir, and sang his own poetry to share the message of love and peace”.¹⁸⁴

Here the instrument Tanpura as a sacred instrument reminds me of the significance of “Raboob or Rubab” in the Northern areas of Pakistan and especially Tajikistan and Badakshan. Barkat Ali Mohsin, an accomplished musician, who is originally from Hunza, Northern Areas of Pakistan said:

¹⁸³ Elias Isqi, “The Music of Sind and the Risala of Shah” 1971, p. 44.

¹⁸⁴ Interviewed was conducted with Fakir Juman after his performance on Thursday evening at the shrine of Shah Latif in 2005

“Our ancestors have understood Ismaili esoteric teachings through qasidas accompanied with the sounds of Rubab, which we play at homes and used to play inside the *Jamatkhana* during the ritual ceremonies, in which we used to sing the poetry of Sayyedna Nasir-e-Khusraw and local mystical poets. As you know that formal education came to Northern Areas of Pakistan especially Hunza very recently, but before that, for centuries our ancestors have always used Rubab music as a source for remembrance and practice the Ismaili faith”.¹⁸⁵

It is not a mere coincidence that when Prince Karim Aga Khan the 49th hereditary Imam, made his official visit to Tajikistan for the first time in May 1995, the community wished to present a gift to the Imam. The first idea that came into the Badakhshani leaders’ mind was to present H. H Prince Karim Aga Khan a Badakhshani musical instrument, *Rubab*.¹⁸⁶ Soon after, a few members raised the issue of what if Hazar Imam should ask about the philosophy behind this gift. So many answered “This is an instrument that kept alive our faith for centuries and through which we were able to teach our religion”.¹⁸⁷ According to the Tajik Ismailis as well as the Northern Areas of Pakistan, the literal meaning of *Rabbob* consists of two parts, *Rab* – Lord and *Bob* – door or gate. In other words, the meaning of *Rabbob* is gate to the Lord. Otambek Mastibekov said:

“*Rabbob* was and is a sacred musical instrument and through the help of this instrument Seyyedna Nasir Khusraw and other *dais* had performed their qasidas through soulful melodies and have given us a precious gift of esoteric teaching of Ismaili faith. We recognized our beloved Imam through rabbob and qasidas. Even under the strict regime of atheist Soviet Union, we were able to carry on with our religion, not through strict rules of ritual practices or formal *Sharia* but through these songs accompanied with rabbob and duf (frame drume).”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Ali, Barkat, interview was conducted both in Karachi 2005, and in Edmonton, 2011.

¹⁸⁶ Interview was conducted with Mastibekov Otambek in Edmonton, March 2011.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid

¹⁸⁸ Ibid

Tradition claims that when Hazrat Shah Inayat was unhappy with his beloved disciple Bulleh Shah, he decided to avoid meeting with him. Bulleh Shah could not handle the pain of separation, wore ghungroos in his feet (small metallic bells strung together) and danced and performed his *Kafis* in ecstasy. A similar concept is also seen in the famous epic of separation between Rumi and Shams Tabrez. Still today, if one visits the shrine of Bulleh Shah at Kasoor will see devotees singing qawwalis, Kafis and also performing, both male and females wearing ghungroos, and dancing for hours to pay tribute to him. As said by a local singer Javeed Hasmi: “Hazrat Baba Bulleh Shah was Auliya-e-din (saint of our faith), and his *kalam* (poetry) is *Arfana* (mystical), I come (*hazri*) to every day, to pay homage to this great Islamic Sufi saint. Without these Kafis, how would we Punjabis have understood Islam?”¹⁸⁹

One of the noticeable things about Baba Bulleh Shah’s shrine as well as Shah Latif’s shrine is that on the entrance and sidewalls various *Kafis* and *Wais* are written, so whoever attends the shrine takes benefit from these spiritual poems. So much so that through Punjab and Sind, from the taxi drivers to shop owners, everyone knows the *Kafi* and *Wai* of Bulleh Shah, Khawaja Gulam Farid, Heer of Waris Shah, Shah Hussein, and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. Rehman one of the devotees of Shah Hussein said: “I used to be a very bad person. Then my father suggested that I must go to the shrine of Hazrat Shah Hussein. Since then I come to the shrine everyday and sing Murshid Faikr Saeen (Shah Hussein) *kalams*, which gives me immense peace in my heart. These *Kalams* are always sung, they are priceless jewels, they are the *ruhanai giza* (spiritual food) for our soul”.¹⁹⁰

Similarly the Sikh scriptures are based on musical compositions and tunes, which go back to the time of the founder himself, Guru Nanak. Throughout his life Guru Nanak was accompanied by his childhood Muslim musician friend

¹⁸⁹ Hashmi Javeed, interview was conducted at the shrine of Bulleh Shah, Kasoor in 2009.

¹⁹⁰ Suleman, Mohammad, interview was conducted the shrine of Hazrat Shah Hussein in Lahore, 2009.

Rababi (a musician who plays rubab) named Mardana, who was an accomplished musician, and wherever Guru Nanak traveled, he accompanied him so that Guru could sing and perform his poems and share his message through songs. In fact Mardhana also wrote some compositions in the praise of Guru and it also appears in the Guru's Granth Sahib in "Bihdgare ki Var".¹⁹¹

Meera bai (c. 1498 – c. 1547 AD) and Sant Kabir (1440–1518) are also famous for their devotional songs and performances. There are so many stories one can hear about their past in South Asia that are perhaps difficult to prove historically. Yet, the fact is that their songs are sung all over Northern India witness the power of their poetry and music.

Similarly, according to Ismaili tradition, Pir Shams attended the *Garba* ritual ceremony in Gujarat and composed and performed his 28 *garbis* during 10 days at the Navratri festival. His performance moved many Hindus and they embraced the teaching of Islam. Until today Ismailis recite these garbis as a part of their daily ritual in *Jamatkhana*. A famous Garbi of Pir Shams "Guraji avya satami" not only described his ability to perform garba but that also through his ability of profound performance, the guru became the talk of the town, Pir Shams said:

From amidst the garbi crowd rose hails
And cries of rejoicing: "Jai jai! Jai jai!"
The whole night passed thus in bliss (ananda)
And no one withdrew till dawn
This became the talk of the town,
And everybody wanted to see for themselves
Thus spoke Guru Shams the Pir;
He had delivered a [great] performance.¹⁹²

In another *garbi* ginan Pir Shams described his experience of performing at Analvad. After mentioning the series of his miracles including his fight with

¹⁹¹ The Guru Granth verse no. 553. Also see *Sikh Sacred Music*, 1967, p. 12.

¹⁹² Kassam, Tazim, *Songs of Wisdom and circle of Dance*: 1995, p. 344.

Sufi Bahauddin Zakaria Multani, followed by the descent of the sun in Multan, the people perceived him equivalent of Lord Krishna and then he proceed to Gujarat. In his ginan “Nar Kasama Shahna” he said:

The Guru performed such miracles for,
 Verily, he was as Krsna himself
 From there he came to Analvad
 Where he danced in the garbi dance
 Fools did not grasp the essence and,
 Circling round and round went astray.¹⁹³

Poetic styles vs. Musical genres

It is crucial to first clarify a few terms pertaining to the devotional poetry and music of Indo-Pakistan. For example, Ghazal is primarily a poetic form, which is also sometimes composed musically. Qawwali is not a poetical form, it is a musical genre or style, which incorporates various types of poetry such as *Kafi*, *Ghazal*, *Rubai*, *Nazm*. Similarly, Bhajan and Kirtan are not specific poetical forms. Both of these terms are generally use for Hindu devotional genres. However, *Kafi*, *Bait*, and *Wai* are poetic as well as musical genres and they are always sung and performed.

Ginan is not based on any singular poetic form; so to say that ginan only represents one type of poetry would be inappropriate. Ginans contain a large repertoire that was written by many Ismaili Pirs and Sayyeds in various local languages. Ginan contains various types of poetry including *Wai*, *Bait*, *Kafi*, *Doha*, *Chupai*, *Garbi*, *Dhal*. So we can assume in a nutshell that ginan is a Khoja Ismaili devotional musical genre, which is always sung in various musical styles such as *Wai*, *Kafi*, *Bait*, *Dhal*, and hence is not based on one specific poetic form. “The ginan style of poetry is based upon various musical rhythm of local mode of music as already prevalent in Lower Indus valley. This view point is supported by the fact that ginans are always recited in the

¹⁹³ Kassam, Tazim, *Songs of Wisdom and circle of Dance*: 1995, pp. 350-351

melody of different *Surs* of *Ragas* and *Raganis*, in chorus in the congregations of the devotees in the *Jamatkhana*".¹⁹⁴

Poetic Content and Themes

As far as the messages and themes of ginans are concerned, G. Allana categorizes ginans into two groups. One comprises ginans where the sole purpose is related to the theme of religious preaching and conversion. In the second group there are ginans, which were composed for newly, converted people; their purpose is to teach them the fundamentals of their new faith.¹⁹⁵

Nanji has pointed out almost the same kind of ideas in his broad characterization of the two phases of the tradition as a whole: emergence and consolidation. The groups of ginans that were presented in the category of emergence indicate that at the stage of emergence the meaning of conversion had both political and religious connotations. At the consolidation stage, however, conversion to Khoja Satpanth might have lost its early political implications, and ginans presented in the category of consolidation refer primarily to religious transformation.¹⁹⁶

A more differentiated and comprehensive categorization is offered by Ali Asani, who states that "Ginans may be categorized into five major thematic types which are as follows: (a) "conversion", portraying Islam through the Ismaili interpretation (b) "didactic", imparting ethical and moral instruction for the conduct of worldly and religious life; (c) "mystical", including guides for spiritual progress and literally expressions inspired by mystical experiences; (d) "liturgical", recited at the performance of certain religious rituals or on specific religious festivals; and (e) "cosmological and eschatological", concerning theories of the origin and end of creation".¹⁹⁷ Of course there are many ginans, which contain more than one of these above five themes,

¹⁹⁴ Allana A. G, *Introduction to the History of Sindhi Literature*, 1990, pp.12 and 18.

¹⁹⁵ Allana A. G, *Ismaili Movement in Sindh, Multan and Gujarat*, 2010, p. 39.

¹⁹⁶ Nanji Azim, *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, 1978, p. 68-69.

¹⁹⁷ Asani, Ali, *The Būjh Nirānjan: A Critical Edition of a Mystical Poem in Medieval Hindustani with its Khojki and Gujarati Recensions*, 1984. p. 3.

conveying the message of conversion, mystical as well as didactic. Indeed, we can also categorize ginans according to their specific occasion, time of performance and ritual occasions.

Musical References in the Ginanic Repertoire

There are numerous references to the music and musical instruments in ginan. At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Seyeda Imam Begum's famous ginan "Eji Hardam Jampo Pir Shah no Nam" (Recite always the name of your Imam and Pir).

*"Play the spiritual instrument of the dhikr given by the true guide within your being and adorn your thought with it.
Sing without mouth, hear without the ear and play the rhythm without the hands.
Play the rhythm on pakhvaj¹⁹⁸ (dhol), mridang¹⁹⁹ (another kind of drums) and keep on praising without the tongue.²⁰⁰"*

Poetically this particular ginan is a very good example of *Wai*, which is divided into two parts. The first line uses rhyme and in the second line the refrain is sung. Most of Sayyeda Imam Begum's ginans are based on poetical patterns of *Wai*. This particular ginan is full of spiritual meaning as here the music is used in a symbolic way. The poet says, concentrate and perform *dhikr* in the name of your Lord. What are the ways through which one can play spiritual instrument? Here I think the poet is using the musical idea of repetition, where a person experiences ecstasy or salvation, and thus urges the audience to keep concentrating in the name of the guru and perform *dhikr*. Once you attain that salvation then you will experience divine light within you, where without mouth you will be singing and without ears you will hearing and without hands

¹⁹⁸ *Pakhawaj* is essentially a north Indian version of the *mridangam* and is the most common north Indian representative of the class of barrel shaped drums known as *mridang*. I

¹⁹⁹ Mridang is two-sided drum, it is usually longer than the dholak and is considered be one of the oldest instruments. The left side is larger and coated with material, even wet flour in the most basic instruments, to produce the heavier sound.

²⁰⁰ Begum Imam Syeda, *Eji Hardam Japo Pirshah nu jap, Ginans with English Translation*, 2007, pp 175-176.

you will playing the rhythms, a blissful moment, where one is beyond bodily experience. Imam Begum has also used some of the very famous rhythmic instruments such as *dhol*, *pakhvaj* and *mridang*. Many of these rhythmic instruments are also mentioned in the garbi ginans.

As far as the melodic patterns are concerned, there are various stanzas where one can find the word “*Sur*” similar to the idea of *Sur* in Shah Abdul Latif’s poems rather than raga. For instance, in a mystical ginan Braham Prakash, Pir Shams said:

Anhad nad vaje janhan tura
*Tej puj uge janhan sura*²⁰¹

Where continuous or ceaseless spiritual instruments are played, that is the sound of the flute²⁰² or flageolet, where there is the luminosity of light that is the very light of the sun or (divine melody).²⁰³

In another verse of the same ginan Pir Shams used the term “*Sur*”:

Surti sabadki gathi gulai
*Jiyun jalme jal dia milai*²⁰⁴

When [Sound] or contemplation and the [divine] word merge with each other then they become one as water mixes with water.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Sabzwari, Shams, Pir, *Brahm Prakash* (Divine Illumination) Translated by Yasmin Sher Ali, 2009, verse no. 75, p.6.

²⁰² The word ‘tura’ is debatable. According to Shafique Virani it means flute, Zarina Kamluddin thinks that this word means Shehnai, and Dr. Gulshan Khaki believes that the word ‘tura’ is derived from ‘Ranatura’ which is a wind instrument, usually blown at times of war. Also see Khakee, Gulshan, *The Dasa Avatara of the Satpanthi Ismailis and Imam Shahis of Indo-Pakistan*, 1972, p. 266.

²⁰³ Sabzwari, Shams, Pir, *Brahm Prakash* (Divine Illumination) Translated by Yasmin Sher Ali, 2009, verse no. 75, p.6.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 7.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

In both stanzas again, Pir Shams uses beautifully the symbols of divine sounds within oneself when the true momin achieves salvation. Here the flute reminds us of a very famous poem of Rumi. It is the flute and its sound that Rumi invokes in the first lines of his *Mathnawi*:

“Hearken to the reed, how it tells its tale
and bemoans the pain of separation:
Ever since I was cut from my native red-bed
All the world weeps when it hears my song”.²⁰⁶

The word “*nad*” means, “sound” as it is popularly used among the Hindus as *Nada Brahma hai*, (sound is the God).²⁰⁷ Another concept or expression, *Anhad*, is quite popular among Sufis such as Bullah Shah’s famous Kafi saying “*Anhad baja waje shahna*”²⁰⁸ (when the divine sounds play within you). In the second stanza Pir Shams has diligently used the idea of song where words and tunes combine to make it complete, so here the divine tune resembles the concentration or utter imagination on the divine word of the Lord, which is the highest state of spirituality.

In another garbi gnan ‘Tame Japajo dina raat’ Pir Shams has used the term ‘*Surti*’²⁰⁹ or it could be ‘*Shurti*’ four times, as the whole stanza is dealing with the matter related to the spirituality and using the analogy of musical instrument and sound. It could mean both and it may include ‘smallest interval between the pitch’ or ‘concentration’. In a similar idea of spiritual sounds of Imam Begum and the eternal *Shabd* (word) of guru, Pir said:

“*Tame Japjo din ne raat ka, mandal mahen miljo re lol*
Janki surti lagi bharmandh ka, amrat reljo re lol

²⁰⁶ Rumi Jalaluddin, *Mathnawi*, Translated by Annemarie Schimmel and Susan H. Ray, *My Soul is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam*, 2003. p. 147.

²⁰⁷ Qureshi, Regula, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan*

²⁰⁸ Shah Bulleh, “Mera Piya Ghar Aya”, *Magic Touch*, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (vocals) Bally Sago (re-mixed and produced), UK, 1992 .

²⁰⁹ The terms ‘*Surti*’ or ‘*Shurti*’ is derived from Sanskrit language which used in various contexts throughout the history of the Hindustani music. A ‘*Shurti*’ is the smallest interval of pitch the ear can detect.

Jiva ta'n na tarodhe tar ka, surti bandoje re lol
Anhad waja waje saar ka, nit sohang authe re lol.
Mahen Betha surtiya saar ka, durejan shun kare re lol
*Janki Surti Lagi Bharmand ka, Nur Mahen Kheljo re lol.*²¹⁰

Repeat the word (*japa, dhikr*) day and night
 And rejoice in the [inner] temple (*mandir*)
 When concentration or the smallest interval of pitch (*surti or shurti*) is fixed
 between the brows,
 Rejoice in Immortality (*amar*)
 The concentration, or the interval between the pitch (*surti or shurti*) should be
 like the string Which remains intact when stretched.
 Then the unstruck sound will play
 And the even breathing of "I" and He" sets in
 When you thus sit absorbed in between the interval of perfect pitch or
 concentration (*surti or shurti*)
 How can the wicked distract you?
 When concentration, or smallest interval of pitch (*surti or shurti*) is fixed
 between the brows,
 You will bathe in the Light (*nur*).²¹¹

Significant other musical instruments are also mentioned, for instance in the
 gnan *Das Avatar*, the word 'setar' is used. According to oral tradition of
 Hindustani music, Hazrat Amir Khusra created Sitar. However, recent
 ethnomusicological research shows that in Medieval paintings as well as
 manuscripts do not provide evidence to support that sitar was invented anytime
 before the 17th/18th century. Although, the term 'sitar' or 'setar' is mentioned in
 the gnan, or perhaps it could be the Persian lute instrument *Setar*, which
 include 'she' and 'tar' three strings.

Te sava kori setara (setar) sakha jhankara
*Te data deve vadyave apara*²¹²

²¹⁰ Kassam, Tazim R. *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance, Hymns of the Satpanth Ismaili Muslim Saint, Pir Shams*, 1995, p. 334.

²¹¹ Kassam, Tazim R. *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance, Hymns of the Satpanth Ismaili Muslim Saint, Pir Shams*, 1995, p. 334.

²¹² Khakee, Gulshan, *The Dasa Avatara of the Satpanthi Ismailis and Imam Shahis of Indo-Pakistan*, 1972, p. 253.

“So the noise (perhaps the right translation of Jhankar would be musical sound) of one and a quarter karores of white conch shells.”²¹³ Or it could be a quarter crore momin played tuneful music on Setar, and Daata deva plays endlessly. Apart from Setar another plucked ancient instrument *vina* is mentioned along with bells, which are often used in Bhakti devotional songs.

*Tiam vaje jamga ura vasalium vena:
Kiam avadhutaki nari vajave vena*²¹⁴

There is a bell and other instruments including *Vina* play,
There the wife of the ascetic plays the *Vina*.²¹⁵

*Tam bija vajanatrina anopana vaina:
Tam avara vajamtrina bija pera na jana*²¹⁶

The other instruments have a matchless sound,
Know that there were countless other instruments.²¹⁷

In the same *ginan* the *Das Avatar* Pir Shams has also portrayed an ancient war where big drums and horns were used, such as:

*To vaje dadama bhai bhera bhugamla avara nisana:
Tam vaje anamta dadi bade ranamsigi tala.*²¹⁸

“The big drum (*dadamu* which beats in front of an army, brother, with it a horn and other emblems), with the many sounds of drums, the earth shakes (There countless sticks beat, and war horns play a tune).

*Te vadya dhamara (Damru drum), ranasagi (war trumpet), tana
Te vadya, mahadara (madra, which is a musical instrument)
dhamadhamakar*²¹⁹

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Khakee, Gulshan, *The Dasa Avatara of the Satpanthi Ismailis and Imam Shahis of Indo-Pakistan*, 1972, p. 259

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Khakee, Gulshan, *The Dasa Avatara of the Satpanthi Ismailis and Imam Shahis of Indo-Pakistan*, 1972, p. 268.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid, p. 256.

²¹⁹ Khakee, Gulshan, *The Dasa Avatara of the Satpanthi Ismailis and Imam Shahis of Indo-Pakistan*, 1972, p. 251.

*Tam vaje mamdara ghummaghmakara:
Vaje camga (bell) avara vasali bayena
Tam bada kanura vaje bahota vana*²²⁰

“So a drum and a war trumpet play the beat of music, and the circle of players sound *dhamadhama* (the circle of players which sound *ghumaghuma*, and a bell and other horns play).”²²¹

Furthermore, Pir Shams in his very famous ginan *Saloko Mota* mentioned the eternal experience in a musical manner as:

“The True Guide proclaims: I will come and be seated in (the heart of) such a person and all seventy-two chambers resound with divine music. The night of this person is spent in an awakened state and that time he/she partakes in ecstasy of ginan (divine knowledge)”.²²²

The Garbis ginans are full of musical meaning and dance as Pir Shams in his garbi ‘ada guru shamasa’ said:

“They danced fervently and sang with intensity;

They dearly worshiped their stone idols”

“Then the Guru began to sing his songs of wisdom (ginan)

The ignorant Hindus [were startled] and Listened to them”.²²³

The above garbi depicts a historical moment when Pirs encountered Hindus during the Navratari festival of Garba raas, and through the singing of ginan songs Pir was able to convey the message of Satpanth to them.

In another garbi ginan “guru vadiya dasami rata stanza “

“They beat seven drums, blew trumpets, and repeated the Gurus speech”.²²⁴

²²⁰ Ibid. p. 267.

²²¹ Ibid, p. 267.

²²² Sabzwari, Shams Pir, “Saloko Moto” in verse, 105, 1904.

²²³ Kassam, Tazim R. *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance, Hymns of the Satpanth Ismaili Muslim Saint, Pir Shams*, 1995, pp 320-321.

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 360

In the famous garbi ginan “Tare vaga te ginanana” Pir Shams said:

Then he played the melody of that ginan!

Refrain: Yes, O Mother, Guru Shams performed such a spectacle!

Then the instrument of religion began to play

And every type of rhythm started to be played.²²⁵

In this section we have seen that the musical ideas, terms and instruments widely mentioned in the ginan repertoire, which also suggest ginans deeper connection with regional musical languages and culture.

Different kinds and styles of Ginan Performances

Ginan is a large repertoire, which contains various styles of music. In this section I will explore its musical features, both tune and rhythmic patterns, with the help of Western staff notation. Why have I chosen Western Staff notation versus Indian or any other form of notations? First of all the Indo-Pakistan music is considered by many as an oral tradition. Melodies are mostly memorized; only lyrics are used while performing. Although we do have an Indian notation system, the Western system seems to be more developed to comfortably demonstrate various sensitivities of rhythm and melody. There are various types and styles, one can find in ginan repertoire, namely *Garbi*, *Venti*, *Chogadia*, *Granth*s and shorter ginans.

²²⁵ Ibid, p. 363



Illustration No 9: Legendary Sufi Singer Abida Parveen and Taufiq Karmali performing gnan in London, UK, 2008. (Photo Courtesy: Taufiq Karmali)

a) Garbi Gnan

The style of garbi gnan has its deep roots in the famous folk dance tradition of garba from Gujarat, which is performed during the festival of Navratri “nine nights” honoring Gujarat’s mother goddesses.²²⁶ *Garba* is the primary and most visible form of their celebration. The word “*garba*,” is the plural form of the word “*garbo*,” an “earthen vessal with holes in its sides and a lamp burning inside”.²²⁷ The word “*Garbo*” is also used to describe this music and dance genre. Perhaps the plural form “*Garba*” is more common. According to the local tradition, the performance of men is called “Garbi”. According to the oral tradition, historically when the men returned successfully from battle they would start dancing to couplets and amorous songs sung by the Charanswar, or the narrators who used to go to the front to raise their spirit during the battle by singing songs of valor. The dance was characteristic for its forceful movements

²²⁶ The goddesses include Amba, Mahagauri, Bahucaraji, Kalaratri, Mahisasur Mardini, Sailputri, Sidhdhidatri, Sfanda. Also see, Yodh, Medha, “Garba: A Social Dance of Gujarati Women.” 1984, 1:65-70

²²⁷ Deshpande, P.G, *Universal English-Gujarati Dictionary* 1988 p 284.

that would fascinate and encourage viewers. In modern day, however, even females participate in the dance.

On the first night (the new moon) of the Gujarati lunar month of Asvin (also known as Aso), which falls in the months of September and October of the Gregorian calendar, Navratri starts. Navratri is also known as the festival of harvest, celebrating the fecundity of the earth.²²⁸ *Garba* music is also performed on many other occasions including marriage, pregnancy²²⁹ and on the completion of certain religious ceremonies.²³⁰

Traditionally during the festivities, *garba* is performed by groups of women who sing and dance around a lamp or an object, which contains a lamp. In some places men also join in the dancing group or may have a separate performance called *garbi*.²³¹ Interestingly the word *garbi* is also used for twenty-eight compositions of *ginans* by Ismaili Pir Shams, which according to the Ismaili tradition were composed by Pir Shams during his visit to Gujarat at the festival of *Navratri*, Pir Shams shared a message of Satpanth Islam to a large group of Hindus.²³²

Garba music according to the tradition has often been accompanied with *dholak* or *dhol* (barrel drums), *Ektaro* (a plucked one string instrument), *manjira* (percussion cymbals), harmonium and some wind instruments such as *shenai* (North Indian double reed oboe instrument) and *murli* or *bansuri* (Indian classical wood flute). However, today many modern instruments have replaced these old instruments including keyboard synthesizers, electric bass

²²⁸ Kallolini Hajharata, *Maro Garbo Ghumyo*, 1981, p. xxxviii.

²²⁹ Majmudar, M.R., "Gujarat, Its Art-Heritage", 1976, p. 98.

²³⁰ Yodh, Medha, "Garba: A Social Dance of Gujarati Women", 1984, p 67.

²³¹ Desai, Sudha R. *Bhavai A Medieval Form of Ancient Indian Dramatic Art (Natya) as Prevalent in Gujarat*. P 101.

²³² Kassam Tazim R., *Songs of Wisdom and Circle of Dance*, 1995, p. 47.

and rhythm guitars, drum set, digital drum pad, and some percussion instruments.²³³

It is often assumed that only Hindus and some Jains perform *garba Ras*. However, there are many other communities originally rooted in Kutch and Gujarat that participate extensively in cultural and social activities such as at wedding ceremonies and festivals using *garba*. Apart from Hindus, Memons, and some Ithna Ashari Shias and Ismailis actively participate in *garba* music and to this day, it is the most famous form of entertainment.

Garba music is fundamentally rooted in the Hindu religion but more so, it is a significant part of Indic culture and tradition from Gujarat, India. When I attended the Navratri festival in Edmonton, invited by one of my Gujarati students Harsh Patel, I was very moved to see how Hindus, through the form of intense dance for hours accompanied with music display their devotion to various Goddesses. The festival was organized at the Mayfield Crown Plaza hotel on the last weekend of September 2011. The section was divided into two parts, one part was assigned for tickets collection, food stalls and other administrative purposes, and the other section was designated for the Navratri dance along with *aarti* and *puja*. No one was allowed to enter this space with their shoes on.

In the middle of that big hall there was a small section designated for the Hindu Goddesses and pictures were placed of Durga, and Amba, along with Prasad (food offering to the Goddesses). Also incense and various colorful lights were placed in the middle of the space. Around that small round sacred so-called temple, girls and boys were dancing, rejoicing as a form of worship. The musicians were invited from India, in which keyboard synthesizers were used to produce some ethnic sounds, along with both electronic and manual drums

²³³ Yodh, Medha, “Garba: A Social Dance of Gujarati Women”, 1984, P 66.

sets, and two singers both male and female were singing the traditional tunes of garba music.



Illustration No 10: Navratri Hindu Festival, devotees praying to the Hindu Goddess Durga, Edmonton, 2011

The most fascinating thing about that event was that at the end, all the devotees were gathered around the middle section where pictures of Goddesses were placed and special *Aarti* (devotional hymn) was sung both by professionals as well all the participants with utmost devotion, depicting how various forms of cultural expressions including dance, music, prayers were combined together in the most amazing, moving, and powerful manner. Soon after this *Prasad* (food offering) was distributed among the devotees. Harsh Patel said: “If you look at my feet they are almost bleeding because I have been dancing barefoot for many hours; I will do so even tomorrow, because I get *Shakti* (power) from Goddess Durga; this is the least I can do for my own personal and spiritual growth”.²³⁴ His remarks reminded me of the Shia *matam*, where devotees lost their consciousness while beating their chest and remembering Imam Hussain.

²³⁴ Interviewed was conducted with Patel Harsh during the festival of Navratri in Edmonton, October 2011.

If I take the above example then I am asking a few basic questions pertaining to Ismaili garbi ginans. Why garbi ginan is still retained in the ritual ceremonies of *Jamatkhana* however, the accompaniment of dance and musical instruments are not allowed? Perhaps one answer could be that they were written and composed by the very famous Ismaili *Pir* and due their higher spiritual status garbi ginans were incorporated within the reitual setting. However, another reason could also be that generally is South Asian Muslims ritual practices especially inside the mosque and other sacred places musical instruments and dances are not commonly encouraged, perhaps that could be another reason that the melodies of Ismaili garbis retained in the ritual sacred setting however, other features such as musical instruments and dance were removed.

Although the Ismailis currently do not use any musical instruments while singing garbi ginans in *Jamatkhana* setting, however, no historian could deny that Pir Shams composed his garbis while dancing and performing garba music. Once can also argue that perhaps it was one of the tools for conversion, but once the Hindus were converted then slowly the teachings of Ismaili *Tariqah* was introduced to them. “Pir Shams also composed ginans in the form of ‘Garbi’, the devotional form of poetry, which was sung along with the Gujarati folk-devotional dance played at the temple of the Hindu deity ‘Mata Bhawani’ in Ahmedabad (Gujarat-India).²³⁵

The *garbi ginans* are only associated with *Pir* Shams. All *garbis* are very upbeat, and share the *doha* (two lines poetic structure) form of poetry. The *garbi ginan* is sung in a metric cycle of *garba taal*, eight beat (four plus four), very popular for *bhajans* and folk songs. The tonal structure of the *ginān* is in *rag bhairvai*, which according to Indian classical music is a morning raga. *Bhairvai* is perhaps the sweetest and most-loved raga in Hindustani music, an all-time favorite of audiences and artists. Often Indian musicians conclude their

²³⁵ Allana A. G, *Ismaili Movement in Sindh, Multan and Gujarat*, 2010, p.301.

performance with this raga. In this *ginan* R and G *komal* (D and E flat) and Dha and Ni *komal* (A and B flat) are used.

Garbi ginan, Pir Nachi ney

Pir nachine kanthe ginanre man,
The Pir dances and recites wisdom (*Ginan*)!

Em samjavine gur kahe chhe re maan

Refrain:

O Mother, the Guru explains things thus:

Tame samjo te satni sanre ma,
Try and understand the signs of truth (sat)!

Em samjavine gur kahe chhe re ma
O Mother, the Guru explains things thus:

Tame jutha shun kidha acharre ma,
Why have you adopted such false practices!

Em samjavine gur kahe chhe re ma
O Mother, the Guru explains things thus:

Gur kahe chhe varoi varre ma
The Guru repeats over and over:

*Em samjavine gur kahe chhe re ma.*²³⁶
O Mother, the Guru explains things thus:²³⁷

²³⁶ Ginan-E-Sharif, Volume 2, *English transliteration*, 2009, pp. 119-120.

²³⁷ Kassam, Tazim, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance*, 1995, p. 356.

Shabnum Merali GARBI GINAN: PIR NACHI NE (Raga Bhainavi)

Dadra tala

Pi-r Na-chi ne Kan-te gi-na-n re

ma e ma sa-ma-Ja vi ne gur Kahe-chhe ve man

Ta-me-Ju-tha shun Ki dha a chavre ma Ema

Sa-ma-Ja vi-ne gu-ra Ka-he che ve ma

Gur Kahe che - va - voi Vava-re-

ma ne ma Sa-ma-Ja vi-ne Gu-ra

Ka-he che ve-ma

Transcription 4: Sabzwari Shams, Pir, “Pir Nachi ne”, Garbi ginan, sung by Shabnam Merali, Edmonton 2005

b) Venti Ginan:

The second type of *ginan* is called *Venti*, or griyazari ginans, (recited with utmost humility and pleading). As compared to *garbi* ginans, *Venti* ginans have slow, beautiful melodies. The structural patterns of venti ginans are very close to Sindhi *Bait* where musical accompaniment and especially rhythm are not used, as it is sung with utmost devotion and beauty, and it also requires good command over the singing. Due to the very slow tempo of Venti, or sometimes very slow rhythm, the good reciters bring immense emotion through

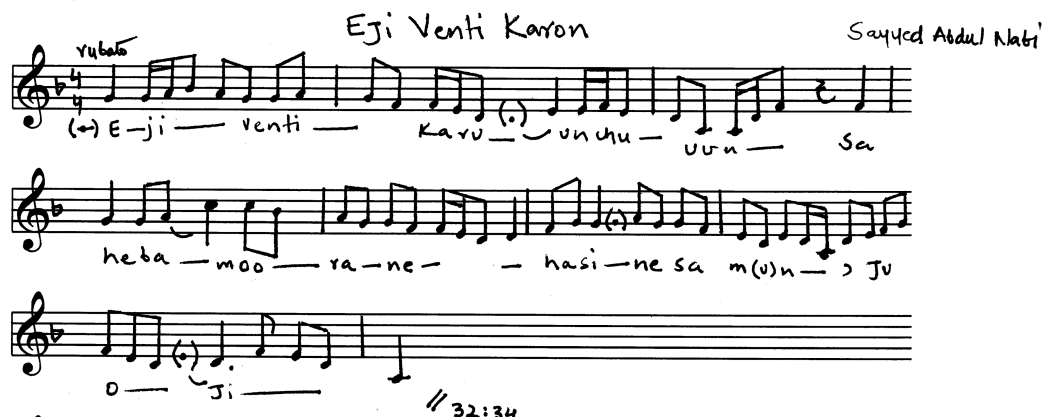
improvisational singing. Most themes related to venti ginans are emotional, such as the occasion of *didar* (physical glimpse of an Imam), or funeral ceremony, or early morning *baitul-khayal* (mediation) where every murid longs to be union with his/her spiritual *murshid* (master), and yearns and pleads with sublime devotion and humility. Venti ginan in terms of its musical structure is similar to *Bait* and *Wai*. However, one can also find some Kafi form of musical and poetical structure.



Illustration 11: Various women and men reciting Venti ginan Inside the Sahiwal, Punjab *Jamatkhana*, Punjab, 2007

The melodic structure of *Venti* can also be compared with *alap* (an Improvisation part of Indian classical music, always performed at the beginning), where the singer introduces keynotes of the ragas with the accompaniment of rhythm instruments. In Qawwali, *Kafi* and *Wai* performances, often *Dohas* or *Bait* (poetry of famous poets and saints) performed before the *bandish* (main composition); none of the rhythmic instruments are used; often *baja* (harmonium) is used to provide musical support. *Venti* ginan also resemblance the *vani*, *vinya*, or *bani* which means ‘pleading’ in Hindu songs as well as Bhojpuri Kirtan which often features free-time *alap* like introduction which provide a “ view of the key motivic

elements”.²³⁸ *Venti* ginans are very popular among the Ismailis and particularly Pir Hasan Kabirdin’s *Venti* ginans are the most famous because of his in-depth expression of love and humility for his Imam.



Transcription 5: Nabi Abdul, Sayyed “Eji Venti Karon”, *Venti* ginan, sung by community members of Sahiwal *Jamatkhana*, 2007

Venti Ginan:

Eji Venti Karon Chhun Saheb mora ne

Hasi ne saamu(n) juo ji, Hasi bolavo maara hansa ji na raja

Sharam hamari Ya Ali toye ji

Translation: Please accept my humble supplication Oh my Master,
Look at me with a gentle smile as I stand before you. Call me with a smile,
O Sovereign of my soul. My honor is in your keeping, O Ali!

c) Chogadia:

The word “cho” means “four” and “gadia” means, “time”. In Hindi and Urdu languages, a watch is also called *gadi* or *gadiyal*.²³⁹ In times past in India, for the division of the day and night into hours, people divided the whole day and night in time zones of 8 *pahors* or *pahars*, according to the lunar calendar, which survives even today. These were known as the *Vikram* (Persian: *pas*), with each *pahar* being equal to 3 hours of modern time. In early times, during

²³⁸ Slawek Stephen, “Popular Kirtan in Benares: Some ‘Great’ Aspects of a Little Tradition”, 1998, p. 89. Also see Bai Meera, *Prem Vani*, compiled and translated by Sardar Jafri (Urdu), Karachi, 2001.

²³⁹ Tajuddin Ali, Mumtaz, “An Introduction to the Chogadia Ginans” (article was shared personally by the author himself in 2007). This article can also be seen on the website: <http://ismaili.net/Source/mumtaz/chogadiyya.html>

the announcement of a new kingdom, the singers and poets were invited to sing songs. From the palace or temple, a trumpet was blown at an interval of four *gadis* during the day to glorify the new kingdom. The first sound was blown at dawn and the last at dusk. The singing of the songs or blowing of the trumpet was also called the *chogadia*.

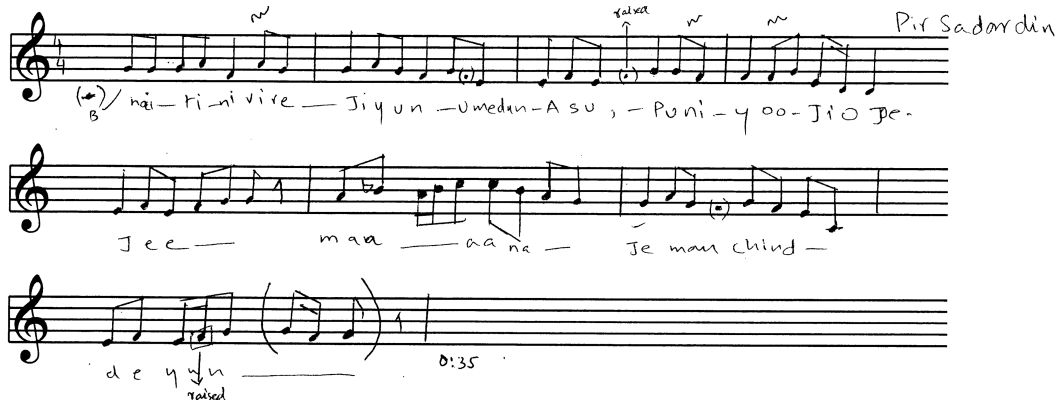
In religious context, the broadcast of similar significance after every four *gadis* twice a day as reaffirmation of the Spiritual Kingdom of the Imam on earth seems to have become of paramount importance and absolute necessity among the Indian Ismailis.

It is also said that when the followers were told that the Imam was arriving on the soil of India, the beat of drums was reserved for the special occasion of the Imam's arrival, and not for any other occasion. Thus, the words *dhol*, *dhamdhama*, *tambal* and *nagara* for small and big drums have been employed in the extant *chogadia ginans* as follows:

- a) "The *dol* will be beaten upon the arrival of Aga Mahdi, the Lord. The *dhol* and *dhadama* will swing with the Lord's flags."
- b) "The *tambal* and *nagara* will be played when the Lord shall arrive from the West."
- c) "The majestic Lord will mount a chariot. Ali as the Sultan of India will come. The armies in a little distance will pour down with the beat of *tambal* and flags."²⁴⁰

There are twenty three *chogadia* prepared by Pir Sadruddin, three by Pir Hasan Kabiruddin, one by Pir Saheb al-Din and one by Pir Tajddin, interestingly all of them are penned in Sindi language. Until today Chogadias are recited mostly on Thursdays followed by the special prayers by the leader of the congregation.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p, 4.



Transcription 6: Sadardin, Pir, “Bhai tini vire”, *Chogadia* ginan, Jafersadiq Surmawala, Mohammad Khimani and group, *Mehfil-e-Chogadia*, Karachi

Ginan:

Bhai tini vire jiyu(n) umedu(n) aasu puniyu
Jio, joi je man ja man chindeyu(n)

Translation: O brother! The desires and hope for all (*momins*, devotees) which they cherished in their hearts, were fulfilled

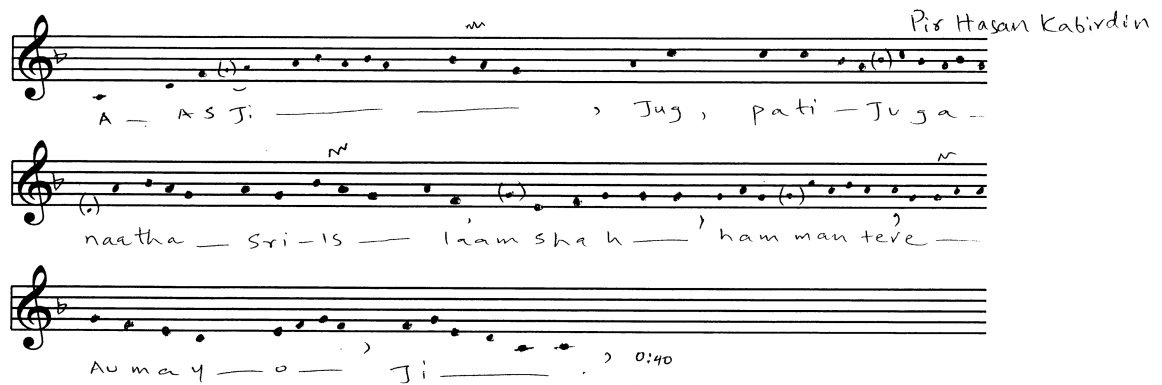
The poetical style of chogadias is based on the ancient form of Sindhi *Wai*, where the refrain is used mostly at the very end of the ginan, as a form of dua (concluding prayers), the tunes of chogadias are very distinctive, and they also remind one sometimes of Shah Latif’s bait. The tune has less variation, but the significant portion of the tune is that after every first stanza, the second stanza starts with the higher notes, followed by the third with low notes, until the end with slow improvisational ending, which gives a clue that now the chogadias are about to finish. During my visit to Sind Pakistan, I noticed that the Sindhi community gives a lot of significance to these Chogadias, and many women try to sing them in their homes during the noon hours with devotion. This Chogadia is based on Keharva *taal* (8 beat rhythmic cycle).

d) Granth:

The word granth means a literary production, treatise, book or composition (in prose or verse); a code; a section; -- the book or sacred scriptures of the Sikhs (short moral poems by Nanak Shah and others, in Panjabi and Hindi²⁴¹).

²⁴¹ Dictionary of Urdu and classical Hindi, accused website :
<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/platts/>

According to Ismailis the *granth* are longer *ginans*, which comprise many *pads* (Parts or stanzas), sometimes more than five hundred verses. Conceptually there is a difference between the Sikh *granth* and the Ismaili *granth*. In *Adi granth*, or *Guru Granth Saheb*, there are around fourteen hundred small and large compositions, and the compilation of these compositions are called ‘*granth*’. However, in Ismaili *ginans* the concept of *granth* means long poem as one complete structure of a book, similar to the *Vedas* and *Gita* (Hindu scriptures), such as *Anant Akhado*, a very famous *granth*. Selected verses are recited every day during the evening ceremonies in Khoja Ismaili *jamatkhana*s all over the world. There are five hundred stanzas, each one of which starts with “Ashaji” (oh Lord) and ends with the similar refrain of ‘Ji’, so the entire five hundred stanzas follow exactly the similar poetic and musical meters. Ismaili devotees have meticulously preserved this unique heritage for centuries. In terms of the poetic and musical structure, *Anant Akado* is based on pure *Kafi* form. There are various other important *granth*s as well, each one of which contains various mystical, ethical and divine teachings. Other popular *granth*s include *Saloko Moto*, *Saloko Nanto*, *Bavan Bodh*, *Moman Chetamni*, *Bujh Niranjani*.



Transcription 7: Kabirdin, Hassan, Pir, “Anant Akado, Ashaji Jug pati jug,” sung by Shabnam Merali, Recorded by Arzina Merali, Edmonton, 2007.

Ginan:

*Ashaji Jug pat jug naath Sri Islam Shah
 Hum man tere umaayo ji
 Qayam sami hansa ji na raja
 Janpudeep me Shah Aavo*

Translation: Oh Mowla Shri Islam Shah, the Master of the age
 We beg you to be the only one in our hearts
 You are forever the Lord and the King of the Soul!
 Come to the Indian Subcontinent (Jampu deep)

Standardizing Ginan Tunes: Case study of Karachi

During my field research in various parts of Pakistan, North America, and Europe I came across many variants of ginans. However, in most of the countries where Khoja Ismaili live, the issues related to the variants of ginan tunes are not seen as problematic as I have seen in Karachi. I found that the students were very keen to learn new ginans. However, they were divided mostly into three schools of thought, of which two are the more popular. The interesting fact is that none of these ginan groups had any issues with poetry as all of them used the official standard Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board books. The problem concerned the tunes, or sometimes they use the word ‘raga’, or ‘sur’. The three different groups and their methodologies of standardizing ginan are as follows:

a) Dr. G Hyder Alidina: The Standardized ginans

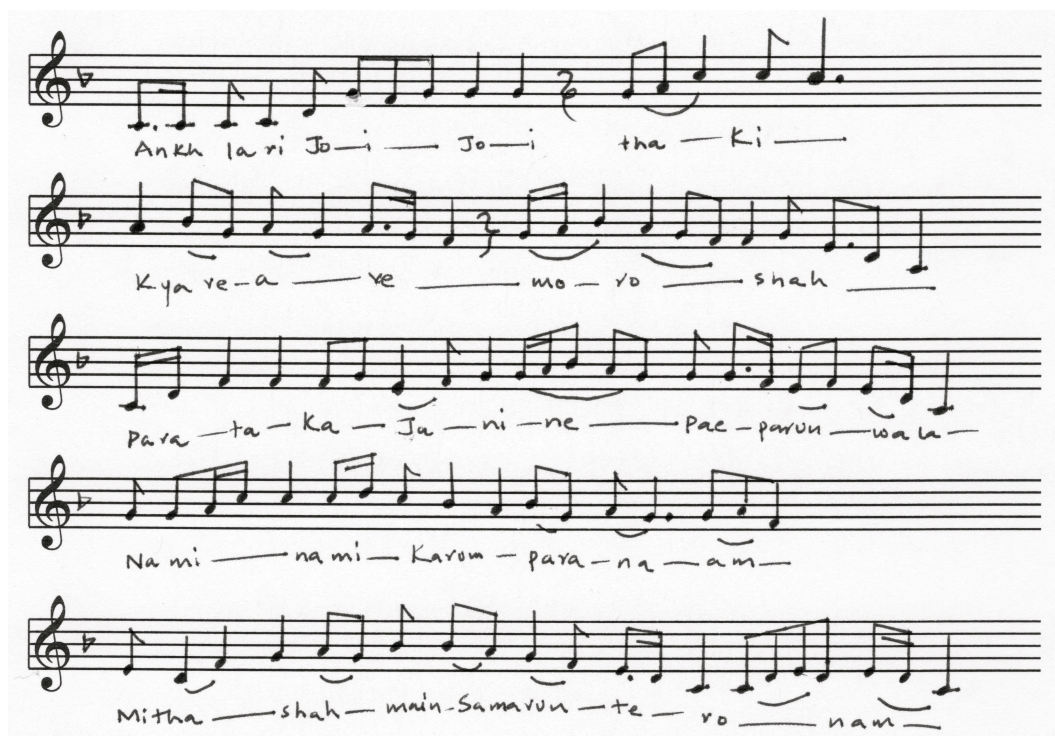
The first approach is to understand ginan according to the framework of Indian classical music. For the last three decades, Hyder Alidina from Pakistan has used this canon for standardizing the ginan repertoire. This process of standardizing ginan leads to the conclusion that if Ismailis are not reciting the *ginan* in a proper North Indian classical raga then the recitation of ginan is incorrect. Dr. Hyder Alidina is an Indian classical trained musician by various renowned musicians such as Ustad Wahid Hussain Khan from Gujranwala, and his father Ustad Altaf Hussain Khan. Dr. Alidina has compiled various versions of hundreds of ginans from all over the world. His main purpose of

compiling and comparing ginan ragas was to find out the original classical root of the ginan. He believes that there is a strong need for standardizing ginan according to North Indian classical raga music. According to Dr. Alidina, some religious ginan teachers have deliberately mutilated and adulterated ginan because for their own interest. This exercise of mutilation has affected the emotional and spiritual depth of ginan that were composed by the Ismaili Pirs.

In this section I will demonstrate the musical transcriptions of a very popular Venti ginan “Eji Ankh Lari joi” by Sayyed Fazal Shah, in four different styles of rendition including Dr. Hyder Alidina, Zarina Kamaluddin, Jafersadiq Surmawala and Fatimah Charania (she was born and brought up in Canada and her parents are originally from East Africa).

Eji Ankh ladi joi joi thaki
 O brother, tired by unceasingly watching
Kyare aave maro Shah
 My eyes, wearied, continue to be searching,
Partak jani paye padun
 So that, with all my Faith, I may touch his feet;
Vahla nami nami karun parnaam
 Bowing my head, my beloved I will greet.
Refrain:
Mittha shah samarun main tero naam
 Sweet Master, on my lips is your name;
Ya Shah Samarun mein tero naam
 O Master, on my lips is your name;
Khudavand samaroon mein tero naam
 O Allah, on my lips is your name²⁴²

²⁴² G. Allana, *Ginans of Ismaili Pirs*, 1984, pp. 298-299.



Transcription 8: Fazal Shah, Sayyed, “Eji Ankh lari joi”, recorded by Dr. G. Hyder Alidina, at his residence, Karachi, 2006

b) Mrs. Zarina Kamaluddin: *Ginan with traditional tunes*

The second approach is quite similar to the first one of standardizing the ginan as many people have distorted the original ragas of the ginan. It involves the need to collect the old ginan tunes from senior community members and preserve the tradition. Many Ismailis who follow this approach are not musically trained. Zarina explained to me that from 1960 -1970, many ginan tunes were changed for a number of reasons. First was the drive to popularize ginan among the Ismaili youth. Hence, many attempts were made to perform ginan accompanied with musical instruments. In the process of singing ginan with musical instruments, many Ismaili singers have attempted to change the ginan’s original tunes. Many community members during that time became interested in learning ginan and without any negative intention they learned the new melodies that were created to be performed only with musical instruments.

So, how did they adapt the tunes to popular musical style, and or popular songs? Did the drumming change the ginan rhythm through popular drumbeats? As we know that ginans are not sung accompanied with musical instruments inside the *jamatkhanas*, therefore, sometimes the reciter does not follow ginans rhythm properly. Moreover, to popularize ginan among the Ismaili youth, a few fast beats were also used accompanied with musical instruments. As a result, some experts of the ginan believed that through the innovation of musical instruments and modern beats Ismailis have lost some of the original tunes of ginan. For finding the original tunes of ginan, Zarina Kamaluddin approached some older community members who remembered the settings used before the time of instrumental accompaniment. Also, she believes that the original ginans can be still retrieved from one of the cities in Gujarat, Junagadh, India, as probably mentioned by the 48th Imam Sir Sultan Mohammad Shah. However, I was unable to find the specific guidance by the Imam or any concrete evidence to confirm this particular statement. Moreover, recently the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board of India undertook a vast field research in various parts of Gujarat, including Junagadh to collect the oral memories and tunes of Ismaili ginan. Interestingly, they found various variants of each ginan even in Junagadh and their study showed similar patterns of cultural diversity within the tunes of ginans that I have shown in my research.

(ZARINA KAMALUDDIN'S GROUP) VENTI GINAN: EJI ANKH LARI
Raga Bilawal

Eji Ankh lari Joi —

Joi tha — Ki tyave a — ve.

mo — vo Sha — ha

pa — va — ta — Ka Ja — ne pa — e —

pa run — wa — la

Pa ra ta — Ka Ja — ni pa — e —

pa run — wa — la .

Transcription 9: Fazal Shah, Sayyed, “Eji Ankh lari joi”, Recorded and sung by Zarina Kamaluddin and her students, by *Ginan with Traditional Tunes*, Karachi.

Zarina Kamaluddin was able to collect no more than two hundred ginans recordings and tunes from the senior citizens of the Ismaili community. So, how do we find the tunes of the remaining ginans whose tunes have been modernized? Because ginan tradition musical settings have always been an oral tradition and have not been musically written down, the challenge is how to create appropriate new ragas for ginan. To answer this challenge, Zarina

Kamaluddin established her own model of composing new melodies for ginan. She proposes that we take the existing melodies of ginan and use them as a model to compose new melodies for those ginans, which are not available from any source.

Many reciters from Karachi have criticized her model of standardizing ginan. In general her students do not accept any other melodies of ginan except those they have learned from Zarina. Therefore, tension exists within the Karachi Ismaili community regarding the appropriate recitation of ginan. Zarina Kamaluddin's approach towards authenticity in ginan melodies is more traditionalist than that of Hyder Alidina. Her method of composing new tunes for ginan is debatable.

c) Jafersadiq I. Surmawala: Traditional Classroom Method

The third approach appreciates the differences of ginan melodies. Many community members give more importance to the content of the poetry of ginan and also believe that the tunes of ginan differ due to regional languages and cultural background. Among them, Jafersadiq I. Surmawala from Pakistan is one who believes that different ginan tunes should be acceptable in the community.

The late Jafersadiq believes in accepting the diverse melodies and approaches in the recitation of ginan, which in his opinion strengthens the beauty and appreciation of the diversity within the community. He even considers the possible use of instruments to strengthen the transmission of ginan, especially for Ismaili youth who are growing up in the Western countries.

The late Jafersadiq also suggested that due to language difference in the Western countries, it is hard to get the enthusiasm among the younger generation to gain knowledge of ginan. Therefore, according to him, it would

be a good idea to teach students *ginan* with musical instruments, especially harmonium and the tabla, (Indian drum). This method would attract various youth to not only enjoy the music of *ginan*, but also to understand its deeper meaning. And due to this method of teaching, the quality of the recitation of *ginan* would improve. To demonstrate the diversity of *ginan* melodies, I will demonstrate the same *ginan* *Eji Ankh Lari Joi Joi thaki* (My eyes have been tired of longing for you) performed in various different styles and ragas.

Dadra tala

An kh lavi Joi - Joi thaki ty a - ve mayo Shah

Pavtak Ja-ni Paye Pa-du-vahla

nami nami Kavon para-naam mitha Shah

Samayumain tevo-naam

An kh lavi Joi - Joi thaki ty a - ve - mayo Shah

Pavtak Jani Paye Pa-du-vahla

nami nami Kavon para-naam mitha Shah

Samayumain Te-vo-naam .

Transcription 10: Fazal Shah, Sayyed, “Eji Ankh lari joi”, Recorded and sung by the late Jafersadiq Surmawala, at his residence, Karachi, 2006.

FATIMA CHARANIA VENTI GIINAN: EJI ANKH LARI (Mishra-Bhairavi)

TONIC G

E - j i Aankh Laddi Joi Joi Tha Ki Kya ve aa - ve

ma ro Sha - h

Par ta Ka Ja - ni Pa - ye - Pa - ru

Par ta Ja ni Pa Ye Pa ru

na - mi nami Ka - ro Para nam mi - ti sha

ah Sa - me - ru - me - te ro - naam

Ya shah Sa - ma - ru - me - te - ro naam

Khu - dha vi dha - sh - ma - ru me - te

ro naam Sa - ma - ru me te - ro - naam - mita shah

Sa - ma - ru - me - te - ro naam.

Transcription 11: Fazal Shah, Sayyed, "Eji Ankh lari joi", sung by Fatimah Charania, Edmonton, 2006

The *venti ginan* “*Ankh Lari Joi Joi*”, written and composed by Sayyed Fazal Shah from 15th century is a very popular *venti ginan*. There are various versions of this popular *venti* sung by Ismailis. According to Jafersadiq Surmawala and Fatima Charania, this way of singing *ginan* is very close to raga *Mishra bhairavi*. However, the melodies do not match and even the rhythmic cycles are totally different. According to Hyder Alidina, this *ginan* was originally composed in raga *Jhinjhoti*. Zarina Kamaludin’s version of this *ginan* tunes, is very close to raga *Bilawal*.

Assessing the three methods:

If we want to standardize the *ginans* according to the classical Indian ragas then which raga should we select to standardize the *ginan*? There are four different ragas of the same *ginans* available and sung widely by the Ismaili community from all over the world. All *ginans* create the same sentiments according to the way the community is emotionally attached to them. So, how can we evaluate this *ginan*? My understanding of the music of *ginan* is that we have no manuscripts to confirm the original ragas of the *ginan*. Also, according to Hindustani classical music, improvisation plays a very significant role in performance. Therefore, when the professional Sufi musician Abida Parveen sings *ginan*, she sings it in a very different style from the rest of the community performers. Secondly, Zarina Kamaluddin as well as the late Jafersadiq Surmawala, learned *ginan* from the older community members in Pakistan, So, how do we confirm which way of singing *ginan* is appropriate?

In my discussion with some trained classical musicians from India about Hindu bhajans and their ragas, Mrs. Wasanti Paranjape mentioned: “The ragas of the same bhajan changes in India every fifty kilometers. You can get the same poetry of Mira bai²⁴³ but composed in various different ragas by musicians.

²⁴³ Mera bai is a famous female *bhakti* saint from Rajasthan, India. Also see Bai Meera, *Prem Vani*, Karachi, 2001.

All of them are widely accepted by the general audience of India”.²⁴⁴ Some ragas also differ from region to region, but the sentiments of the ragas are very much attached to the poetry of bhajan. As with Sufi *Kafis*, when Abida Parveen and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan sing, both follow their own way of singing and have their own raga. Each sounds unique to the audience and yet, will convey the sentiments of the Sufi poetry. In the same way the Sikh *shabd* and Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai’s *sur* music²⁴⁵ even though in both cases, the composers prescribed the information about the *ragas* and they are presumably be performed in the same way. However, even then one can find the different way and style of singing.

Conclusion

Music has its own roots and history to share; every song has its own characteristic, mood, and theme, which are embedded in the socio-cultural and religious environment in which it was conceived. In this chapter, we have explored that how the rich heritage of Ismaili ginan is one of the vital contributions towards the musical and poetic landscape of Indo-Pakistan. Ismaili Pirs have adopted and contributed to the rich vernacular musical and poetic systems available at that time and shared the sublime Shia religious messages of love and devotion through the creation of a new genre called ginan.

²⁴⁴ Pranjape, Wasanti, was a vocal instructor and director of the Indian music ensemble at the University of Alberta for many years. I was fortunate to be her students and gained immense knowledge about the Hindustani classical music from her. The interview was conducted with her in 2006, Edmonton.

²⁴⁵ “*Sur*” music is usually refers the Shah Abdul Latif poetry collection. According to N. A. Baloch “*sur*” music stands between classical music and folk music from Indo-Pakistan.

This chapter explored three key areas related to the poetic and musical contexts of Ismaili ginan. First, we have analyzed various methodologies, which the Khoja Ismailis have used throughout many centuries to practice their faith through the recitation of ginan. We have also examined how the system of *jodilo* (collective tunes) function in an extremely vast repertoire of Ismaili ginans. Furthermore, we have also explored that ginan has always been categorized according to its liturgical settings, as Ismaili ritual ceremonies take place only during the early morning and evening hours. Therefore, ginans are also categorized according to specific time of religious ritual such as *Prabatio* (morning) and *Sandya* (evening), as well as specific *kriya* (ritual) including ‘*gat-pat* ginan (water for cure), *akhrat* (life after death) and *Kushali* (celebratory occasions). We have further analyzed the function of the book ‘Ragamala’ prepared by Mukhi Lalji bhai Devraj so that the community can remember the *jodilo* (collective tunes) of major granths.

Moreover, we have also situated ginan within its cultural context. The Ismaili Pirs were well versed of the musical and poetic system of Sind, Punjab and Gujarat especially *Kafi*, *Wai*, *Bait*, *Dhal* and *Garba*, therefore, they have masterfully used these popular styles of music to compose ginans. However, this is the first time ginan poetry and music have been systematically and comparatively been situated within these existing forms. There are various signs both in the manuscripts as well as in the ginan poetry, and more so the structure of ginan and musical and poetic patterns and meters clearly demonstrate that ginan is based on regional devotional musical genres.

Among the South Asian scholarly work, often a few terms such as ‘Great’ and ‘Little’ traditions are used to distinguish from one tradition to another from various reasons, and unfortunately, it has also seen that ginans are very loosely placed under the ‘Little’ tradition which may have some roots with *lok*, *desi*, *folk* vernacular literatures.²⁴⁶ On the other hand, often scholars masterfully praise the work of Shah Latif, Bulleh Shah, Shah Inayat, Waris Shah, Shah Hussein, under the category of ‘Great’ traditions which are as regionally and culturally rooted as ginan tradition, perhaps because these poets are more popular and have been recognized as the ‘cultural soul’ of regional expressions of Pakistan and India. Scholars have sometimes employed only historical data and ignored the fact that the ginan tradition is very much rooted in the poetic and musical matrix of Indo-Pakistan and have been continued through its performance for centuries. In fact some of the ginans are the earliest forms of *Kafi*, *Wai*, *Dhal* and *Bait* traditions of Sind, Punjab and Gujarat

A few attempts have been made by individuals to legitimize ginan according to the ‘Great’ traditions, employing only their own limited understanding on classical music or regional knowledge on ginan and do not realize the diverse regional and musical expressions already embedded in wider culture of South Asia. H. H. Price Karim Aga Khan at the opening ceremony of Ismaili Centre Dubai in 2008 said: “Human diversity is itself a gift of Allah—that pluralism is not a threat but a blessing. It sees the desire to explore and connect as a way to learn and grow—not to dilute our identities but to enrich our self knowledge.”²⁴⁷ Similar ideas also arose during the 20th century, when all of a sudden musical genres were purposefully categorized under Hindustani classical music, such as “we only sing qawwalis which are based on Hindustani

²⁴⁶ Slawek Stephen, “Popular Kirtan in Benares: Some ‘Great’ Aspects of a Little Tradition”, 1998.

²⁴⁷ <http://www.theismaili.org/cms/255/Speech-at-the-Opening-Ceremony-of-the-Ismaili-Centre-Dubai>

ragas”²⁴⁸, or “we only perform authentic ghazals rooted in the Hindustani classical music”.²⁴⁹ As tradition shows, qawwali shares its deep roots within the vernacular literatures of South Asia along with some influence from Hindustani classical music. Similarly, ghazal is the poetical form, sung in various ways. Whether in classical musical form or not, ghazal will remain ghazal if it is performed according to the right poetic meters.

Therefore, having a limited understanding of any musical and poetic genres within its narrow scope might burn and discard various profound socio-cultural, religious and poetic contributions of any specific genre. That is why it is often said, “Great traditions are said to have it, and little traditions survive without it”.²⁵⁰ As a result, we perhaps do not need Therefore, if we need to study the musical and poetic aspects of gnan we need to understand the cultural realities and context sensitivities of Indo-Pakistan. As McKim Marriott argues that if someone needs to develop analytic modes that are pertinent to South Asia then one should recognize “Indian cultural realities”.²⁵¹ Similarly, A.K Ramanujan suggested that, unlike the Western way of thinking, which is based towards “context-free” parameters, Indian thinking is “context-sensitive”.²⁵² Contextualizing gnan music within its cultural context has helped us to better situate gnan within the wider framework of devotional practices of these regions, where music and poetry are inseparable from each other. Religious communities often use music and poetry as a medium to pray, regardless of their believe.

²⁴⁸ This expression is quite popular among trained Hindustani classical musicians, who perform Qawwali, interestingly one can also hear the similar expression from the late Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and his party.

²⁴⁹ Among the ghazal singers, once can hear the similar expressions by the performers, for more information see Manuel, Peter, “Thumri, ghazal, and modernity in Hindustani music culture,” 2000, pp. 133-156.

²⁵⁰ An expression mostly heard in oral tradition, also see Slawek Stephen, “Popular Kirtan in Benares: Some ‘Great’ Aspects of a Little Tradition”, 1998. And also see Thompson Gordon R, “What’s in a Dhal? Evidence of Raga-Like Approaches in a Gujarati Musical Tradition”, 1995.

²⁵¹ Marriott, McKimm, “Constructing and Indian Ethnomusicology”, 1989, pp. 295-308.

²⁵² Ramanujan, A. K, “Is There an Indian Way of Thinkng?”, 1989, pp. 41-58.

Finally, we have seen how various methods of standardizing ginans have evolved recently in Karachi, based on the argument related to the correct tunes of the ginan. One can hear similar debates sometimes among the East African Ismaili community in Canada that the only right tunes can be found in the collection of the legendary late Alwaiz Shamsuddin Haji Bandali, the late Alwaiz Amlani, and the late Alwaiz Abu Ali. I was fortunate to interview most of them except the late Shamsuddin Hajii Bandali who passed away before my arrival in Canada. He had single-handedly recorded almost six hundred ginans on audiocassettes and presented them to the Imam. I have also used some of his ginan recordings in my dissertation. I was very fortunate that his own daughter Mehrun Bandali, who lives in Edmonton, has graciously given me the gift of her father's entire collection. After listening to many of his ginans, I was amazed at his profound memory and ability of his singing, but more so for his utmost dedication and devotion towards ginans which he expressed through preserving this wonderful tradition and presented to his beloved Imam as a token of his dedication and utmost love towards this unique tradition.

All the above have made significant contributions to the field of ginan music. The late Jafersadiq Surmawala, Al-waiza Zarina Kamaluddin and Hyder Alidina, the Late Alwaiz Amlana, the Late Al-waiz Shamsuddin Haja Bandali and the late al-waiz Abu Ali, all have enriched the meaning of ginan through their monumental works. However, problem arise when one or the other tries to legitimize his or her position as an authority on this oral tradition and tries to impose their own limited framework based on either one type of classical music or one region of Junadardh Gujarat way of recitation. In my field research in various parts of Pakistan, I have witnessed the tension between "the Zarina Kamaluddin's Traiditional Ginan tune" versions with the "Oral" tradition, which has been practiced by the local communities in various parts of Pakistan for centuries. I have witnessed various regional influences on the ginan performance, such as in Sind, the style of ginan recitation is very close to Shah Latif's *Wai* and in Punjab the recitation is very close to the *Kafi* mode.

Therefore, one has to realize that these regional differences are not a threat; they are strength, as they give deeper meaning to their recitation to communicate their love and devotion to their Imam in their own regional expressions.

Ginans were written and composed in various styles of music, and has been passed down to the community through oral tradition for centuries. Therefore it is natural to find differences in ginan tunes. Kamran Khimani, an Ismaili poet, born and raised in Karachi said:

“One of the main purposes of composing ginans was to spread the messages of the Satpanth Shia Ismaili teachings to the indigenous people through the melodic hymns. Indeed ginan is based on the vernacular musical styles of Pakistan and India. One also needs to understand that ginans are the source of divine knowledge, revealed to *Pirs* in musical and poetic forms; and passed down to us through oral tradition. As you know that Khoja Ismaili live in various parts of the world and practice their faith through singing ginans, therefore, changes in tunes are meant to happen, hence we must accept unity in diversity and practise this wonderful tradition for generations to come”.²⁵³

²⁵³ Interview was conducted with Kamran Khimani over the phone in 2012. He currently lives in UAE and also serves in the Ismaili community as an honorary Al-waiz.

Chapter Four

Tradition of Reciting Ginan within the Context of Khoja Ismaili Ritual

*“Ginans are a precious gift from our Pirs; through recitation one can connect with the divine. Our Pirs have given us the essence of the Holy Quran in the indigenous languages so we can follow the sirat-ul-mustaqim (straight path). Indeed ginan is a form of prayer!”*²⁵⁴

Sonic performances and vocal recitations play a constructive role in building ritual spaces of many religions. Singing together in chorus promotes unity in a congregation and overwhelms devotees with personal and spiritual satisfaction. In many cases, however, the function of religious sonic performances is not scripturally defined. In the context of *Satpanth*²⁵⁵, ginans come to life when they are sung. Reciters sing ginans as devotional prayer. As a result, many questions arise, including what role does recitation or sound play in the religious ritual of devotion? How do space and sound affect each other in the context of Ismaili ritual? For many centuries, Ismaili ginans have played an integral part in Ismaili ritual, piety and prayers. For almost every Ismaili ritual occasion, there is a specific ginan that invokes sentiments and shares layers of symbolic and cultural meaning through recitation and performance.

In this chapter, I will first analyze various theoretical frameworks to situate ginan within the larger context of Ismaili Khoja ritual. How does sonic

²⁵⁴ Karmali Taufiq, interviewed over the phone in May 2011. The term “*sirat-ul-mustaqim*” (*straight path*) is derived from the Quran, which is used for those who follow the path of God or truth, which is the exact translation of the indigenous Indian term used for *Khoja* Ismailis in Indian Subcontinent “*Satpanth*” (a true path).

²⁵⁵ The term *Satpanth* is an indigenous term used for the *Khoja* Ismailis from South Asia, the term ‘*Sat*’ means truth and ‘*panth*’ means path, so *Satpanth* means true or straight path, which is the exact translation of the Quranic term *Sirat-ul-Mustaqim*. The word *Satpanth* has been used many times in the ginan repertoire such as Pir Shams in his ginan *Valek Moto*, verse number 63 said “O Brother! The Momin has found *Satpanth*, yet the foolish one did not obtain the secret”, Compiled by Zarina Kamaluddin and Kamaluddin Ali Muhammad, English Translation by Yasmin Sher Ali, Karachi, Pakistan, 2009, p. 14.

recitation in unison integrate devotees and prepare them for a certain ritual? Second, I will examine a few Ismaili rituals and analyze what effects ginans bring into the personal and communal life of the devotees. Within the ritual context, how do ginans facilitate and prepare devotees to share with their utmost devotion, love and spiritual union with their Imam?

Sonic Performance, Ritual and Sound

I will use ethnographic tools to place emphasis on the “process” which includes the manner of performance, that is the “process” itself, rather than the music, becomes the focus of study. Victor Turner notes: “I find it useful and like to think of ritual essentially as performance, as enactment, and not primarily as rules or rubrics. The rules frame the ritual process but the ritual process transcends its frame.”²⁵⁶ Similar to all great moments of performance, ritual provides some culturally important dimension to be experienced in both a structured and highly significant manner. Ritual seen as enactment, as social drama, may even be paradigmatic: “It is held to communicate the deepest values of the group regularly performing, it has a ‘paradigmatic’ function.”²⁵⁷ Further, if we follow the insights of Van Gennep, we would perceive the transformative quality of rituals: “For there is undoubtable transformative capacity in a well-performed ritual, implying an ingress of power into the initial situation: and ‘performing well’ implies the co-involvement of the majority of its performers in a self-transcending flow of ritual events.”²⁵⁸

In other words the participant is beyond the rules governing the ritual, or rather, through the rules the person moves into a state beyond that is defined. For Turner it is a ‘liminal’ state, an experience which is beyond the boundary of mere rules and practice.²⁵⁹ Earle Waugh has masterfully used Turners approach in his pioneering ethnographic work entitled “The Munshidin of

²⁵⁶ Turner, Victor, “Social Dramas and Stories about Rhem.” 1980, pp 159-60.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 163.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 160.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 161.

Egypt”, in which he has situated their *dhikr* and Sufi *Sama* in a more holistic approach, including the mystical poetry of Islam as well as the ritual context of performance.²⁶⁰

Within the Ismaili ritual context, ginans are sung and performed because they give new life to the text. Each reciter, through performance, brings their own meaning to the understanding of ginans. Indeed, on a given occasion, the community can be moved while hearing the ginan. Sounds also evoke certain sentiments especially when they are combined within the ritual setting. For example, Khushali ginans are more celebratory in their core performance. The ginan “*Ya Ali khub majalis*” (O Ali, in the splendid assembly) is specifically sung every year on July 11th when the present Imam came to the throne and became the Imam of his worldwide Ismaili community.

The entire ginan expresses the glory of the Imam and is a celebration of happiness. Similarly the ginan “*Dhan dhan aj nu*” “(An auspicious and joyous occasion) which is also a celebratory ginan is specifically performed every year on December 13th, the birthday of the present Imam, it shares the feeling of joy and happiness, and “*Navroz na din*” (On the day of Navroz) which is sung every year on March 21st, the first day of spring, shares the story and experience of the *Pir*’s journey to Iran when he met Imam Khalil-ullah on the day of Navroz. All of these ginans bring sentiments of happiness and joy, and whenever they are performed in *jamathhanas*, the entire *jamat* in unison participate at the congregation, and this enriches unity and happiness within the community.

²⁶⁰ Waugh, Earle, *The Munshidin of Egypt*, p. 7. It was as early as in 1989 when a religious scholar has explored the profound power of Sufi music of Munshidin and challenges us to look more extensively at the relation of Sufism to Islam and to reconsider the misperceptions about the music’s ability to articulate the sacred. Waugh has provided a fresh creative method of looking at music in Egypt through various cultural and religious contexts drawn from Islamic practices itself; for cultural studies and historians of religions, Waugh has located music and its performance at the core of religious belief and practices.

Similarly, there are specific ginans that are associated with *bandagi*, (early morning hours of meditation) and, it resonates both in terms of sounds and poetry as meditative, and it better prepares devotees to concentrate. It is difficult to say whether the sounds or melody create the mood of specific ginans or whether it is the poetry that heightens its sentiments. Studies reveal that in Hindustani classical music, specific ragas are associated with the time of a day, such as *raga bhairav*, which is often sung during the early morning hours, and *raga Yaman* during the evening. After carefully studying the ginans according to the theory of Hindustani classical music, it appears that ginans which may have been composed in the afternoon raga. However, because formal ceremonies are conducted during the early morning and evening hours only, therefore these ginans are performed accordingly.

For example, the gnan “*Eji Kalapat Jal Pat*” (Unreal and false is this illusionary) is composed in *raga bhairav*, however, it is often recited both during the morning and evening hours. Similarly, a very famous gnan “*Aye Raheman Rahem*” (O most Gracious and Merciful) composed by Sayeda Imam Begum in *raga Kafi* is mostly performed during the evening hours. However, it is sometimes also performed during the morning congregation. Among Ismailis, the ginans are not prescribed according to specific time of the day similar to the concept of Hindustani classical ragas but are often set according to specific occasion and ritual.

What effect does sound bring into the given ritual? Do the sounds of ginans create a sacred environment and echo the sentiments of piety? Each musical piece has its own history and cultural roots, and each shares its own tale. Although the Khoja Ismailis have gone through various cultural and social changes from migration, their ginans shed light on the story of their religious, social and cultural identities. Sounds also evoke certain sentiments, especially when they are combined with a specific ritual context. In his evaluation of *Hinduism and Sacred Sounds*, Guy L. Beck explores sound in its core as sacred

in origin and sacrality, in its root expression, is sonorous. That is why “the soteriological *modus operandi* for the Hindu aspiring for liberation or association with a chosen deity involves a sonic act informed by a sonic theology”.²⁶¹ Another popular religious expression of sound among the Hindus is “*Nada Brahma hai*” (sound is a God) which is commonly used for religious chants such as *mantras*, *bhajan* and *kirtan* (devotional songs), in daily ritual practices.²⁶²

Sonic sounds give expression to the culture and society because sound is the symbolic presence of sacred being. Through chanting and singing *ginan* in communal gatherings, devotees harmonize themselves into a society; they are unified as one large family. Moreover, devotional songs assist devotees to spiritually prepare themselves for religious ceremony. The oral cultural element of *ginan*, especially its tunes or *ragas*, help devotees to memorize it by heart.

Steven Feld, in his book *Sound and Sentiment*, argues that sound constitutes the very cultural system, in all its myriad expressions, of the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea.²⁶³ And Feld takes pains—he even weeps—to show us that it is the way the Kaluli hear reality; that is, through music and other fundamental sonic performances such as lamentation. A slightly different but an equally comprehensive musical basis for reality, is inflected by the Kalapalo people of the Upper Xingu Basin in the Southern reaches of the Brazilian Amazon. In *A Musical View of the Universe*, Ellen Basso demonstrates how Kalapalo religious experiences are the outcome of complex spectacles (dramatic presentations of history, social existence, poetry, arts, and fantasy)

²⁶¹ Beck, Guy, *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound*, p. 213, 1993.

²⁶² Wulff, Donna Marie, “On Practicing Religiously: Music as Sacred in India.” 1983, pp. 149-72.

²⁶³ Feld Steven and Fox A, Aaron, “Music and Language”, 1994, pp. 25-53.

whose finely tuned symbolisms and psychodynamics are orchestrated, above all, through ritual music.²⁶⁴

In Ficino's view, music is a key both for physicians and mystics who deal with conditions of frenzy and prophetic furor.²⁶⁵ Ficino's view of the fundamental importance of sound, especially music, to the functioning of the world and the human knowledge of it is unusually comprehensive, but it is by no means unique. From ancient times, thinkers and practitioners alike have employed music to ground their understanding of the universe and the role of humans in it. For Socrates, music invokes a primary model for justice and "the mean." For him, as Plato gives him voice in *The Republic*, the musical scale is where moderation reigns in a demonstrable way and, therefore, the musical scales model the virtues—especially distributive justice—which allow all people to "sing the same chant together".²⁶⁶

Ginan and Ritual Process

What affect and emotions can one feel through performance in a specific ritual? According to Tambiah, "ritual is a culturally-constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotype (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)".²⁶⁷ Tambiah's definition of ritual is strongly constructed within a culture in which people use symbolic patterns and languages through various sources to communicate with the divine. In his definition, Tambiah mentions

²⁶⁴ Basso, Ellen B, *A musical View of the Universe: Kalapalo Myth and Ritual Performances*, 1985, p. 311,

²⁶⁵ Godwin, Joscelyn, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth: Mysticism in Music from Antiquity to the Avant-Garde*, 1995, pp. 17-19.

²⁶⁶ Sullivan E Lawrence, (edited), *Enchanting Powers* "Introduction", 1997, p. 5. Also see Plato, *Republic*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, 331e-432a, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>

²⁶⁷ Tambiah, S.J, "A Performative Approach To Ritual", 1979, 65, pp. 113-69.

four main functions of the ritual; first ritual provides a form and structure, which helps to formalize the community. Second, ritual binds people together, construct on groups, and establishes rules in which everyone is involved in participating. Third, ritual draws upon many indigenous cultural and linguistic qualities in which people symbolically communicate with the divine and finally, ritual allows believers to continuously repeat ritual actions and participate communally through chanting and singing together until it becomes an essential part of their daily consciousness.

In his classic work, the *Elementary forms of the Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim studied the impact of ritual in society. He concluded that one of the major functions of rituals is to integrate the individual into the group allowing the maintenance and vitalization of collective order and solidarity²⁶⁸ The performance or ritual, according to this view, expresses the collective consciousness of the social group; hence participation in ritual action reinforces conformity to collective values.

Monica Wilson defines ritual with, “surely men express in ritual what moves them the most, and since that form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human society”.²⁶⁹ Wilson highlighted the relationship between ritual expressions and human society. Her views support the ideas that people construct rituals and practice devotion in a specific culture where it can symbolically communicate in two ways, first for personal satisfaction and second, for the collective consciousness of a wider community.

Among the Khoja Ismaili community the term “*kriya*” (good deeds) is often used instead of the term “ritual”. The term “*kriya*” is derived from the Sanskrit

²⁶⁸ Durkheim, Emile, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 1965.

²⁶⁹ Wilson, Monica, “Nyakyusa ritual and symbolism.” 1954, 56: pp. 228-241.

language and it means, “purified actions” or “good deeds” The etymology of the word ritual does not fully convey the meaning of the term “*kriya*”. The word ‘ritual’ derived from the Latin word ‘ritualis’ from late 16th century and according to the Oxford dictionary is “a series of actions or type of behavior regularly and invariably followed by someone”²⁷⁰, and the Cambridge Dictionary define the term “ritual” as “a set of fixed actions and sometimes words performed regularly, especially as part of ceremony”.²⁷¹ Hence, both definitions more or less take ritual as a routine set of actions or behavior; this may or may not be used in the religious context. However, the specific meaning of *kriya* within the Ismaili context is mostly used for ceremonies that take place inside the *jamatkhana*. In this chapter, I will use the term “ritual” not in its limited meaning of continues action but within the broader context of Ismaili ritual which incorporates actions of good deeds.

Within the Ismaili ritual ceremonies, special significance is given to the *batin* (esoteric or internal aspect) rather than *zahiri* (literally, external) aspects of the faith. Many Ismaili rituals contain layers of symbolical meanings; therefore, it is vital not to rely on only action but to find the deeper meaning. Nanji writes,

“The ritual merges the individual at one level into the new community, at another it frees him from the merely structural or *zaheri* (literally, “exterior”) aspects of ritual and enables him to experience the dimension of *batin*, the interior religion through which his individual quest for spiritual knowledge and understanding is attained”.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Online Oxford dictionary: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ritual>

²⁷¹ Online Cambridge dictionary:
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/ritual?q=ritual>

²⁷² Nanji, Azim, “Ritual and Symbolic Aspects of Islam in African Contexts”, 1982, pp. 105-107.

Liturgical and Non-Liturgical Contexts:

The ginans are performed both in liturgical and non-liturgical contexts. We will be analyzing that performances of gnan first according to its liturgical, which includes Ismaili ritual and sacred space such as *jamatkhana* assembly. It is important to identify the differences in performance context between sacred and public recitations:

Figure 3: Liturgical and Non-liurgical Context

Liturgical/Sacred/Ritual/Inside <i>Jamatkhana</i>	Non-Liturgical/Self-Motivated/ Outside <i>Jamatkhana</i>
1) Guiding principles exist and are complied with 2) Motivated by the Jamat/Community 3) Structured and enforced by Leadership 4) Follow ritual setting and appropriate sequence 5) Official Cds of ginans available through sources approved by the ITREB 6) No musical accompaniments inside <i>Jamatkhana</i> 7) Specific timelines enforced on overall ceremony of recitation.	1) No Guiding principles and compliance 2) Self-motivated 3) Not structured and not enforced consistently 4) Free flow, not bound by specific ritual context 5) No official Cds only available through Internet word of mouth, personal connections. 6) With or without musical accompaniments 7) Public performance on stage, no specific timelines are enforced.

Before moving on to the next section, we need to know the role of ITREB in terms of gnan transmission. The Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education board is the official body of Ismaili Council for Canada, which according to the guidance of Ismaili constitution undertake the religious formation of the community. ITREB in the past has released official gnan tapes and Cds, which are widely available to the community through *Jamatkhana* literature counters and libraries. ITREB also

In the sacred setting of reciting ginans inside the *jamatkhana*, compliance with official guidelines is mandatory because ginans are an important part of the

formal ritual ceremony. In view of this, strict timelines are applied on how long each reciter is allowed to sing ginans in this setting. Usually the choice of reciting ginan is not mandatory and it is up to the reciter to select a ginan according to his or her choice. However, the selected ginan has to be sung in its appropriate tune, which is familiar to the other participants who can then participate in the performance, according to the appropriate occasion and approved time. The national ITREBs in all countries where Ismailis exist release ginan books and recordings for the community, and especially for the BUI (Bait-ul-Ilm) religious classes, where BUI teachers are used to teach ginans. Outside the official ITREB setting, many Ismaili individuals have also released private ginan albums in North America. In the following section, I will demonstrate various examples of individuals who have released such albums, or used various other creative mediums to demonstrate and share their love and devotion.

The ritual emphasizes the meaning through various ceremonies in which ginan plays a key role; it sets the tone for the performance. For example, ginans that are recited before *bait-ul-khayal* (early morning meditation) creates an atmosphere for the ritual. They heighten the sentiments of meditation to another level.

Before we move on, it is essential to define the role of *jamatkhana* within the Ismaili community and what role ginans play during the specific rituals inside the *jamatkhana*.

Jamatkhana

Jamatkhana is a blessing and utmost gift to our community, where elders, children from various geographical countries including South Asia, Central Asia, East Africa, Middle East and North America all come together under one single roof, as one large family. My parents are retired and they are very happy in their own life only because of *jamatkhana*, they attend both early morning and evening ceremonies, and for them coming to *jamatkhana*, hearing ginans and participating in

other religious *kriya* gives them utmost peace, for them *jamatkhana* is like a spiritual janat (lit. heaven).²⁷³

Badar Alidina one of the Ismaili community members from Edmonton made the above comment. Badar and his family moved to Canada almost twenty-five years ago from Pakistan and all his family members try to attend *jamatkhana* services regularly.

The term *jamatkhana* is derived from the Arabic word *jamat* (gathering) and the Persian word *khana* (house, place) that together can be translated as ‘a place of congregation’ or ‘assembly house’. A range of spaces for worship, communal, religious and practices can be found throughout the course of Muslim history especially within the socio-cultural context and geographical differences. Islam spread from Arabia to Indonesia and evolved in various ways. Many cultural ideas, indigenous practices, languages, traditions and customs which were prevalent before the arrival of Islam, were incorporated into the Muslim beliefs, so Islam did not seem alien to them.

Therefore, diverse places of worship and practices exist throughout the Muslim world. Although among the majority of Muslims the most common place of worship is *masjid* (mosque), a wide range of places for contemplation and religious practices are known. Among the mystically-oriented Sufi Muslim communities the places of religious practices include *khanaqas*, *ribats*, *tekkes*, and *zawiyas*. For Shia Ithna ‘Ashari communities the houses of religious practice include: *husayniyas* also known as *ashurkhanas*, *imambaras*, *matam* or *tekiyas* and *majlis*. Among Druze Muslims, the most common terms used are *majlis* and *khalwas*. Among the Sunni Muslims some other terms are also such as *dargah*, *astan*, *rawzah*, *maqbara*, which are very common among the Muslim religious spaces.

²⁷³ Alidina, Badar, I interviewed him in Edmonton 2010.

Pir Sadardin in one of his *ginan* “Sambhlo momano vedni vat” says:

Eji Zikr karo vira gatmanhe jai
Bhaire gat manhe gurnar bahest lutai

Translation: Go to *jamatkhana* and remember the name of the lord.
 The Lord has generously offered paradise in the *jamatkhana*.²⁷⁴

The origin of the term *jamatkhana* has its roots in the Indian subcontinent, and historically has been used to refer to the outdoor covered spaces used by the Chisti Sufi *tariqa* during their religious sessions and teaching by their *pir* or *shaykh*. In this context, the *jamatkhana* is most often found within important tomb complexes such as that of Salim Chishti in Fatehpur Sikri and Mu'inuddin Chishti in Ajmer. The Sunni Memon and Shia Bohra communities of present day India and Pakistan also have private places of gathering called *jamatkhana*.

Situating the *jamatkhana* within the tradition of Muslim piety, His Highness the Aga Khan made the following remarks on the occasion of the foundation laying ceremony for the Ismaili Centre in Dubai:

“For many centuries, a prominent feature of the Muslim religious landscape has been the variety of spaces of gathering co-existing harmoniously with the masjid, which in itself has accommodated a range of diverse institutional spaces for educational, social and reflective purposes. Historically serving communities of different interpretations and spiritual affiliations, these spaces have retained their cultural nomenclatures and characteristics, from *ribat* and *zawiyya* to *khanaqa* and *jamatkhana*. The congregational space incorporated within the Ismaili Centre belongs to the historic category of *jamatkhana*, an institutional category that also serves a number of sister Sunni and Shi‘a communities, in their respective contexts, in many parts of the world. Here, it will be space reserved for traditions and practices specific to the Shi‘a Ismaili *tariqa* of Islam.”²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Sadardin Pir, “Sambhlo momano vedni vat”, stanza number 3, Ali Mohammed Kamaluddin, Kamaluddin, Zarina, *Practices and Ceremonies: Essays on Rites and Rituals*, 2008, p. 25.

²⁷⁵ H.H Prince Karim Aga Khan during the Dubai ground breaking ceremony of Ismaili Centre, Dec 13th, 2003. Web address: <http://www.akdn.org/Content/594/Foundation-Laying-Ceremony-of-the-Ismaili-Centre-Dubai>

Jamatkhana is an integral part of the Ismaili community. Indeed most of the Ismaili activities are somehow connected with the *jamatkhana* and revolve around it. In South Asian countries and in some parts of East Africa many Ismailis prefer to live in small communities (comprised of several buildings) where only Ismaili families live, so they can practice their faith freely. Some of the bigger communities have the services of *jamatkhana* inside their premises so families can attend *jamatkhana* and practice their religious duties easily. Even in the western world, many Ismaili families prefer to live within close proximity of the *jamatkhana*, so that they attend the religious ceremonies easily.

Jamatkhana and Ginan

As soon as one enters the *jamatkhana*, one hears the sounds of ginan. Old and young alike recite and lead the ginan from a podium located in the front centre of the *jamatkhana*. The sound is projected through speakers that are mounted in the ceiling; hence as soon as one enters the *Jamatkhana*, one hears the ginan from almost every corner. The sounds of the ginan itself create a sacred environment and echo sentiments of piety. For example, a mother entering the *jamatkhana* with her child hears the recitation of ginan. Even when they are taking their shoes off inside the entrance, they hear the ginan, are aware that the official ceremony has already begun and therefore everyone has to maintain the proper *adab* (code of conduct) and observe silence. All participants sit in rows, wherever there is room. They need to accommodate themselves and everyone except the senior community members, sits on the floor and participates as one community in the *sama* and *dhikr* of ginan.

Performing Ginan within its ritual context inside the *Jamatkhana*

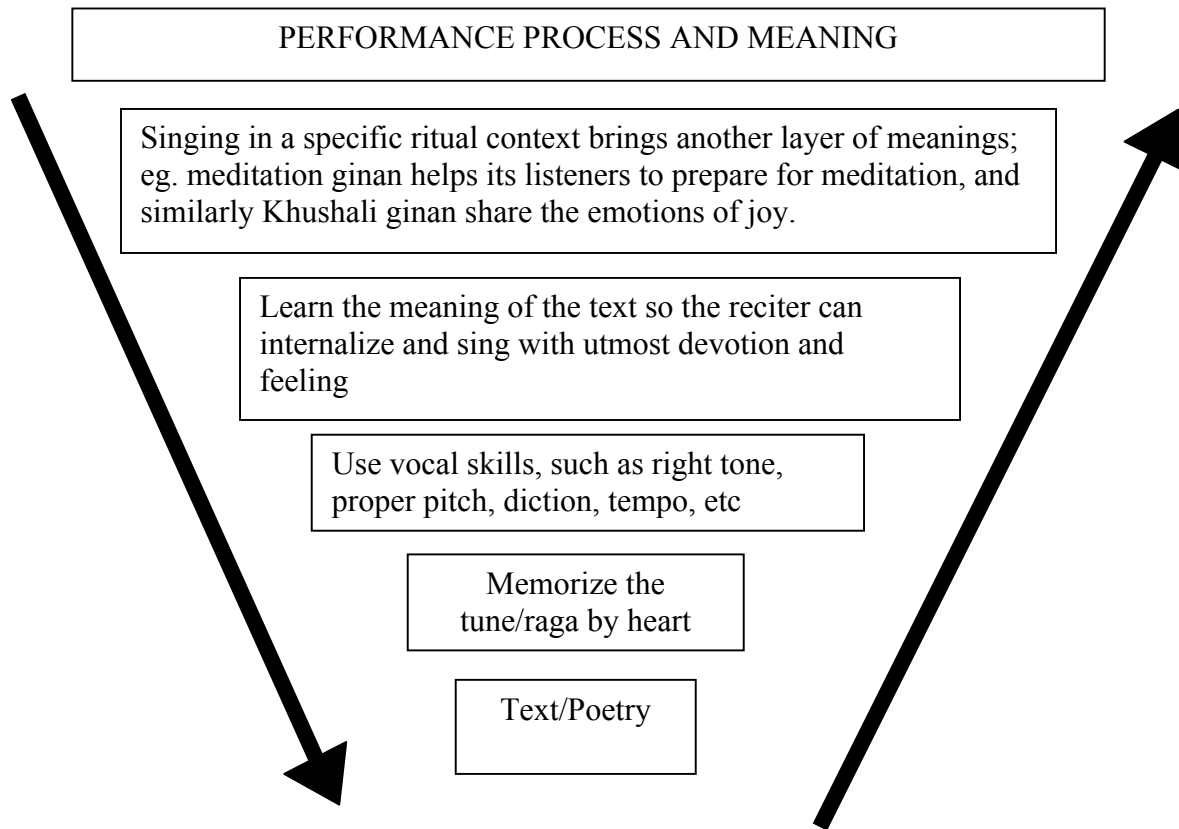
Figure three below demonstrates the process of performance within the Ismaili ginan in its ritual context. The tunes of the ginans do not appear in the ginan books used by the reciter. The reciter memorizes the tune he/she is going to

use during performance in *Jamatkhana*. He/she also needs to be more effective in his/her performance. This encourages a deeper experience, both in terms of rendition and the meaning of the ginan. These two elements are extremely important for any given performance. For vocal performance, it is important to use better vocal techniques such as right tone, proper pitch, diction, tempo. This brings the mood and proper feeling to the ginan. One must also understand the meaning of the poetry, Al-waiz Muhammad Yousuf said, “Without understanding the meaning of ginan it is very difficult to bring out emotions and feeling. We must not forget that the ginan contains many esoteric treasures therefore one must try to comprehend the meaning of ginan before performing inside the *jamatkhana*”.²⁷⁶

After memorizing the ginan, practicing its music abilities, internalizing its meaning, the next most important step is to deliver the performance in the given context. Therefore, certain a *adab* (code of conduct) is required. This includes the proper dress code (simple clothes, for instance, reciting ginan during a death ceremony, most devotee prefer white), cleanness, the strict guidance of time in *jamatkhana* settings. Most commonly five minutes are allocated for each performance of ginan, therefore, it is reciter’s responsibility not to exceed the given time.

²⁷⁶ Noor, Mohammad, Yousuf, interviewed in Hyderabad, Sind, Pakistan, 2009.

Figure 4: Performance Process in the *Jamatkhana* Ritual Context



Adab includes the reciter's permission at the *jamati Mukhi Saheb* (*Jamatkhana* ritual leader) before recitation. From a technical point of view it is also important that the reciter sit close to the microphone so he or she may be able to project his or her voice better and the *jamat* can sing along. Further, one must try to learn the ragas of the gnan familiar to the *jamat* and sing in a manner that the entire congregation can sing along with him/her in chorus. As Badar states, "some reciters have beautiful voices for the gnan but I don't enjoy them, as they only try to project their sole voices and forget the core

essence of the ginan which is to sing along with the *jamat* so than everyone appreciates the beauty and meaning of ginan”.²⁷⁷

In the front centre of *jamatkhana* there are two types of podiums (higher and lower), both are used for recitations of ginan, *qasidas*, *tasbih*, *dua* (*salat*). The religious ceremony is lead by respected jamati religious leaders called *Mukhi*, *Mukhiani*, *Kamdia*, *Kamdiani* directly appointed by the Imam through his institutions. Male and female members are seated in two separate sections. The *jamatkhana* is open throughout the year, both during the mornings and evening hours. Although the sequence may be different in some parts of the world, in North America, during the evening hours, the religious ceremony mostly takes place in the following sequence²⁷⁸

- Around 6:15 pm the *jamatkhana* is opened by designated members
- From 6:30 pm to around 7:29 pm: Ginans and sometimes qasidas are sung while ginan is being sung *community* members participate in religious offerings, this section is very similar to *mehfil-e-sama* (an assembly of hearing) where community members listen to the ginans and prepare themselves for prayers; many members also recite along with the reciter, some members close their eyes and recite internally, and some perform *dhikr*.
- 7:30 pm: *Dua* (*salat*, or prayer starts), both male and female members are allowed to lead the prayer which is recited by heart, certain code of conduct applies.
- 7:37 pm: Upstanding Tasbih: Any male or female member offers standing prayers.
- 7:40 pm: *Ginan* or qasida is sung. Either male and female, regardless of age, can lead

²⁷⁷ Badar Alidina, I interviewed him in 2009

²⁷⁸ The following ritual sequence is based on Edmonton, Canada ceremony, in other parts of the world one can find the sequence a bit different.

- 7: 45 pm: *Farman* (guidance of an Imam) is read. Again either both male and female members can read the *Farman*
- 7:50 pm: Second Dua (*salat*, prayer). Either male or female member lead the *Dua* (prayer).
- 7:56 pm: Announcements are made related to upcoming *majalis*, death services or any other community ceremonies.
- 7:58 pm: After the formal ceremony of *jamatkhana* is over, members of the community participate in the *dua karavi* ceremony and *jura* where *jamati* religious leaders give specific prayers to individual members.

“*Jamatkhana* is like an ocean; it contains numerous pearls. The kind of pearls that one can acquire depends on the *niya* (intention) of the believer. A lot depends on the receptivity of the heart. Everyone goes to *jamatkhana* for his own *jiv* (soul). The latter does not benefit unless the believer’s heart is pure so that the Divine Light (Nur) can shine through it.”²⁷⁹

Apart from regular ceremony in *jamatkhana* there are specific occasions in which *ginan* plays a significant role such as *gatpat* ceremonies, *Bait-ul-khayal*, *Kushalis* including Navroz (21st March), Imamat day (11th July), Salgirah Mubarak (13th December), also during the ceremony of *didar/darbar* (*physical glimpse or vision*), *Akhrat* (means life after death).

Unlike mosques, *jamatkhana* is not only the place of worship. It is the heart of the community where, along with prayers and Ismaili rituals, many other social activities are organized. Most *jamatkhanas* provide the service of libraries and reading rooms where a wide variety of books are available especially on the topics of Islam, Ismailism, Sufism and religion and culture for all age groups. The *jamatkhanas* also offer literature desks where various materials related to Islam in general and Shia Ismailism in particular is available for sale, including books, CDs, audio tapes, DVDs, rosaries, Imam’s portraits. Some *jamatkhanas*

²⁷⁹ Comments made by elderly female respondent, Parveen Aziz Dossa “Ritual and Daily Life: Transmission and Interpretation of the Ismaili Tradition in Vancouver”, 1983, p 93.

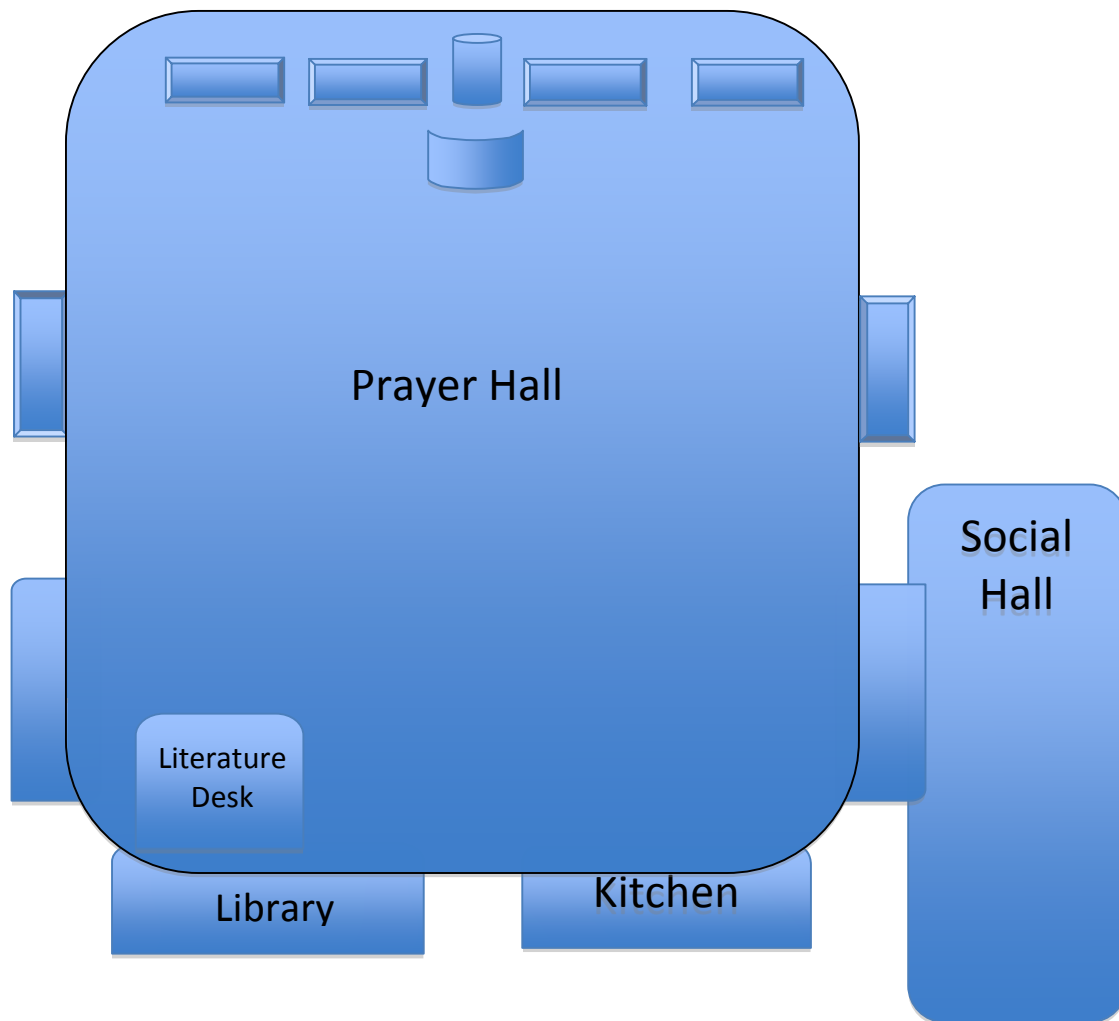
also offer *Bait-ul ilm* on weekends where Ismaili students attend religious education classes. The model of education is quite advanced and its curriculum is designed at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, UK. Most *jamatkhanas* also offer kitchen facilities to prepare and maintain food for certain occasions. Many *jamatkhanas* offer the facility of social halls, which are used for various purposes such as lectures, seminars, meetings, social and cultural activities and celebrations such as *raas* (cultural dances) and *jaman* (festive food on specific events), devotional music shows, talent shows, games for youth such as table tennis.

A young member Nazir who was brought up in Canada explains the importance of *jamatkhana* as:

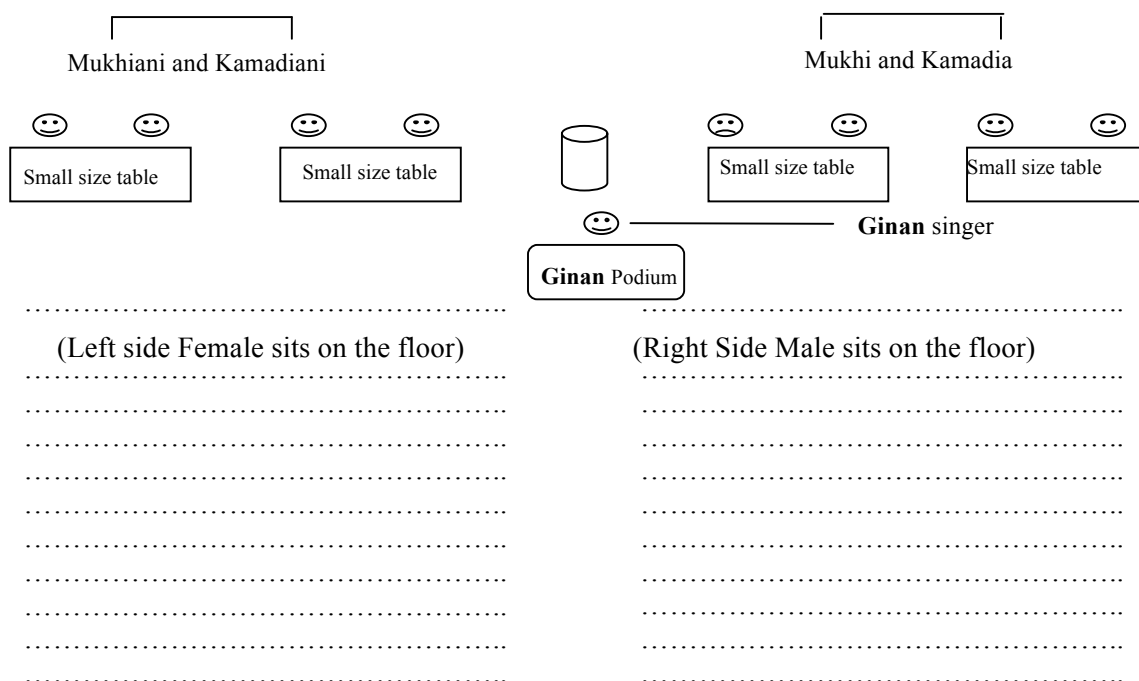
“Having been exposed to the Western world, I feel that there is an absence of a sense of belonging. There is havoc and no common denominators. All these shortcomings are reversed in *jamatkhana*. There is a very special kind of bond that ties us with the Imam and through him with the *jamat*. A sense of well being is a vital part of life, and I think that this is acquired through faith. By faith, I do not mean blind faith; at one time, I never appreciated our ceremonies. But as I grow older, I realize that there is deep significance attached to the ceremonies. I wanted to learn to appreciate them myself rather than being told what to do.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Comments made by Nizar, Parveen Aziz Dossa “Ritual and Daily Life: Transmission and Interpretation of the Ismaili Tradition in Vancouver, 1983, p. 22.

Figure 5: *Jamatkhana* Sample layout²⁸¹



²⁸¹ This is a sample layout, based on the headquarters *Jamatkhana* in Edmonton, located at 4243-93rd Street, Edmonton. However, in general, the *Jamatkhana* settings and layout can be changed according to different geographical places and needs.

Figure 6: *Jamatkhana* Ritual Setting

Among the many rituals practiced inside the *jamatkhana*, the ghatpat ceremony is very significant.

Ghatpat Ceremony and Ginan

Ke tame amiras pijo din ne rat ke, nur nuraniyare lol.

Pap prachhat sarve jae ke, chit na chokhlare lol.

“By day and by night (always) partake of nectar which is full of light.
Then all sins will be removed and the heart will be purified.”²⁸²

The use of water as symbol of purification is common to various religions, especially South Asian religions. Sikhs use *amrit* (holy water) as a reminder not to repeat their sins. Hindus go to the river Ganges for self-purification. Many Sufis use water for self-purification. Ismailis make use of water for the *gat-pat* ceremony.²⁸³ Among Muslims the well of Zamzam in Mecca or the sacred places in Karbala one finds reinforce the symbolic and ritual connections with Shia Ismaili Islam. As described in various *ginans*, in terminology analogous to some of the Sufi literature, the drinking of the sacred water is symbolic of the heart being illuminated by divine light in the Quran God says “And by means of water, We gave life (*hayaya*) to everything”.²⁸⁴

The words “*ghat*” (vessel used for water) and “*pat*” (low rectangular table) are derived from the Sanskrit language. One of the main features of the *ghatpat* ceremony is *niyaz* which is also known as *Aab-e-Shafa* (water for cure) *Aab* means water and *shafa* means cure, hence *aab-e-shafa* means water for cure. *Aab-e-Shafa* is performed daily after the early morning prayers in *jamatkhana*, on every Friday evening, and on special *majalis* and occasions such as Chandrat (first night of the new moon). The vessels, consisting of three round plates, one round bowl, eight minibowls, and one jug, are wrapped in a white square cloth diagonally tied with two knots and covered with a white towel.

The study of *ginan* reveals that the *Pirs* introduced the *Ghatpat* ceremony in the Indian Subcontinent. There are various terms used in the *ginanic* discourse for *Ghatpat* including *Amijal*, *Paval*, *Nur*, *Nirmal Nir*, *Nirmal Nur*, *Ami*, *Amiras*, *Kalash*, *Kumbh-jal*, *Niyam*.

²⁸² Sabzwari, Shams Pir, “Ke tame amiras pijo”, stanza 1, Ali Mohammed Kamaluddin, Kamaluddin, Zarina, *Practices and Ceremonies: Essays on Rites and Rituals*, 2008, p. 114.

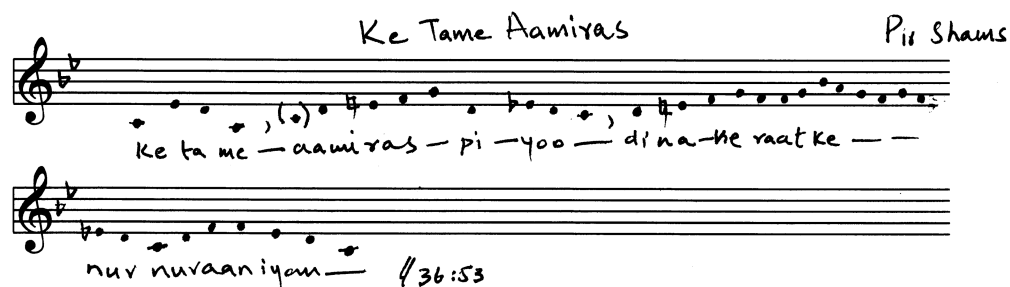
²⁸³ Tajdin, Mumtaz, “Ab-I Shafa”, 2006, pp. 4-5.

²⁸⁴ Quranic *ayat*, Sura 21, *ayat* 30

Performance Context of *Gatpat* Ceremony:

The *ghatpat* ginan is usually sung by solo male or female members and also sometimes sung in chorus. When the official religious ceremony is about to finish, the *Kamadia saheb* concludes the official ceremony and hands over to the person who prepares ghat-pat to invite the *jamat* to partake. The *Mukhi*, who is a representative of an Imam, leads the ghatpat ceremony followed by the *jamat*. Meanwhile, a ginan reciter proceeds to the podium and recites the *ghatpat* ginan for about three to five minutes. Usually the younger members of the *jamat* get an opportunity to sing *this* ginan. During the recitation usually the entire *jamat* rises and sings along in chorus and also partakes in the ghatpat ceremony. Among many ghatpat ginans, the most popular include “*Eji anand anad kariyo rikhisaro*”, “*Eji Ghar Sar vadhaaiyu(n)*”, “*Noor vela noor piyo*”, “*Hanspuri Nagri maa(n)he*”, “*Eji gat maa(n)he aavi ne*”, “*Pachamthi shahna dal aavshe*”.

Ghatpat ginan affects participants on many levels. First of all it is a reminder to the *jamat* to begin the ceremony with utmost humility, therefore it consciously prepares the *jamat* for the ceremony. Second, the main objective of the *Ghatpat* ceremony is to plead forgiveness for the shortcomings or sins one has made, and promises the Lord not to repeat the sins. Consciously or unconsciously it cleans one's heart and gives importance to the cleanliness of actions and behavior. It also symbolizes the unity within the community especially when the whole *jamat* drinks from the same cups as at home with the family. Therefore ghatpat reminds everyone about the unity of one large community. Every piece of the music has its own history and culture from where it may have originated; therefore specific tunes of ghatpat ginan unconsciously connect Ismailis to the wider culture of their ancestors. Thirdly, the ghatpat tunes have its own effect in the memory of Ismailis, because it signifies the specific ritual and its meaning.



Transcription 12: Sabzwari, Shams Pir, “Ke tame Amiras”, sung by religious centre students in Talwandi, Punjab, 2007.

Ginan: *Ke tame Amiras pijo din ne raat ke, Nur, Nuranya re lol*

Translation: Drink the water of life, all day and night

“The *pirs* use hagiographic materials in ginans which were already part of culture they lived in and transformed material into vehicles for Ismaili teaching”.²⁸⁵ This process can be best defined as mythopoesis, that is, a recreation that reflects “a critique of the existing social norms and points to a futuristic order which is envisaged as integrating the valuable residues of the past and the present”.²⁸⁶ According to Nanji, when pirs through their teaching converted Hindus to Islam they initiated the ceremony called *ghat-pat*. These converts participated in a group ritual where they drank a sip of sacred water after having given up the traditional *jane’u*, the sacred thread they had worn as practicing Hindus.²⁸⁷

Through *ghatpat* ceremony, one can experience its *zahiri* or the structural aspect of the ritual. However, one needs to transcend the structural aspect of the ritual and experience its esoteric or *batin* dimension through which one can advance in spiritual knowledge and develop a deeper appreciation of faith.

²⁸⁵ Nanji, Azim, “Shariat and Haqiqat: Continuity and Synthesis in the Nizari Isma’ili Muslim Tradition”, 1988, p. 65,

²⁸⁶ Slochower, Harry, *Mythopoesis*, 1970 p. 34 .

²⁸⁷ Nanji, Azim, “Shariat and Haqiqat: Continuity and Synthesis in the Nizari Isma’ili Muslim Tradition”, 1988, p. 65.

Symbolism of *Sukrit*

The gat-pat ceremony is also accompanied by the *sukrit* ceremony. The following verse of the ginan: "Sami raajo more manathi na veesarejee" explains the symbolism of *Sukrit*.

*Khir ne khand girath amrat bhojan e laviye sar,
Panch vastu bhediyaun kari bhai teno kije thad.*²⁸⁸

“O momins: Brothers submit rice pudding, sugar, ghee, water and wheat at the mouth of the Lord, O dear brothers. All the above represent the ingredients of sukreet (good deeds)”.

The *sukrit* is made up of five ingredients, each one of them symbolizes various elements, the following details may differ from person to person based on their perception:

- a) *khir* - milk symbolizes '*zikh*' which is prayer and remembrance of the Lord. Just as milk is a nourishing food for our body, so is '*zikh*' the real food for the soul, which nourishes and enables us to grow.
- b) *Khand* - sugar symbolizes '*Sat*' the truth that is always sweet which means that if one speaks the truth one will enjoy success.
- c) *Grath* - 'ghee' symbolizes '*Imaan*', faith under all circumstances. Ghee' in a vessel will always remain 'ghee' no matter how much it is heated hence it symbolizes steadfastness in faith.
- d) *Amrat* - 'nectar', '*ab-e-shafa*' symbolizes smooth flow of knowledge and wisdom without which virtue is impossible. It also signifies purity of heart and mind.
- e) *Bhojan* - wheat symbolizes '*khamiyaa*', tolerance by virtue of its ability to withstand great physical stress, it in the process of its transformation, the best example is from grain into flour. It retains all its properties of food in spite of being crushed between the grinding stones.

²⁸⁸ Sadardin Pir, "Ghatpat vela avi" stanza 6, Ali Mohammed Kamaluddin, Kamaluddin, Zarina, 2008, p. 117.

Didar/Darbar Ceremonies and Ginan

“I remember in 1978, when I got an opportunity to sing ginan in front of Mowlana Hazir Imam, I sang “Darshan diyo mora naath” (bless me with your vision, oh my lord), and I asked my mother what should I do. She always used to say,” *bandi ginij*”, in Kutchi language (tie Him with you) and a verse from the ginan “*Te din sami mune paas tedaavjo... pakdi lejo maaro hath daasi choon teri*” (On the day of judgment O Mowla call me to Your presence and hold my hand, I am your female devotee). And I have said the same thing to Mowla, you will be singing through me. And after I recited the ginan and went to Hazir Imam for dua (prayers) He said, “You sang ginan most beautifully”.²⁸⁹

Didar is one of the most important occasions for every Ismaili community member. In Shia Islam, the Imam holds a vital position in the spiritual and material lives of his followers. Guidance to the community has continued for many centuries through the living Imams, and therefore physical and spiritual glimpse of an Imam is considered the most sacred. The *didar* is not conceived of in anthropomorphic terms; rather it refers to the inner, mystical vision of the Imam’s spiritual light (*nur*).²⁹⁰ Through this vision one can re-unite his or her soul to its sublime origin. For many Ismailis life is incomplete without the experience of Imam’s *didar*.

Among the most common symbolic expression used in the ginan literature for the Imam-*murid* relationship is that of a women who is separated from her beloved. This concept is also called *virah*. In one of the Pir Sadardin (8th/14th) century *ventis* (supplication) “*Tamaku sadhare soh din*” (The day that you left), “echoes the sentiments of a women’s who lament the departure of their beloved”. It highlights the pain of separation in a melodic tune and language, which is intended to inspire the listener on the spiritual journey.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Khursheed Noorali; interviewed her in Vancouver, Canada, 2009.

²⁹⁰ Esmail, Aziz, “Sathpanth Ismailism and Modern Changes wihtin it with special reference to East Africa”, 1952, pp.459-60.

²⁹¹ Asani, Ali, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment*, 2002, p. 57

Beloved, it has been long since the day you left
 (and) anxiously I wait for you.
 My merciful lord and kindly master;
 O my beloved, how will I spend these days without you? ²⁹²



Illustration No 12: Khursheed Nurali reciting gnan during the *didar* ceremony in the presence of H.H Prince Karim Aga Khan, (Photo Courtesy: Khursheed Nurali) Karachi, 1962

²⁹² Ibid.



Illustration No 13: The H. H Prince Karim Aga Khan talking to Khursheed Nurali after her ginan recitation, *didar* ceremony (Photo Courtesy: Khursheed Nurali), Karachi, 1962

Darshan Diyo Mora Sayyed Imam Shah

Dar-shan - di - yo - - mora - naath - aa -

dasi - chun - - nn - - teri - - i

13:34

Transcription 13: Shah, Imam Sayyed, “Darshan diyo mora naath”, sung by Khursheed Nur Ali, Vancouver, 2008

Venti Ginan: *Eji Darshan dio mora nath, dasi chhun teri*

Translation: O my Lord! Bless me with your *didar*, I am your slave (utmost devotee).²⁹³

***Didar*: Performance Context**

Even before the official announcement of H. H Prince Karim Aga Khan's *didar* (physical glimpse) is announced in the *jamatkhana*, everyone starts preparation for the *didar*, and celebrates their happiness through various means including spiritually preparing themselves through regular attendance in *jamatkhana* both early morning and evening ceremonies. Community musicians compose new song, poets write new poetry. New clothes are made/bought. Special activities are organized within the community to make *didar* a very special occasion for the entire *jamat*.

After the official announcement, ITREB arranges auditions for *ginan*, *qasidas* and *Quranic* recitations that are recited in the presence of the Imam during the ceremony of *didar*. Community members register their names and their choices of *ginan* preferences and start preparing for their auditions. Specified printed books are distributed to all the members who wish to participate in the auditions, with the printed text of the *ginans*, *qasidas* and the *quranic ayats* and their meanings. Often a few choices are given to the reciters, so that they can select the one they feel most comfortable with. Qualified evaluators are selected by the ITREB to undertake proper auditions. Sometimes evaluators are brought from other cities so there are no biased decisions.

Ginan Auditions and Performances

Recently two *didars* or we may call it *darbars* (a bigger venue than *didar*) took place in Canada, one in 2005 and the other in 2008. In 2005 the *darbar* was organized in Toronto and Vancouver. During the Golden Jubilee of H. H.

²⁹³ Begum Imam, Sayyeda, "Eji darsan dio", *Ginans with English Translation*, Vol. 7, 2007, pp. 211- 212

Prince Karim Aga Khan the *darbars* were organized in Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary. Both years more than several thousand Ismailis attended the *darbar* ceremony across Canada and many also came from other parts of the world mostly from USA and Europe.

As soon as the *darbar* dates and venues were confirmed, the ITREB made the announcements in *jamatkhana* for interested members to register for the auditions. Once the registration was completed the reciters were allocated specific times for their auditions. Usually each participant got around five minutes for their auditions, with two to three judges. There were specific criterias by in which the marks were allocated including, voice or tonal quality, pronunciations and diction, proper tunes or ragas, posture, gesture.

As Hussein explained “My mother had said please audition, and I said no, that I had a few chances to perform in front of Hazir Imam and therefore I want to give others a chance”. But without me knowing, she registered me for an audition. So I was checking my email, and I read, thank you for registering, I phoned my mother and said, “Did you do it?”, and she said,” I knew you wouldn’t do it, and it is my wish that you could do it”, because, Al-Hamdulliah my sister with three other girls, during Silver Jubilee of Mowlana Hazir Imam, recited ginan in Edmonton, so my mother said it would be her dream that if Amina recited in Silver Jubilee then you should recite in Golden Jubilee, I said, “Ameen mom, but it is your dream and I am doing it this for you”.²⁹⁴

KG: How was your audition process, and how did you feel about it?

Hussein: “*It was interesting when I auditioned, it was for the ginan “Sahebjī tu more man” and I had a pitch pipe, so actually that ginan, if you go low its too low and if it goes high then it is too high, and I am not a very high pitch kind of singer, I can sing high but it is like an Opera style, and it is very loud, I haven’t quite worked that, so I asked the judges can I use the pitch pipe to give myself a*

²⁹⁴ Janmohammed, Hussein, Vancouver, I interviewed him in Edmonton, 2009

note, why not! It is a musical idea, so they looked at each other and one of the fellows knew that I am a musician and he said sure, why not, just go for it, and he convinced the other two judges, and when I sang it, I sang without any inhibitions, I just open my voice, I did not care either it was opera style or non-opera style, and when I sang I moved around, my hands were like this, (showed the traditional style of putting two hands together which is quite common among the reciters), I was moving around and I sang with full of my voice, great, thank you very much”

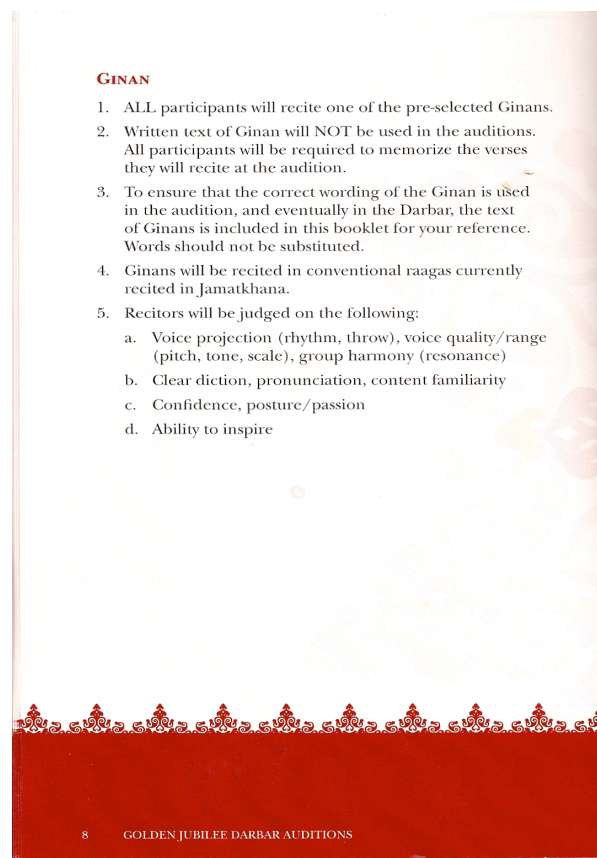


Illustration No 14: Ginan audition guidelines and criteria, Booklet, Golden Jubilee of Prince Karim Aga Khan 2008, Canada

Once the auditions were completed, than the ITREB short-listed the potential reciters according to their overall performance. During the 2005 *darbar*, four

names from Edmonton were short listed for ginan recitation including Shafik Lalani, Jaferali Surmawala, Fatimah Charania and her mother Gulbanu Charania from Edmonton.

According to Shafik:

*“On Saturday I did the audition at the West jamatkhana and I felt good about it, because we were able to use our papers not having memorized, it was a very short period of time to learn any ginan and there was a choice of ginans to recite from, so I recited the ginan “Sahebji tun more man bhav” because I was familiar with it. So that was Saturday afternoon, and Monday about five in the evening, I got a call from the Council office letting me know that I was selected as one of the reciters from Edmonton and that the next stage of audition was now going to happen in Vancouver but I had to go to the council office on Tuesday and get the breakdown of exactly what the process was. So we went on Tuesday or maybe Monday to the Council office. We went there, all the participants showed up there for ginan, qasidas, quranic ayats, and that is where we were told the next level of auditions which was going to happen in Vancouver and Calgary will also be joining us there. We were also told that we will be there ten days before the didar and that we will not be coming back home but the audition process will be very tiring and it was going to start within a couple of days in Vancouver”.*²⁹⁵

KG: Do you know how many people applied for the audition from Edmonton and other parts of Canada?

SL: *“I do recall some numbers, Edmonton had about a total of 80 participants, I heard Calgary had about 150 that did the initial audition, and Vancouver had somewhere around 250 people who went through the auditions. Initially from the jamatkhana stage from each city, and then from Vancouver we had six reciters of ginan, six from Edmonton, six from Calgary and from all of them, they selected three to recite in the morning and another three for back up and*

²⁹⁵ Lalani, Shafik, I interviewed him in Edmonton, 2010.

*three to recite in the afternoon and another three for back up, that was the same for quranic ayat and qasidas”.*²⁹⁶

All four short-listed participants were sent to Vancouver ten days prior to the *darbar*, where reciters from Calgary, Vancouver, were also present.

Various ginan groups were formed to hear voice combinations and each group was given the recitation platform everyday in various Vancouver *jamatkhanas* where along with the community members the judges were also listening to the ginans. Moreover, reciters were getting opportunities to overcome their performance fright and also harmonize their voice with other reciters.

According to Jaferali, “those ten days practices were very intense, right from day one, from morning to night we were only singing ginan and trying to match our voices and pitches with each other”. According to Shafik:

“They would basically put us into teams of three people, first thing at the audition, they put us individually, then they went ahead and started to audition us in a group of three and we thought it might take one day. But on the third day we are going through this back and forth coming to Burnaby Lake jamatkhana every day in the morning by jamati bus and again it was a matter of how far was it going to go, how long it was going to take, and always being in the dark or in suspense because they could not say very much except for judging us and they had different judges from Vancouver, from Edmonton, from Calgary, and that all went on for three days. We thought after three days of practicing everyday, going through auditions everyday, they should be able to finalize their decision and so we felt on the fourth day we will get the decision on who was reciting, who was not reciting and what ginan. Well, on the fourth day that did not happen, they encouraged us to continue practicing and after talking to the committee members what we realized was they were not going to tell us until the day before simply because they did not want to have

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

some people get upset, some people not wanting to practice more if they were not selected, and they wanted to make sure that everybody was operating at their peak right till the end because what if somebody fell sick or could not recite they needed to replace them, so they had to keep everybody until the eleventh hour at their peek, yet that was quite an emotional time because many people towards the end realized that well we are not selected then for what was all this practice, all of that work, seva, whatever you want to call it, but at the end they didn't know so their family members were asking them how was it going, have you been selected so there was a lot of tension, and we felt that tension".²⁹⁷



Illustration No 15: Shafik Lalani recited gnan during the *darbar* ceremony in Vancouver, 2005, Edmonton, 2008

On the last night before the *darbar*, the process is that the final names and groups were finalized as to who will recite the ginans, qasidas and Quranic recitation in the presence of Hazir Imam, and the remaining groups and

²⁹⁷ Lalani, Shafik, I interviewed him in Edmonton, 2010.

individuals given the opportunity to recite at the *intizar* (waiting) program (last hour before the arrival of an Imam) on the central stage.

As soon as the Hazir Imam enters the *darbar* hall everyone recites the *salawat* “*Allahuma salli ala Mohammadin wa aale hi Mohammad*” (meaning: O Allah! Bestow peace on Muhammad and his Descendants) in a united voice until the Hazir Imam is seated on the throne (chair on the central stage) the *jamati* Mukhi Kamdia Sahebans walk slowly behind the Hazir Imam and sit on the floor right beside him. The *jamati* Mukhi Kamdia Sahebans and the *jamati* leadership offer humble *nazrana* (offering) to the Imam and with His permission the official ceremony begins with the Quranic recitation with meanings. After the Quranic recitation is over the reciter humbly goes to the Imam and he put his hand on the reciter’s shoulder and gives special *duas* (prayers); *ginan* reciters then go to the microphone, and after getting permission from the Imam, they recite the *ginan*. As soon as they start reciting *ginan* all the *jamati* members join them in chorus.

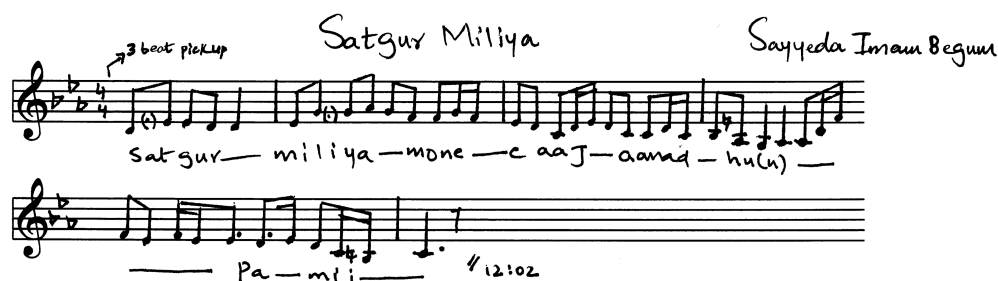
According to Shafik: “*Again in anticipation of any didar, any time you are at the didar, you know the hour before the Imam comes in, there is dhikr, tasbih, but on top of all that we are also I guess, nervous by way of not just that there were twenty thousand people listening, but the Imam is listening, (Shafik broke down and started to weep), it was a very emotional time and I really believe that, when that time came, quranic ayat was recited, then we went up to recite our ginan, our biggest fear was to make sure that we start at the right pitch, because as a musician to have three people reciting together and not having an instrument behind to give you a chord so you know what the pitch is, you are now literally going on those 10 days of rehearsal, we did as a team, so our nervousness was at the maximum, we were so nervous, standing on that stage, Imam was right there so close by (tears came out of Shafik’s eyes) and another miracle, which obviously we are supposed to look at the Imam to (to get his permission and blessing to start the ginan) and he said amen, the warm*

smile he gave calmed every nerve (tears burst out of Shafik's eyes), something that you cannot explain in words but that experience gave us so much strength, gave us so much encouragement, and we had a charge that we started reciting the ginan, even though He was there, when it was like He was behind us, and he was there in spirit with us so that the nervousness went down to absolutely zero, there was no nervousness whatsoever, there was total calm, there was total confidence, that was total spirit in us to recite that ginan and we recited it just like we practiced it, not once in the ginan was there any mistake or anything we felt that we didn't do that right or we that did something wrong, it was just like we recited it, and it was so amazing, and obviously when we finished the ginan, the ultimate blessings after going up to him and again, as we were getting closer and closer to him and his voice was so gentle, and it was so soothing. The blessings he gave you, and puts his hand on your shoulder again, one of these things you never forget (Shafik became very emotional) one of those things which we will always remember and I believe that the strength at that time in that moment carries on for the rest of your life, it gives you so much strength that any time in your life when you feel (tears burst out of his eyes) down or anything that moment lifts you back up and that moment is something which you will cherish, and I pray for everyone to have that blessing because I really feel blessed".²⁹⁸

I still remember in 2005, Vancouver then ginan "Sahebji tun more man bhaave" (Oh lord you are dearest to my heart) was recited, it was a special moment for the entire *jamat*, everyone was reciting together, the sound of the *jamat* along with the reciters was extremely powerful, and one could feel the devotion, supplication and love of the Imam within the sounds of yearning through ginan. After the ginan was over all three participants went to the Imam one by one and Imam put His hand on each one's shoulder, and they walked backwards, left the stage and took their respective places.

²⁹⁸ Lalani, Shafik, I interviewed him in Edmonton, 2010.

According to Hussein, during Golden Jubilee, “We go on stage to practice, and people from the sound portfolio from Aiglemont, France said that it is not loud enough, can you sing louder, we were thinking we all were singing as loud as we could and sound person just said turn the microphone up and I said to myself well, and we were singing more internal like this (shows the posture) like a ginnan people normally sing, my style is performativity so I speak to myself what I have learnt in an opera production and music school, stand tall, sing to the back of the room, fill the room with your voice, and we were in a big BC place, 20,000 people, so I said to myself, ok Mowla this is what do you want, I am going to stand tall, I can take a good breath, and I am going to sing to the last person in the room and that experience was magical for me because I actually felt liberated, that I stood up and I did what I had to do, at that point we have already sung so much together that I was not thinking about matching my voice or making my voice less or more, I just sang, and we all just sang, and that was a lesson when you do all the work then you just have to go out and do it, you know how to do it, and I sang in my Opera style, and I would say that, when we actually did it when Hazir Imam was there, you are always scared that because you have heard stories that your voice might not come out or you are not meant to sing or something may happen, you are praying to Mowla you are with us, this is your voice, this is what you want, you help us, and some how it was so easy, because He was there to help us, and I would say that one of my most profound musical experiences, and I have two, and that was by far one of the most profound musical experiences and personal spiritual experience”.



Transcription 14: Shah, Imam Sayyed, “Satgur Milaya mune”, sung by Khursheed Nur Ali, Vancouver, 2008

Ginan: *Eji Satgur Miliya mune aj, anand hun pami*

Translation: O brother! Today I have found my true guide and because of that I am very happy.²⁹⁹

KG: How was that particular moment when you sang?

HJ: “Again, I felt so liberated, I felt liberated, and I felt like (made sounds of relief), there was no stress, no tension, no pain, no struggle, we just poured out our hearts, and I did what I knew how to do, that feeling was completely non-choir experience, yes it was in chorus, a group of people singing together but it was a complete, purely devotional, how I would experience a ginan ritual experience, and it was full of meaning at that time”.

KG Who decided the pitch?

HJ: “Yes, basically Iqbal (another reciter from the selected group) and I, we are in the choir, so all week we had a pitch pipe so every time we presented, even at the practice whatever group we were with, we found a note that worked and we would use to play the note and go up so we had on the day of didar, so we kept playing the note to ourselves. We arrived at 7:00 am to do the sound check and darbar was at four so we were sitting all day mostly so we kept

²⁹⁹ Begum Imam, Sayyeda, “Eji Satgur Miliya”, *Ginans with English Translation*, Vol. 1, 2007, pp.129-130.

reminding ourselves but I would say that if we did not have pitch pipe. I think it would have been very difficult to perform”.

KG: Who initiated the process?

HJ: “We did it together, we all knew the note, so the group decided that I should take the breath, Karim beside me (another member of the group), who was closest to Hazir Imam so he would wait for Hazir Imam’s signal and permission to start and then I would go (take a deep breath) “Eji” not with my hand but just do it with my breath so I did that and we all started together on the same note, we had already been given the pitch.

KG: What was it?

HJ: I think it was B flat, or something I do not remember exactly

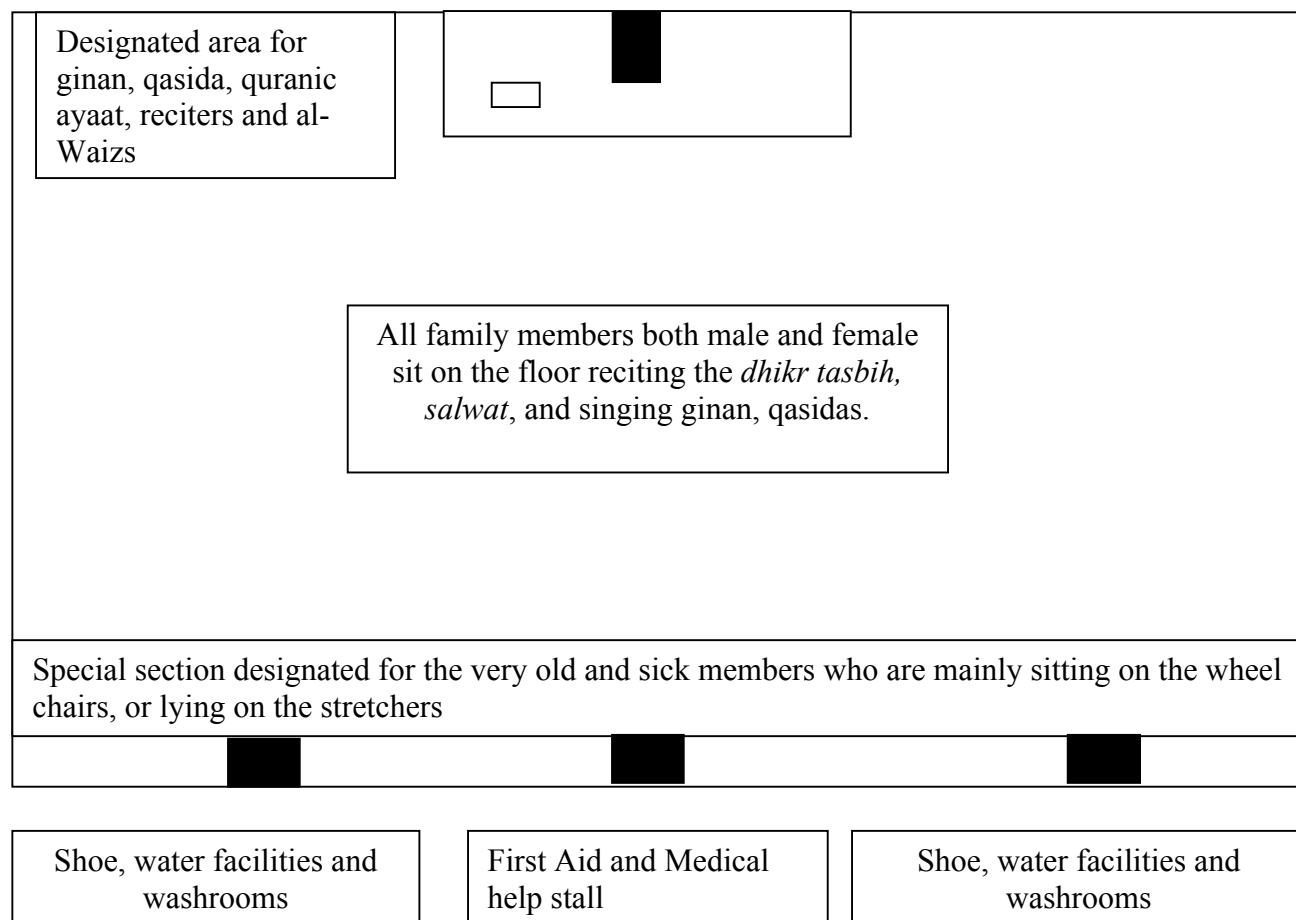
KG: And all four were able to pull it off?

HJ: Because we had all practiced so many times, and I like to think that it was an evolution that we already had a note that we gave to ourselves and maybe other people in the past have done it but, so it was interesting that one judge said, you can’t use on the day of didar but we did, there is nothing wrong, it is a tool”.

KG: So you and Iqbal both had Choir experience, what about the other two?

HJ: “Meboob Chaglani from Edmonton also sings with a few bands so he knew the pitch and also Karim is the brother of Nimat Jafer who sings, so he also knew how to sing on a certain pitch, and he understands music and all of that and the idea was to make up a pitch so all four of us already were inclined to that and we were able to match, I mean Mowla’s grace, otherwise we can’t do that, that feeling was just Shukr Mowla afterwards that was all I could think of, thank you thank you”.

The ginan recitation was followed by the qasidas and then Imam approached the microphone and made *farman* (guidance) to His *jamat*. After the *farman* Imam physically went off the stage and walked all over the *darbar* hall so each one of His *murids* (devoted members) could achieve his *didar*, tears flowed from almost everyone's eyes, the *salwat tasbih* was continuously chanted by every *murid* and everyone was rejoicing and experiencing one of the most precious and spiritual moments of their life, of seeing the Imam of the Time. After giving his physical *didar* to all his *murids* Imam left the *darbar* hall and *murids* continuously recited the *salwat*. Then, an Al-waiz (missionary) stood up for a few quick announcements, followed by the *salawat dhikr tasbih* and the formal *darbar* ceremony was over. At the end of the ceremony, everyone greeted each other, hugged each other; and one could still feel the tears flowing from their eyes. On the same night, the big *jaman* festivity was organized where the *jamat* danced on the beats and *geets* of *rasra* and *dandias*, special meals were served to the *jamat*, and everyone enjoyed each and every moment of this special occasion.

Figure 7: *Didar/Darbar* Performance Sample layout³⁰⁰

Anecdote 1 One day before the Golden Jubilee of Mowlana Hazir Imam, at the Bellerive *jamatkhana* in Edmonton, I was talking to Shafik Lalani who recited the ginan during the 2005 *darbar* in Vancouver. Shafik was wearing a black suit. Suddenly I saw Mehboob Chaglani, who was walking towards us and before he greeted us he started to rub the right shoulder of Shafik and asked him, is this the same suit you wore during the recitation of ginan in the presence of MHI, and Shafik replied “Yes”, I could see in Mehboob’s eyes the yearning and love to sing in the presence of the Imam, as Mehboob himself is a

³⁰⁰ This sample model is based on the North American *didar* settings, it may have some changes depending on the geographical location and country.

very good singer and well known among the Edmonton Ismaili community as a singer. During the Golden Jubilee of Hazir Imam, Mehboob's prayers were fulfilled as he was among the four finalists who recited ginan in the presence of Hazir Imam in Vancouver.

Anecdote 2

Pir Hassan Kabiruddin's ginans are full of supplication and yearning, especially the granth *Ananat Akhado*, which has five hundred stanzas. The father of Pir Hassan Kabiruddin, pir Sadardin was going to visit the Imam of his time, and his son, who was still very young, Pir Hassan Kabiruddin, was eager to meet the Imam of the Time. However, due to his tender age Pir Sadardin requested him to stay at home, and promised him that he will take him once he is a little older. As young Pir Hassan Kabiruddin was yearning to meet his beloved *Imam*, with utmost devotion and humility. He wove a cloth, composed the beautiful ginan *Anant Akhado* and wrote the entire ginan of five hundred stanzas onto the one large piece of cloth by hand.

During the visit of H.H Prince Karim Aga Khan in 2005, in Vancouver, Dr Nooruallah Juma yearned for his Imam and used the most popular ginan which every day Khoja Ismailis recite before the *dua* (prayers). Dr. Juma requested the *Jamati Mukhi Kamdia Sahebs* that he wished to recite the ginan before *Hazir's Imam's* visit to Canada and he proposed that a group of singers recite the entire five hundred stanzas of the ginan *Anant Akhado* in *Jamatkhana* over the duration of forty days, every day prior to the *didar* before the *dua* (*salat*, or prayer).³⁰¹

Didar is an occasion where a *murid's* soul experiences the soul of his or her divine through vision. It is a moment of reunion between momin and *murshid*, it is a moment of spiritual purification, and according to the ginanic literature

³⁰¹ Juma, Noorallah, I interviewed him in Edmonton, 2011.

“*Didar dekhyā tab mān santoshiyā jī*” which means, “Seeing your glimpse make my soul peaceful”.



Illustration No16: Taufiq Karmali reciting gnan in the presence of an Imam, Prince Karim Aga Khan in London, 1979, (Photo Courtesy: Taufiq Karmali)



Illustration No17: After reciting the gnan in the *darbar*, London, 1979, Imam is putting his hand on Taufiq Karmali’s shoulder and giving his blessings, (Photo Courtesy: Taufiq Karmali).

Funeral Ceremony

The role of ginan during the death ceremony is immensely important. Even when someone is in critical health condition, or living in a senior citizens home, it is not difficult to find ginan recordings and books near their bedside.

There are various ginans which are directly related to *ruhaani visaal*, or journey of the soul, such as *Marna hai re zaroor* (death is eternal), *jug maheen chehti ne chaloo* (live prudently in this world).

With the demise of family member, almost the first thing the family does is to inform the Mukhi/Kamdia Sahebs and *Mayat and Gusal committee*³⁰². The *Mayat committee* is comprised of male and female members of the *jamat*, who look after the family members of the deceased. Close family members and friends get together at the deceased person's home and recite the *salwat* and ginans. All family members participate in the ceremony and specific ginans are selected. Most of the ginans are related to the theme of the journey of the soul and the eternal life after the death, the whole ceremony is very moving as it gives deeper meaning to the deceased family and assists in consoling them for their loss.

Performance Context

Close family members and friends get together at the deceased person's home and usually sit on the floor in a semi circle. One person starts the recitation of *salwat* and everyone joins in. Then another person starts a ginan and everyone joins in. As soon as one ginan is over another person starts reciting another ginan followed by chanting of *salwat*. Usually the Mukhi, Kamdia sahebs visit the family members and give special *dua* (prayers) for the soul of the deceased and for the strength of family members. The entire process some times takes a

³⁰² *Mayat* committee and also in some parts of the world, it is called *Gusal* committee comprised of voluntary members of the committee, whose responsibility involves every single aspect related to burial arrangements.

couple of hours, where along with mourning for the departed soul, everyone prays in unison and does the *dhkir* with *salwat* and ginan.

Anecdotes

One day, during afternoon time, I got a phone call from a very close friend regarding the demise of our mutual friend at a very young age. I was shocked to hear the news. At that time I was having lunch with my mother. As soon as I heard this terrible news, my mother and I rushed to my friend's house. As we entered the house, all her family members were sitting on the floor with mother father were seated in the middle. The mother was desolate. It was a devastating moment for everyone. All age groups were present there. We heard ginans being played on the CD player. I met my friend's mother who was emotional about the loss of her young child. We sat down right beside her and chanted the *salwat* together. After a while she requested me to sing a ginan and told another person to turn off the CD player as it was difficult to follow along. She asked me to sing "*Aye sami mara ji*" as it was one of her daughter's favorite. So I led the ginan and everyone joined me in the recitation. This was followed by other ginans related to the theme of death. One of the ladies said that we should encourage the recital of ginans with themes of hope and spirituality rather than death. They give more support and courage to the family in such tragic times. Several ginans were recited, followed by the *salwat* and then slowly participants started to give condolence to the family members and departed. Others came to the house to pay their respects and give condolence to the family.

Funeral Services and Ginan

Among Ismailis the funeral services are usually held in the social hall located in the *jamatkhana* facility. However, in some countries the funeral services are also held at locations other than *jamatkhanas*. I have personally attended and participated in a few funeral ceremonies in Edmonton. During the first part of the ceremony, ginans play an important part. We can divide the whole

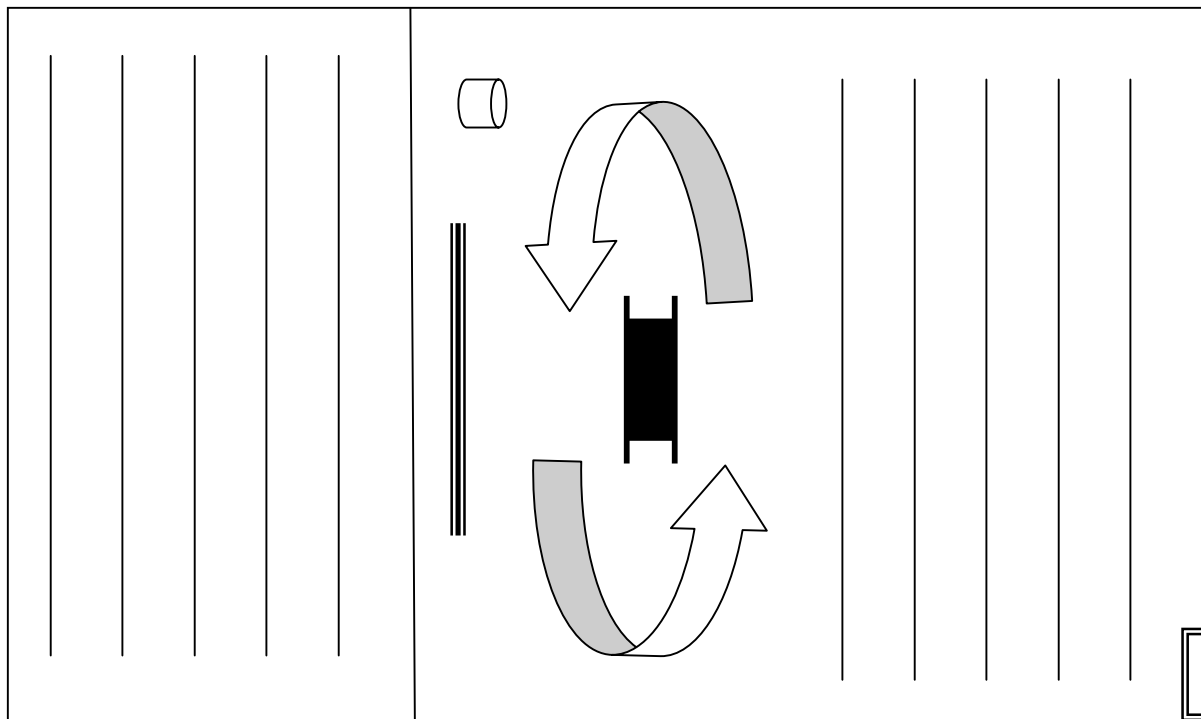
ceremony into sections. In the first section, only the close family members and friends of the deceased are allowed to attend one of the pre-burial ceremonies in which two to three reciters are selected to recite the ginan in the beginning. This is followed by the *salwat tasbih* and those present pay their last respects to the deceased. The second section is open to all. Once again some people are asked to recite ginans followed by the *salwat tasbih*. All remaining then pay their last respects to the deceased, followed by recitation of *Fateha* and *Namaz-e-mayat* as part of the pre-burial ceremonies. Male members then carry the coffin around the hall and to the funeral car for transport to the cemetery for the burial, while reciting aloud the *Shada* (lit. witness), *Lailah illah, Mohammed ur Rasul Allah* (There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God).






On the same day, during the evening prayers in *jamatkhana*, the *ziyarat* ceremony (literally means “to visit” in Arabic) take place where the close family members and the community at large come together and pray for the departed soul. Usually on the same evening, a close family member of the deceased is chosen to recite a ginan which echoes the same message of eternal life. Upon asking one of the community members, Zulfiqar Murji, about reciting ginans, he responded with:

“Let me share one incident with you. I like to visit people in the hospital especially those who are extremely sick. One day in Vancouver, I went to one lady a few times. At one occasion her husband was also sitting there. Every time I recited different ginans. One time I recited a ginan for her “Ame Saheb Sathe Sehal Kidha” “I came to be in the company of my Imam” and a few days later, I heard that she passed away. But before she passed away, she told her husband and her husband conveyed to me after the *ziyarat* in *jamatkhana*, “Well before my wife passed away, she asked me who is this man, who comes here as an angel and gives me so much peace?” That day he really made me cry and I want to say something to you that, personally there are moments in my life when I recite ginan, I can’t explain as Mowla says, you cannot command yourself, you have to have humility, and the humbleness and understanding and then when the place and time is right it is truly inspiring, people wonder what happen, I just say, look I just go there to sing. I just say You just

be here within me, be my tongue, be my thoughts, and be my voice, and just take over”.³⁰³


Figure 7: Funeral Ceremony Sample layout³⁰⁴



-  Podium for Namaz-e-Mayat Janaza, Ginan and Farman reciters
-  *Mayat*
-  Jamati Mukhi, Kamdia, Mukhiani, Kamdiani's allocated seat
-  Jamat gives last respect to the deceased by walking in a semi-circle and return to their respective places for further proceedings.
-  *Jamat* sits on the floor and observes the *Namaz-e-Mayat*

³⁰³ I interviewed Zulfqar Murji in Edmonton, 2009.

³⁰⁴ This is a funeral model based on Edmonton, it does change according to its geographical location and country.

-  Main door of the *jamatkhana* through which the community carries out the *mayat* on their shoulders while the *salwat* is being recited outside the premises and put it in a van. From there the *mayat* is taken to the cemetery for final journey.

Anecdote

The late Gulshan Merchant and I knew each other for ten years. She was an Institute of Ismaili Studies alumna and she always treated me as her younger brother. She was also a writer and teacher of Ismailism, and wrote quite a few articles on Ismailism and in particular on selected ginans and their meaning. One of her articles titled “Significance of Sandhiya Vera: From the Ginan *Anant Akado* by Pir Hasan Kabirdin”³⁰⁵ encapsulates in detail the significance of a monumental work by Pir Hasan Kabiruddin. Gulshan’s very close friend Shabnam Murji, who spent most of her time with Gulshan during her last few days at the hospital shared some insight with me that Gulshan had made a list of items on her diary before, she went to the hospital as she knew that it would be her last visit.

Among the many things she wrote in her diary, the one thing really that struck me was a list of who will be reciting ginan at her funeral. She was a very keen student of ginan and we always had discussions on Ismaili spirituality and particularly on ginans; and many times we even recited selected ginans together. The night before she passed away, all her close friends and family members gathered at the hospital and we were all reciting ginans and Quranic *ayats* for her soul’s peace. I still remember a few very close friends of her namely: Almas Murji, Dolly Bandali, Shabnam Murji, Dr. Noorallah Juma. We recited a few stanzas from *Ananat Akhado* especially from Gulshan’s own article. Those last moments, especially when we were all reciting the ginan,

³⁰⁵ For complete article of late Gulshan Merchant, visit:
<http://gulshanmerchant.wordpress.com/2010/02/14/the-role-of-spirituality-in-the-esoteric-traditions-of-islam/>

were very deep and emotional as we could feel that our very dear friend was departing from this world. Recitation of *ginan* at that time reminded us all of the shortness of life and the greatness of life hereafter. Each one of us will treasure this opportunity and remember of that day and how Gulshan loved *ginans* and especially *Ananat Akhado* which was recited in the last moments of the life.

Kalam-e-Mowla

Among the large collection of *Ruhaani Visaal* *ginan*, *Kalam-e-Mowla* is very popular. *Kalam-e-Mowla* literally means “sayings of Hazrat Ali”. These are not literal translations of Hazrat Ali’s teachings, however they are the compilation of the teachings of Hazrat Ali in mixed Urdu and Hindi languages, which are sung in a specific melody. The poetical meter and musical nuances are very familiar to the *ginan* tradition though the author of this long piece is not known.³⁰⁶

Baytul Khayal Ginans

Baytul Khayal *ginans*, also known as *bandagi ginans* are very meditative both in sounds and poetry. They deal with the core concept of *dhikr*. As one of the *ginans* says “*Dhikr jago, bandagi maango, zikr karo ilahi* which means, “remember the name of your Lord and perform more *bandagi*, and always remember your Lord”. In another *ginan* Pir Hasan Kabirudin says:

*Eji sum nahi tu(n) jaag savaara, furasat nahin sonnedhi
antakaall samaa chal vaise, karle tu(n) gooj gur sandheev
bodd tusaa nahi(n) avannaa, fer tusaa nahi(n) avannaa
tu(n) alee alee naam dheeyaavere
tu(n) Ali Ali nam dheeyaavere ghafal
guru charanne chit tu(n) laavere
guru charanne chit laavere ghaafal
vendhee shaah rayanna viyaannire, vendhee shaah rayann.*³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Valliani, Amin Muhammad “Kalam-i- Mawla”, 2008.

³⁰⁷ Sadardin Pir, Ali Mohammed Kamaluddin, Kamaluddin, Zarina, 2008, p. 118.

Translation: The time of death is approaching fast; pass your life in the company of the Guide. You do not get born (in human form) always, and you will not return again (in the present form). So recite (meditate or contemplate upon) the name of Ali, recite Ali's name often, O ignoramus creature. Bring your mind (your intellect) at the Guide's feet (at His behest), bring your mind to the Guide's feet O ignoramus. Hence, the Lord will enable your night (dark times of ignorance) to pass away (in enlightenment).³⁰⁸



Transcription 15: Kabirdin Hassan Pir, “Sum Nahi tun”, Al-waiz, Mohammad Ayub, Sailkot, 2007

³⁰⁸ Sadardin Pir, “Ghatpat vela avi” stanza 6, Ali Mohammed Kamaluddin, Kamaluddin, Zarina, 2008, p. 119.



Illustration No 18: Alwaiz-Mohammad Ayub, reciting ginan in Sailkot, 2007

Through the centuries Ismailis have given special significance to the *batin* (esoteric) aspect of religious teaching. It is important for all Ismailis to experience the essence of Ismaili faith, the *ruh* (spirit) of its *tariqah* that is to internalize its faith through *bandagi* (*Dhikr bil qalb*). In Muslim tradition, Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) participated in the early morning prayers called *tahajjud*. He also meditated at Mount *Hira* and performed *dhikr*. The practice of individual *bandagi* to attain the salvation is similar and it is an eternal *rehmat* of Allah and vital to Ismaili practice. Those community members who wish to attain spiritual growth and experience the light of Allah through meditation attend the early morning *jamatkhana* which starts at around 3:30 am everyday. *Bandagi* ginans and *dhikr tasibihs* are recited before the 4:00 am. From 4:00 am to 5:00 am the *Jamat* meditates. Pir Sadardin in one of his Sindhi ginans “*Eji Uthi Allah na gure Banda*” explains the importance of early morning meditation:

*O slave of God! Wake up since God does not like you to sleep all night. Neither (you) care for your soul, O slave! Nor prepare provision (for hereafter). The Lord loves only those who rise in dawn (for meditation). The hurries (special heavenly blessings) will not give their hands to those who do not rise at dawn. Such (lazy) will (later) repent, smearing their hands, just as a (lazy) farmer misses the sowing season.*³⁰⁹

Kushali Ginans

Three celebratory accessions are extremely important for all Ismailis. Navroz or the new year according to the Persian Calendar is celebrated every year on the March 21st. Imamat day is celebrated on July 11th, when the present Imam H. H Shah Karim al-Hussaini became the spiritual leader of the Ismaili community. Salgirah Khushali is celebrated on December 13th, the birthday of the present Imam. Apart from these three Khushali events, Ismailis also celebrate Lailat-ul-Qadr on the 23rd day of the Muslim calendar month of Ramdhan, Eid-e-Gadir, when the Prophet declared Hazrat Ali as his successor at Khum, Yum-e-Ali, the birthday of Hazrat Ali, and Shab-e-Miraj, when the Prophet Mohammed ascended to the seventh heaven.

On the occasion of Navroz, various activities are designed to share the festive occasion. In some places in Indo-Pakistan colorful lights are visible all over the *jamatkhana*. In Iran various indigenous colorful activities are organized, where men and women enjoy the festivity, dance, wear traditional dresses, eat traditional food, color boiled eggs and offer to the *jamatkhana*, plant wheat in small buckets. During the Navroz, among the Khoja *jamat*, one of the main features of the *majlis* is the Navroz Ginan written by Sayyed Fateh Ali Shah, narrating the story of his visit to Imam Khalilullah (39th Imam) in Iran. Upon arrival, Syed Fateh Ali Shah realized that Imam of the time had gone the forest

³⁰⁹ Sadardin Pir, "Ghatpat vela avi" stanza 6, Ali Mohammed Kamaluddin, Kamaluddin, Zarina, 2008, p. 220.

to hunt. At that moment his heart was saddened not to have an opportunity to see the glimpse of his Imam. However, his soul was still at his lord's feet.

Ginan: *Eji navaroz na din sohamannaa
shri hari Qayam shikar ramava gaya
sevak na man thaya udasi, paraan hari charanne raheaa.*³¹⁰

Translation: On the lovely day of the New Year, the noble ever-living Lord went to the forest to hunt. The heart of his servant was saddened, but his soul remained at His feet.

Navroz na din Sayyed Fateh Ali Shah

Eji — N-vaa — rooz — na — din — So ha man —
a — na — shri — hari — Qayams — hi kar — a —
ra — ma va — an — vaan gaya — Navraz

Transcription 16: Shah Fateh Ali Sayyed, “Eji Navroz na din”, sung by Zarina Kamaluddin and her students, Karachi, 2005

Imamat day: July 11th

Imamat day *Khushali* is one of the most important occasions for the entire community. Various activities and events are designed to make the day a very special occasion. In some *jamatkhana* *ginan mehfil*s (performances) are organized where community members from all ages participate. In Canada and particularly in Edmonton the entire community gathers at the Shaw Conference Centre where scouts, girls guides and volunteers, volunteers, all participate in a march past celebration with a live band. The Canadian national anthem and the

³¹⁰ Shackle, Christopher, Moir, Zawahir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans*, 1998.

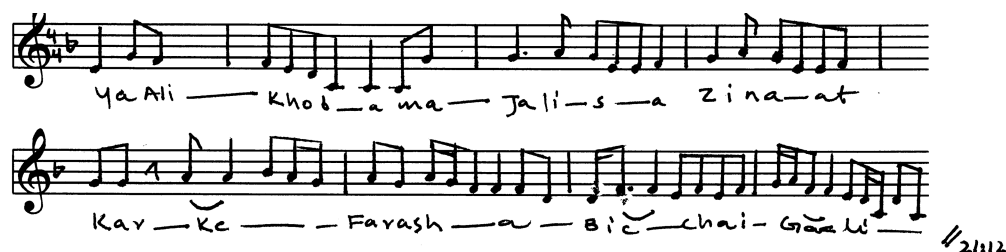
Ismaili anthem are sung, delicious food especially *bryani*, *Gha(n)thia*, and sweets are served. A live band performs music and the community participates in a cultural dances.

The official religious ceremony of Imam day takes place during the *jamatkhana* ceremony. One of the highlights of the ceremony is popular ginan “Ya Ali Khub Mijalis” (O Ali in the splendid gathering) by Sayyed Fateh Ali Shah, in this beautiful ginan, depicts the day when the present Imam came to the throne of Imam.

Ginan:

*Ya Ali khub majalis zeenat kar-ke
farash bichai gaali
aan bethe hae takht ke upar
Shah Sultan mahamad shaha vaali
Aaj raaj mubaarak hove,
Nur aen ali ku(n) raaj mubarak hove
Shaha aal-e nabi ku(n) raj mubarak hove,
hove hove aaj raaj mubarak hove.*³¹¹

Translation: O Ali, in the splendid assembly gloriously adorned, with carpets spread upon the floor, Sultan Muhammad Shah the Lord has ascended the throne. Blessed be your rule today! Blessed be your rule, O light of Ali's eyes! Blessed be your rule, O Lord, descendant of the Prophet! Blessed be your rule today!³¹²



Transcription 17: Shah, Fateh Sayed, “Ya Ali Khub Majalis”, sung by Multan religious centre students, 2007.

³¹¹ Shackle, Christopher, Moir, Zawahir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans*, 1998.

³¹² Ibid.

Salgirah Khushali

On December 13th every year Ismailis celebrate the Salgirah Khushali with utmost devotion and joy. In various parts of the world the *jamatkhanas* are lighted with beautiful and colorful lights, new clothes are tailored, food offerings are made, families gather in *jamatkhana*, and participate in various cultural and religious activities. Some seniors of the *jamat* make new rosaries for themselves and their families, children from BUI design birthday cards for their Imam, some children show their love to the Imam with poetry or painting on canvas. Ladies apply *hena* (*mehndi*) on their hands or feet.

The main ceremony starts during the *jamatkhana* services where one of the main components of the ceremony is the ginan “*Dhan Dhan Aajno daadlo re*” by Pir Sadardin.

*Eji dhan dhan aajno daadlo re
ame hareever paayaa
chaar jug naa kasamal paap-j taalleeyaa jee
het no mellaa vddo re aapnnaa satgur su(n) keeje jee
man no mellaav ddo aapnnaa baargur su(n) keeje
dhutaaro sa(n)saar parale - chhoddee mukkeeje bhaai
tthagaaro sa(n)saar shaah jine naame tareejiye
enne sa(n)saare bhalaa(n) sukaram kaam keeje.*³¹³

Translation: O momins, it is an auspicious day today (a day of joy full of fortunes), for we have gained the recognition of the Supreme Lord, our Imam, the Protector and Provider. The impurities of the sins of the four ages (Kartaa, Tretaa, Duaapur & Kaljug) have been removed (wiped out).

Have a gathering full of love with the True Guide. Have a gathering full of heart's desire with the Master of twelve crore souls Pir Sadardin who assisted and enabled them to achieve salvation in the present age. Keep aside the world which is only but a cheat, O brothers, with the

³¹³ Shackleton, Christopher, Moir, Zawahir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans*, 1998.

Name of our Mowla cross over the world, which is only, but a thief
And do good deeds in this world.³¹⁴

Dhan Dhan Aaj nu Pir Sadardin

vahn 20130

Transcription 18: Sadardin Pir, “Eji Dhan Dhan aaj nu”, Hussein Janmohammed recited ginan during the Golden Jubilee in Vancouver, 2008

Talika Ginan

The meaning of the word *talika* among the Khoja Ismaili is the special *farman*, guidance sent by the Imam of the time to his murids (community). After the *taliqa* is recited, a specified ginan is sung. There are two particular ginans for *talika*. *Shah na Khat Aaviya*, (My Lord has sent us a message) by Sayyed Imam Shah and *Saheb Farmaan lakhi mokaliya* (The master has sent the commandments) by Pir Hassan Kabirdin. Both ginans echo the happiness and joy when the *murids* receive the blessings and guidance of their Imam.

Historically, it is difficult to trace whether the above ginans were always situated within the context of the ritual setting, however, for many decades, or so, one can observe that many of the ginans have been performed according to

³¹⁴ Ibid.

the ritual context, and as a result the community is able to better relate to its ritual.

One question always comes to mind; were ginans set according to the specific ritual by the *Pirs*/composer or were they chosen by devotees according to their poetic themes and content, and assigned to the relevant ritual? There is very little historical evidence to prove that *Pirs* themselves set the ginans for the specific rituals. Perhaps it was a process that evolved throughout many centuries and devotees adopted gnan according to their needs and the circumstances of specific ritual. A similar notion can be seen among other Muslims, especially with the recitation of Quran. Muslims across the world use various passages of Quran for various reasons such as *safar ki dua* (travel prayers), *sone se qabl ki dua* (before going to bed prayers), *bimari se shifa ki dua* (speedy recovery from sickness prayers).

According to Nanji:

What you see in Arabic, Persian and many local languages and in the gnan is that the characteristic of ritual develops both to encompass a certain right of passage in life, so if it is a funeral, another ritual of passage or practice in faith similarly what you get is the development of recitations that allows you to address that particular moment, as you know there are certain verses of the Quran that are recited on particular occasions and even within the Quran you find that the Muslims after the Quran was reveled and compiled and systematize then they selected the verses of the Quran so they can use for specific ritual occasions, and I think if you looked at some of the other traditions including the Muslim world and the Gnan that they mirror that development and you find that over the period of time, and that is why I think we have so many ginans that are associated with particular ritual and I think if you look at the Central Asian traditions you would find similar things such as the chirag roshan where qasidas and maddahs are recited are very particular to moments of rituals and passages of ones spiritual journey.³¹⁵

³¹⁵ Nanji, Azim, I interviewed him in Edmonton, March 2011.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzes how ginans facilitate and bring emotions to almost every Ismaili ritual occasion and the impact ginans have on a given ritual. Further, it explores how the text or poetry becomes alive when it is sung or performed especially within its ritual context. Ismaili teachings signify the esoteric aspect of their faith more than the exoteric; therefore, one must not interpret ritual only in its structural form but aim to understand various symbols that lie beneath. The performance of any ginan, especially in its ritual context, assists both the reciters and the listeners to appreciate these treasures. I have examined ritual not within its limited understanding of fixed actions or rules, but as a process and performance that transcends its frame. For Ismailis, ritual does not mean mere repetition of similar actions and patterns but *kriya* (good deeds). In other words, participating in ritual and listening to ginans will remind devotees repeatedly of the ethics and core significance of faith. Although ritual does follow more or less the same structure, repetition and conventionality as mentioned by Tambiah, what makes ritual important within the Khoja Ismaili Muslim setting is the performances of ginans, *tasbihs* (chanting the Holy names), and *qasidas*, especially ginan that more or less changes for every occasion and creates new dynamics. The structure of the ritual and timeline remain the same, but the reciter and sometimes even the ginans change, so as to bring new colors and enthusiasm.

The effect of any ritual ceremony depends on the reciters, therefore, on special occasions; one of the key processes is to make sure that all the reciters are carefully chosen based on their delivery and performance. From *gatpat* ceremony to *didar* ceremony and from *Akhrat* to *khushali* occasions, the Ismaili Khoja rituals are knitted very tightly with the emotion embedded in the sounds of ginans. In fact the sounds of ginan bring out the sacred and spiritual aspect of their ritual in the utmost sublime and devotional manner. Through ginan, various elements are brought into the ritual framework. First, ritual is strongly constructed within the specific cultural framework in which people

use symbolic patterns and languages through various sources to communicate and spiritually connect. Ginan links devotees to their cultural roots and provides a historical and theological context in which rituals were created and practiced as a part of larger Khoja Ismaili identity for many centuries.

For example, the *ghatpat* ginan *Nur vella nur piyo* (at the time of enlightenment drink the light) signifies the ceremony not only as just the drinking water, but also as the process of experiencing spiritual light through this specific ritual. This ceremony signifies that one should first clean heart and keep away from false habits. Promises are made to the Imam that he or she will not repeat the same sins and errors. To repent with pure intention and utmost devotion, the water becomes light both for the heart and soul. Furthermore, the historical roots of *ghatpat* ritual connect us to the larger historical framework of the medieval times when many other religious communities such as Sufis, Sikhs and Hindus adopted water as a symbol to purify their heart and soul through ritual.

Second, ginans also depict stories and narrate them in a manner to enable listeners to pass from one geographical place to another especially when they are recited with utmost devotion and beauty. The ginan *Ya Ali khub majalis* (O Ali how glories gathering) for instance narrates the story of how the Imam of the time came to the throne. It is a situation-based or an event based ginan. Hence, once the devotees listen to this particular ginan, in their imagination, they draw a picture of visiting the Imam and experience the glorious day of Imam's *takht nashini* and rejoice in every moment of the occasion.

Similarly, the ginan *Navroz na din* (on the day of Navroz), is also a situation-based ginan when the Sayed Fateh Ali Shah went to Iran to have a glimpse of the Imam of the time, Imam Khalilullah (39th Imam). He found that the Imam had gone to the forest for hunting, and then Sayyed waited and yearned for the Imam with utmost submission and devotion. When he met with his beloved

Imam the purpose of his life was fulfilled. Even the sounds of this Kushali ginan remind devotees of that happiness and utmost joy. As expressed by Khushi Mohammad “I could not imagine Khushali occasion without a Kushali ginan, especially when the entire *jamat* sings in unison, glorifies the occasion thousand fold and also unites us all as one large *jamat*, that has gathered today to witness our living Imam’s *takht nashini*”.³¹⁶

Third, the element of *dhikr* is the most important aspect of ginan within liturgical *jamatkhana* ceremony as well as ceremonies, which take place outside the premises, especially the *intezar* program (waiting for the Imam) in *didar/darbar* ceremonies, which may last for more than three hours. During the *intezar* program certain ginans and qasidas are selected according to the theme of *didar*, which prepare devotees on many levels. *Venti ginans* especially, sung with utmost devotion and yearning, affect the devotees emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. Ginans and qasidas are also sung in the presence of the Imam, which heighten the overall experience.

I recall the 2005 *darbar* in Vancouver when the entire *jamat* recited along with the reciters the *venti* ginan *Sahebjī tu more man bahave* (O Lord you are dear to my heart). Many of them had tears in their eyes, and were singing with utmost devotion. Perhaps the effect of the ginan heightens a thousand fold especially when singing in the presence of the Imam. The ginans such as *Darshan diyo mora nath*, (O lord grant me your spiritual vision) or *Hun re piyasi*, (I am thirsty for your vision my lord) with powerful imagery and beautiful tunes attract devotees to yearn for a physical glimpse of the Imam.

Fourth, the ginans are a way of life for many Ismailis; there are ginans for almost every occasion. Whether they are happy occasions of Kushali or sad occasions like funerals, ginans are an essential form of prayers for all devotees. As one community reciter said, “I sing ginan *Anant Akhado* by *Pir Hassan*

³¹⁶ Muhammad, Khushi, Interviewed in Punjab, 2009.

Kabiruddin every day before I go to bed and especially when my family is going through difficult times, as it gives me courage and peace.”³¹⁷ There are devotees who teach their children languages such as Gujarati and Sindhi through ginan, there are artists within the community who have painted drawings based on the teaching of ginans.³¹⁸ As one of the famous Ismaili painters Jalal Gillani said:

I was always attracted by the rhythmic expression of Sufi poetry like Qawalis and Ginans. Those rhythms triggered me to learn more about Sufi poetry, and as I learned more, my mind started creating more visual impressions (images). Flow of that imagination gave me a true subject for my painting and so I started expressing it in "Strokes of Ginans".

Initially I was a little scared about creating visual expression of Ginans. I was not sure if I could do the justice to the great messages that *Pirs* were intending to convey but then I realized that this is my meaning and understanding. If I am inspired, it must be divine plan.... While painting Ginans, I learned rhythms (raags) invite the soul and understanding the meaning, takes the soul to the next level. The purpose of my painting is to allow my audience to understand the meaning, reflect on it and make changes in their lives, which was the true purpose of these Ginans. I wish that my paintings could take this great literature to larger audiences.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Gillani Shazia speaks about her belief on ginan, interviewed in Edmonton, 2010.

³¹⁸ Some of the Ismaili Muslim artists inspired by Ginans such as Gillani Jalal in USA, Jadavji Salma from Calgary, see her website: <http://salmajadavji.com/home.htm>, and Madhani Hamida at: <http://www.myhmstudios.com/bio.html>

³¹⁹ Gilani, Jalal, the interview was conducted in Feb 2012, for more information see his webiste: <http://www.feelartistic.org/art-gallery-of-jalal-gilani/>.



Illustration 19: This canvas was created by Jalal Gilani, who received an inspiration from one of the verses of Pir Sadardin’s ginan, “Eji kapda dove so kia hoa, Dil dhove so pave”, (If you wash your cloths, what a big deal until you clean your heart, you will never attain salvation”, (Photo Courtesy: Jalal Gilani)

Some members of the community have used digital media and developed stories based on the teachings of ginan, and there are others who have used stories from ginans and shared them with their children. One ginan teacher Hasan Chatriwala said, “I bring out many stories from the ginan and sing them and explain them to my students and they listen to me with allot of interest, such as the ginan *Kesari sinh saroop buhlayo* (the lion has forgotten its true identity).³²⁰ This particular ginan depicts the story of a lion, who has been in an illusion by losing its original self, and feels as if he is a goat by staying in the company of goats, people have been trapped in ignorance and selfishness, the only way to come out of this illusion is to recognize the Lord, Imam of the time”. Some of these narratives, combined with the ritual settings, with beautiful melodies set in indigenous languages make a profound impact on listeners personal and spiritual lives.

³²⁰ Chatriwala Hasan, I interviewed him in Canada, 2008.

Finally, ginans are a significant part of Khoja Ismailis and their living tradition, and more significantly their significant part of cultural memory. They are not only devotional literature as sometimes we may have heard from scholars. For many ginan is a way of life. They are teachings that invoke spirituality, messages of good deeds; similar to some scriptures such as *shastra*, *veda*, *purana*, *Quran* (*Sacred books of Hindus and Muslims*). A Ginan reciter Mehboob Kamdia from Toronto describes ginan as

“Yes, you may call it devotional literature if you like, perhaps I think it is much more than that, it is full of deeper spiritual meaning, as one of the verses of ginan says “*ginan ma to saheb che*” (Imam resides within ginan). For some it is a sacred literature of Khoja Ismailis, and without the contribution of our *Pirs* and their compositions of ginans our ancestors would not have been able to follow *sirat-ul-mustaqim* (the true path) for centuries. For almost seven hundred years Imams were not physically present in the Indian Subcontinent, it was only through our *Pirs* and their precious ginans that our ancestors recognized the living Imam. All in all, the performance of ginan, especially in a specific ritual context provides a deeper understanding and meaning to both, the reciters and the listeners”.³²¹

³²¹ Kamdia, Mehboob, interview was conducted in Edmonton, 2009.

Chapter Five

Music beyond Boundaries: Tradition and Transformation

*“It is now not so much physical boundaries...that define a community or nation’s “natural limits”. Increasingly we must think in terms of communications and transport networks and of the symbolic boundaries of language and culture... as providing the crucial and permeable boundaries of our age.”*³²²

Several challenges and issues have emerged in the modern period of Ismaili history pertaining to the migration, transmission and performance of ginans in North America. In the seventies and eighties, a large number of Ismaili families migrated from East Africa and the Indian Subcontinent to the West for various political and social reasons. Many of them chose Canada as their new home due to its friendly immigrant policies and freedom to practice their religion. Canada’s political stability and pluralistic values have offered innumerable opportunities and growth to Ismailis. However, the new surroundings have posed some cultural and religious challenges, especially those related to the transmission of ginans.

The first challenge is linked to understanding the Indian languages in which ginans were originally written. Ismaili families have adopted the English language as the medium of every day life to fit into their new surroundings. Their children are educated in English; the medium of communication with family and friends is mostly English. Most parents are finding it difficult to teach their children the ethnic Indian languages. The new generation has issues with understanding the traditional ethnic languages such as Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Sindhi, Punjabi, and Kutchi in which the sacred ginanic literature has been preserved for centuries. Therefore, they have very limited ways of

³²² Morley D. and K. Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*, 1995, p. 1

understanding the meaning of the ginans, appreciating their significance and gaining inspiration from them.

The second challenge pertains to the tunes or melodies of the ginans. Some elder community members believe that the ginans that are available today have been preserved in their original form, and have never been changed throughout the course of Ismaili history. They believe that the sacred *Pirs* composed the ginans and therefore they have to be retained in their pure and sacred form. However, one can find various differences in ragas or tunes within the community especially when the reciters have different ethnic backgrounds. For example, those who migrated from India and Pakistan recite some of their ginans differently from those recited by the East African communities. Yet another issue is related to the accompaniment of musical instruments with ginans. Some community members wish that ginans should be recited in their original tunes and have no musical instrumentation associated with them. On the other hand, a number of community members do not have a problem with the inclusion of musical instrumentation with ginans if the tunes are not mutilated, perhaps because this heightens the whole experience of reciting and listening to ginans.

The third challenge is associated with the media and the communication of the ginans in the West. Access to modern media and technology has enabled Ismailis to record and release private ginan albums with or without musical accompaniment, and without the official permission of the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board (ITREB) for Canada. The ITREB is an official body within the Ismaili religious organization, which seeks guidance from the Imam and looks after the religious affairs of the community. Hence, ITREB officially releases various materials of ginans including books, CDs for the community and especially for BUI (*Baitul-Ilm*, religious education classes) students.

In this chapter I will explore how ginans change their meaning and context when reciters travel from one geographical and cultural location to another. How does the transmission of ginans impact their meaning in the Western context? What creative and innovative ways have community members initiated in the Western diaspora to retain the ginanic tradition? What role does modern media and technology play in the transmission of ginans? Why do some diaspora youth like to modify ginanic tunes according to contemporary popular music styles? I will also explore how the performance of ginans from a liturgical to a social context may affect its meaning and transmission.

Many changes occur during the process of migration. The old memories and culture once practiced widely in a given culture move to the new shores where people face new challenges and opportunities. As soon as the migratory journey begins however, the music of one's childhood and the music that one might associate with 'home' often takes on new and important meanings. As noted by Baily and Collyer:

“Music is bound up with identity and memory in a special way, for music is not only a ready means for the identification of different ethnic or social groups, it has potent emotional connotations and can be used to assert and negotiate identity in a particularly powerful manner”.³²³

Listening to familiar music out of its original context, ‘the delocalization of the experience of listening’³²⁴ in Martin Stokes’s formulation, may allow people to remain connected to ‘home’ (imagined or real) through the sentiments and memories that music evokes. The South Asian Ismaili community in North America shares more or less a similar situation. In this chapter, the music I am exploring plays a vital part in their religious performance and devotional practices rather than looking their ethnicities or

³²³ Baily, J. and Collyer, M, ‘Introduction’, 2006, pp. 167-82.

³²⁴ Stokes, M, ‘Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music’, 1994, pp. 1-28.

homelands. This applies especially to East African Ismailis, who learned these ginans as a part of their inherited religious identity from their parents and grand parents who migrated from India to East Africa during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today in North America, many of the second-generation community members are experiencing numerous difficulties in understanding and comprehending the languages of ginans. However, they are motivated to learn, memorize and sing ginans as a part of their daily ritual and devotion.

Ginan Performance and Performativity

Judith Butler developed a concept of “performativity” which is employed to include everyday behavior.³²⁵ In this chapter, I will illustrate Judith Butler’s ideas on performance and performativity, and examine music as a site where performers and those who participate can coexist. I will also rely on my own extensive ethnographic fieldwork information, which includes interviews and field research notes from performers and participants. Further, I have gathered materials from various scholars and experts on ginans and collected diverse life stories from ginan performers and singers. I will use the interviews and life stories as a tool to share each individual’s own understanding, interpretation and contribution to the transmission of ginans in the western diaspora. I have been fortunate to have access to the community and its ritual and religious literature because I am a member of the Ismaili community. Therefore, not only am I privileged to study this tradition, I also personally participate, perform, and record it first hand. Hence, I have been able to develop a deeper insight and appreciation of all aspects of ginans and their relationship to the community, which is almost impossible for an outsider to study or experience.

I would like to examine how performance and performativity can be understood in the act of sharing music. Acknowledging all the difficulties encountered in the process of entering into the stories of other peoples’ lives, I will highlight how the communal performance of music has opened up doors to

³²⁵ Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, 1997.

many life histories and interviews. For many of my participants who could not afford the luxury of education and musical knowledge, this method served as a means to identify who they are, and how recitation of ginans has been and is a significant part of their lives.

Why Stories?

There are various reasons why I chose stories and interviews with the people who are making and contributing ginan music in the West. For this chapter, I have interviewed selected Ismaili individuals who are trying to redefine the term boundary and address the issues related to the ginan transmission in the West. I will also highlight how various new mediums of ginan transmission have pushed the boundaries of traditional methods of transmission and introduced creative ways to connect and re-connect, shape and re-shape individual identities and affinity with ginans. Why stories? First, it relates to my fundamental belief that storytelling is a process through which people assign meaning to their lives and to the environment in which they create music.³²⁶ Second, through stories and interviews, one can understand the processes of individual thinking, music making, emotions, and creative involvement. Third, the individual stories and interviews bloom at the juncture of personal and common interpretations of the social reality.³²⁷ Lastly, when you enter someone's personal life and musical journey, you get to know the deeper experiences of an individual's own journey of learning and sharing ginans.

Migration and Diaspora

In general discussions on migration and ethnic minorities, both academics and non-academics often use terms such as 'Diaspora', and 'immigrant', but they fail to define the terms in their proper context. Sometimes the terms are debatable especially when they are employed in a loose manner and attempt to

³²⁶ Gabriel, Yiannis, *Storytelling in organizations: Facts, Fictions, and Fantasies*, 2000.

³²⁷ Boje, M. David, "The storytelling organization: A study of story performance in an office-supply firm", 1991, pp. 106-26.

paint everyone with the same color. Those communities, families and individuals who have traveled to new countries sometime during nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to various reasons were seen as somehow 'different' and as a result were called 'immigrant'. Although, this term could be applied as to these populations however, upon receiving citizenship and in most cases residing in the 'new land' more years than in their original homeland, these people are still called 'immigrant'.³²⁸ According to Oxford Advanced Learners dictionary the term 'immigrant' is defined as "person who has come to live permanently in a foreign country".³²⁹ Although the term can be used to describe immigrant populations, it is sometimes disturbing when use of the term especially utilized by academics, in reference to the children and grandchildren of the first generation, for it implies that, regardless of being born and brought up in the West, they continue to be viewed by the ethnic majority as 'outsiders'. In today's world, we live in an era that can be described as a 'globalized world' in which the issues and concept around identities, and communities are vital. Nowadays, there are increasing debates about religious, national and regional identities. Therefore, the limitation around the term 'immigrant' may suggest a lack of citizenship, identification with and loyalty to the nation state.³³⁰ For the second generation "the West" is the only home they have known and therefore, terms such as 'immigrant', 'outsider' and 'foreigner' can no longer be used to identify this group.

The term 'diaspora' is another word that is increasingly being used to describe all minority ethnic communities, without regard to the birthplace and the historical experiences of members of these communities. The term "diaspora" mostly looks at homeland as sites of authenticity and tradition.³³¹ Often emphasis is given to the idea of origin. The term "diaspora" is derived from Greek meaning the dispersion through sowing or scattering, sometime

³²⁸ Mawani, Sharmina, "The Construction of Identities Amongst Young Adult Nizari Ismaili Muslims in Toronto And Mumbai," 2006, p. 24.

³²⁹ Hornby S A, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 1990 p. 620.

³³⁰ Mukadam and Mawani, "Post-Diasporic Indian Communities: A New Generation", 2006.

³³¹ Brah, Avtar, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, 1996, p 190.

referenced to the “exile of the Jews from their historic homeland and their dispersion throughout many lands, signifying as well the oppression and moral degradation implied by that dispersion”.³³² Over time the definition of diaspora has evolved and expanded further and is signalled in the Jewish experience with the idea of exile and oppression. Furthermore, the above definition does not shed light on other dispersed communities.²⁸ Few scholars have raised to various questions concerning the inherent and assumed link between the homeland and Diasporas.³³³

Radhakrishnan in his article “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora” sheds some new light on the issues surrounding the debate of identity. His inquiries reveal some interesting questions such as:

“How could someone be both one and something other? How could the unity of identity have more than one face or name? If my son is both Indian and American, which one is he really? Which is the real self and which is the other? How do these two selves coexist and how do they weld into one identity? How is ethnic identity related to national identity? Is this relationship hierarchically structured, such that the “national” is supposed to subsume and transcend ethnic identity, or does this relationship produce a hyphenated identity, such as African-American, Asian-American, Asian-American, and so forth, where the hyphen marks a dialogic and non-hierarchic conjuncture? What if identity is exclusively ethnic and not national at all? Could such an identity survive, and that is, be experientially authentic but not deserving of hegemony? Does this transformation suggest that identities and ethnicities are not a matter of fixed and stable selves but rather the results and products of fortuitous travels and recontextualizations? Could this mean that how identity relates to place is itself the expression of a shifting equilibrium?”³³⁴

³³² Safran, William, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return." 1991, p. 83.

³³³ Clifford, James, "Introduction: Partial Truths", 1986, p. 305.

³³⁴ R. Radhakrishnan, “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora”, pp 119-131, 2003.

Usually, South Asian communities in the West are often referred to as a 'diaspora', indicating that they are deterritorialised.³³⁵ In the first issue of the *Journal Diaspora*, according to Safran five main features of a diasporic community are:

1. Dispersal from an original center to at least two further locations
2. Maintenance of a myth in relation to their homeland
3. Alienation in the country to which they migrated
4. Envisaging returning to their homeland at some future point in time
5. Dedicated to a relationship with this homeland.³³⁶

If we use above features as indicators to whether communities are diasporic or not, then it is quite evident that the second-generation of Nizari Ismaili Muslims from South Asia's ancestry are not members of a diaspora; because first and foremost they have not participated in any form of migration. The term "post- diaspora" should be used proposed by Mukadam to refer to the second and subsequent generations.³³⁷

Many Ismailis in the West try to retain the old traditional ways of learning gnan despite adding some modern creative methods in which they are able to push the boundaries of old tradition and incorporate new ways of learning gnan. We can attach the word "hybridity" for this whole notion; however, it needs to be examined critically. To what extent has the community adopted the new languages and culture in the one hand and also carefully inserted their old tradition of learning gnan into their daily lives? In the following section I will highlight a few individuals who have contributed immensely in regards to gnan transmission. I will share their life stories, inspirations and passion, for

³³⁵ Vertovec, S., *The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative Patterns*, 2000.

³³⁶ Safran, William, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return." 1991, p. 1.

³³⁷ Makadam, Anjoom, *Gujarati Speakers in London: Age, Gender and Religion in the Construction of Identity*, 2003.

learning gnan. What contributions have they made in the western environment and how have they kept their tradition of learning gnan alive? And how much they have pushed the traditional boundaries and created new horizons to learn and appreciate gnan?

When I describe cultural boundaries in this chapter, I indicate that boundary is constantly changing, since, whenever existing cultural borders are crossed, new borders are constructed. According to Massey, we can thus characterize cultural borders as “articulated moments”³³⁸ which means that we cannot physically touch or define cultural borders, but only imagine them, and our sense of boundaries reflects the extent to which we, consciously or otherwise, wish to keep or change what we perceive as our cultural borders.³³⁹

Various Spaces of Performing Gnan

Ginans play a vital role in the daily religious practices of Ismailis, both during the congregation ceremonies inside the Jamatkhana (House of Congregation), as well as outside the prayer hall. Community members play *gnan* CDs in their car, listen to them at home, browse them online on various websites including Youtube, listen to them on their ipods, and sing them along with their children while driving them to the school or *Jamatkhana*. Some mothers often use ginans as lullabies for their children before they go to bed.

To understand the difference between the sacred and public performances and how various factors may influence each other, please see the following figures:

³³⁸ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 1994. P.154.

³³⁹ Baruch, Shimoni, “Cultural Borders, Hybridization, and a Sense of Boundaries in Thailand, Mexico, and Israel”, 2006, p 219.

Figure 9: Performance Context and Meaning

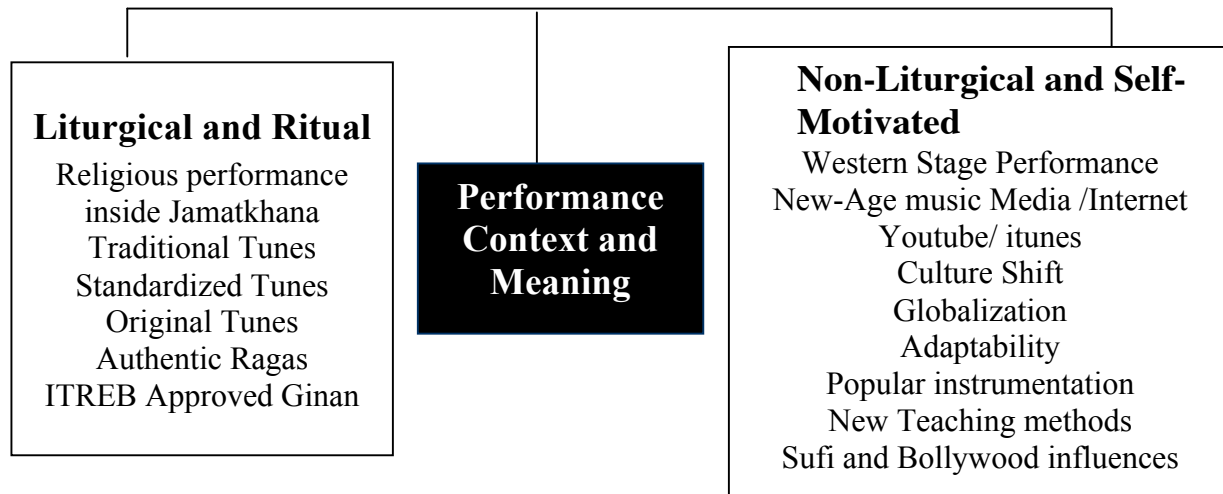
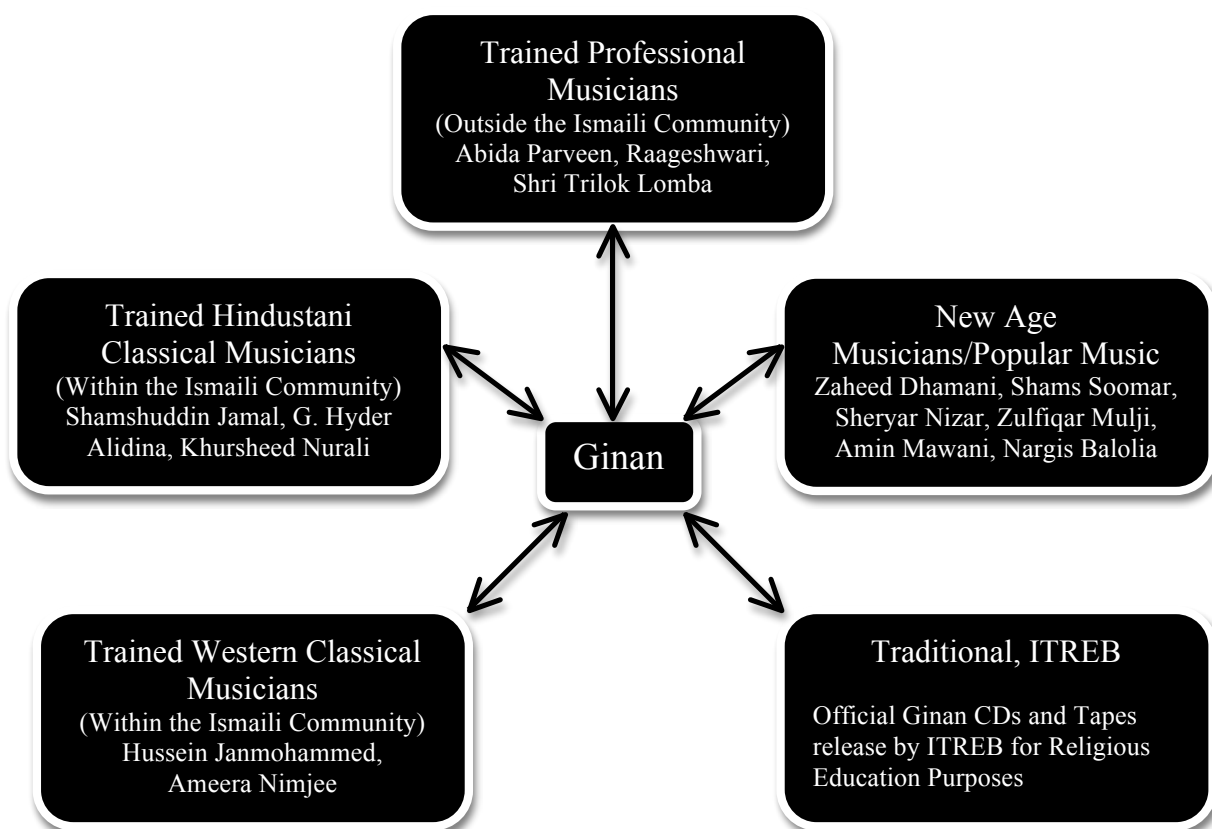


Figure 9: Musician's Background and various Performance Contexts



Explanation of the above two figures

In the above figure, I have demonstrated two performance contexts. One is liturgical, which is reciting gnan inside the prayers hall, or *Jamatkhana* setting, where the community recites in unison and emphasis is given to communal recitation. Therefore the gnanans that are sung and recorded for the *Jamatkhana* setting are more appropriate for religious ritual settings. Strict guidelines are followed and the most emphasis is given to the authenticity or traditional tunes of the gnanans. However, there also differ from country to country. The second is the recitation of gnanans for use outside *Jamatkhana* purposes. Community members recite and record gnanans as a part of their own devotion and share these with their family and friends. Sometimes they record gnanans accompanied with musical instruments. A few also try to share modern musical orchestration with the gnanans to enhance their experience, and some incorporate their western musical influence into the gnanans.

In Figure 9, I have demonstrated gnanans within the five different groups, each bringing its own element and meaning to the understanding of gnanans. These groups such as ITREB, promotes more traditional ways of recording the gnanans, and some community members trained in Indian classical music, would like to incorporate their Hindustani classical background into the gnan. There are other Ismaili musicians who are trained in Western classical music and the choral-conducting setting, and they would like to bring their experience into the music of gnanans. Further, there are new-age musicians, who would like to use Western instrumentation and various Western-style genres into the gnanans. Finally, there are professional musicians, who would like to bring another layer of meaning and interpretation to the recitation of gnanans. Therefore, one needs to understand and appreciate the various ways and spaces of performing gnanans and understanding their meaning within the context of their performance. In the following section, I will analyze the various styles of music influencing the gnan tradition in modern times, especially in North America.

Hybridity: Eastern Sounds - Western Instrumentation:

The concept of hybridization implies that cultures are neither given nor fixed; rather they flow and tend to blend.³⁴⁰ Through interaction cultures are shaped and reshaped with other cultures, whereby people either reflectively or unreflectively insert new meaning into their own cultural understanding.³⁴¹ The term hybridity, as used by Garcia Canclini, does not resolve the tension between its conceptual polarities. Hybridity can be applied to define a space between two zones. As for the anthropological concept of syncretism or liminality, for example, it is generally believed by some scholars that Sikhism occupies a hybrid site midway between the mystical practices of Islam and that of an indigenous Hindu religion. Hence, hybridity can be understood as the ongoing condition of all human cultures, because they undergo continuous processes of transculturation (two-way borrowing and lending between cultures). Instead of hybridity versus purity, this view suggests that hybridity is continuous.

“Messages: Notes from the Soul” - a Remixed compilation of Ginans

Shams Somar is a talented Ismaili composer/musician, who has demonstrated musical and cultural hybridity by blending eastern melodies with western musical arrangement. He had released an instrumental CD entitled “Messages: Notes from the Soul” - a re-mixed compilation of Ginans.

Shams began his musical journey at the age of 5 when his parents introduced him to a keyboard. His eastern culture and western environment encouraged an exotic blend of contemporary composition that mesmerized his listeners. The teachings of spirituality and the stimulating melodies were a perfect unity, which seemingly promised the emergence of an evolving artist.

³⁴⁰ Friedman, Johnathan, “The hybridization of roots and the abhorrence of the bush”, 1999, pp 230-56.

³⁴¹ Bhabha, K. Homi, *The location of culture*, 1994.

What is striking about his album is that although Shams has used Western synthesizers and modern sounds whether his ginans and also included musical pieces and interludes, he has managed to retain the existing or traditional tunes of the ginans. When I asked him how he got the idea of making an instrumental ginan CD and why he did not include vocal music, he explained that “*at one point in time, I thought of including the vocals, but I was afraid that if the vocals and instrumental do not go well together then it would be difficult to keep the ginan’s sanctity*”. He further believes that “*as far as the instrumentation is used in a sensitive and responsible manner, then perhaps it should be fine because it is important not to harm the ginan’s sanctity*”. After interviewing Shams, I came to know more about his efforts and musical contributions. Here are some of his responses to the questions I asked him:

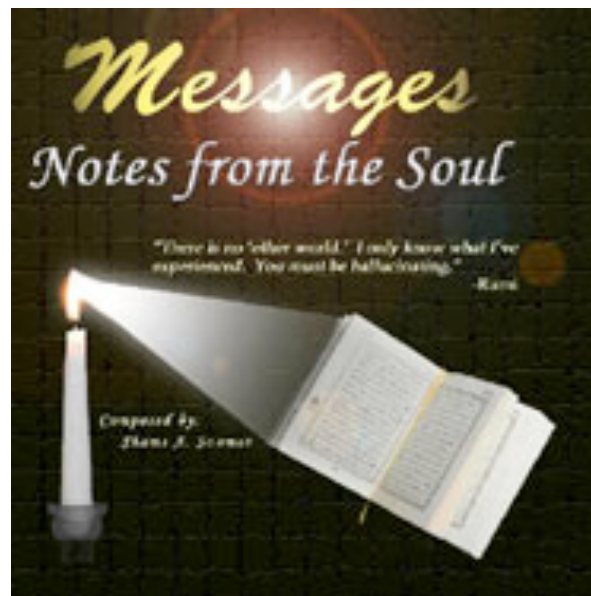
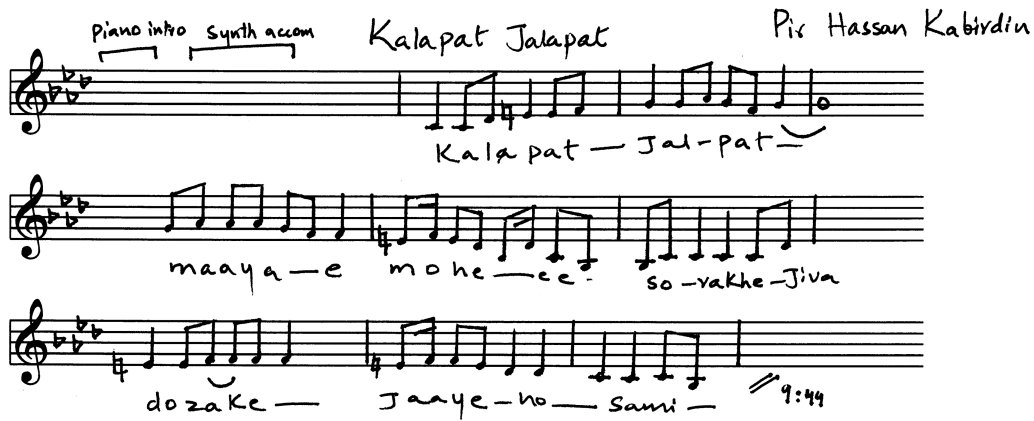


Illustration No 20: Shams Soomar, “Messages: Notes from the Soul”, ginan instrumental album cover, USA, 2003



Transcription 19: Kabirdin, Hassan, Pir “Kalpat Jalpat”, *Messages: Notes from the Soul*, instrumental music was composed by Shams Soomar, USA, 2003

Ginan: *Eji Kalpat jalpat maya-e-mohi*
So rahe jiv dozakh jaye ho sami ji

Translation: Unreal is this illusiory existence in which my soul has gotten attached.

KG: When and how were you initiated into the ginan instrumental CD project?

SS: *Music has been a very vital part of my life since childhood. As far as the ginan instrumental CD is concerned, it is something that is a part of my personal journey and meditation. I remember those days when I used to participate in a lot in meditation in the early morning Jamatkhana. It was difficult to express my spiritual experiences verbally, so I wanted to share my deep feelings through music. As a result, almost every day after coming back from Jamatkhana, I used to play the tunes of ginans on my Keyboard, especially those that appealed to me and were close to my heart. So, I started playing tunes to express my feelings and love to my Imam. Of course, my understanding of ginans' meaning was limited. However, I tried to know the meaning before arranging music, but it was the tunes of ginans that really inspired me.*

KG: How and when were you introduced to the ginan tradition?

SS: *Ginans have been always the central part of Ismaili ritual. However, I have always been drawn towards their music since a tender age. I remember whenever I hear ginan in Jamatkhana; I always imagine how this ginan would sound if I orchestrate this ginan with violin, strings, and keyboard pieces and harmony and arrange it musically.*

KG: All three CDs of yours including “Messages: Notes from the Soul”, “City of Light” and “The Evolution of Creation” seem to have some religious undertones. What role do faith and religion play in your music?

SS: *Yes, indeed, faith plays a major role in my life and I get immense inspiration through my faith and it helps me to compose music and be creative.*

KG: How did you come up with the title of your instrumental ginan CD “Messages: Notes from the Soul”?

SS: *Initially, I thought, it would be right to have a title of ginan CD as “The Traveler” as you know that our Pirs had traveled from Central Asia to India to share the esoteric knowledge of our faith. But then, I thought that the “Notes from the Soul” would be appropriate. Here I have layers of meaning to share, especially within the single word “Note”, first of all it is musical notes, as we all know. Second, these are “Notes” and teaching of Ismaili Pirs, and last but not least here the “Notes” also express my own deep feelings and inspiration about this soulful ginan music.*

KG: What types of music do you listen to?

SS: *Of course, I listen to some Indian music especially, I like A. R. Rehman but apart from Indian music, I also enjoy World music including Yanni, Loreena McKennitt and I also listen to the ginans as well.*

KG: How far can one go when arranging the ginans' music, are there any limits?

SS: *You know everyone has equal rights to do whatever they want. However, as far as ginans are concerned, they have to remain musically and aesthetically soulful. I think one needs to be careful and sensitive when working on the music of ginan. It is not like if our youngsters like Pop music so make it Pop, no, not at all; that was not my intention when I did the ginan instrumental CD. I used modern sounds in which my emotions can be heard through music. I wanted to give a new meaning to the understanding of Ginan, which is a very personal, it is the utmost feeling about love to God, and it is pure. Recently, I heard the ginan "Sahebji" with rap music. I know many people would not have liked that idea at all. Before listening to this ginan, I had similar views. But after listening to the ginan, my views have changed. The person who has added layers of music and hip-hop and rap together, was able to keep the sanctity of ginan, and after hearing the ginan, I can say that he understood his relationship with the Imam and he also knew that the sanctity attached to this ginan needs to be kept, and he expressed it in his own way. As far as the messages and the essence are concerned, I think this Hip-hop rendition of ginan is all right.*

KG: How can we motivate Ismaili youth to participate in learning ginan?

SS: *First of all, we need to understand that teaching Indian languages of ginan to our youth in North America is a huge challenge. If our youths are not familiar with the languages, they will not understand the meanings and we will lose them. Therefore, I think we should allow interpretations of ginans, I mean we should modify our culture in such a way that our youth can relate to it, such as we should provide English translations and transliteration. We should allow musical accompaniment in which our youth can also participate and learn this*

unique Ismaili heritage. As we know that music plays a very important role in the lives of everyone. Music also helps us to memorize, it provides us calm and peace, and it also captures our emotions and sentiments, so through ginan music we can certainly encourage our young generation to participate and understand more about our ginans.

Ginan with English Transliteration: Zulfiqar Mulji

One of the major issues pertaining to learning ginan in North America is related to language. Children born and raised in North America are not entirely acquainted with the languages of ginan; therefore, they have difficulties in understanding and appreciating its richness. Although ginans and their meanings are taught in the BUI classes so that children can practice their faith through the teaching of ginans and appreciate their cultural and religious heritage, many individuals from the community believe that in general, we do not give enough significance and effort to teach ginans and their meanings to our younger generation.

To overcome language barriers and to transmit ginan tradition in the West, many individuals have adopted new ways. Among them is Zulfiqar Mulji who migrated from East Africa in early 80s. He shares his own experience:

We are slowly losing the languages of ginans, and for the kids I am teaching, routine learning and traditional teaching methods are not helping out. So one day I said to myself, something needs to be done, and you know rules are made to be broken, sometimes changes are introduced which are very difficult to grasp, so on my own initiative, and HIS inspiration, I was teaching from the Grade 8 BUI (Bait-ul-Ilm, religious education classes) curriculum in Toronto. Initially I picked the ginan “Tum chet man mera”, that’s a very nice melody, kid will love it, why don’t I let them recite in traditional ragas, traditional words, line by line, and after every line I will recite for them in English in the

*same raga. So the first gnan I did was “Tum chet man mera”.*³⁴²



Illustration No 21: Zulfiqar Mulji, Vancouver, 2008

KG: What was the feedback you received when you first started teaching gnan according to this new methodology to the Ismaili Youth?

ZM: *The overall feedback from students was great. In 1992, 1993, I did not purposely spread it out, I kept it in our local BUI (religious education) centers. I have a cousin and his wife, and they really forced me to spread it around that's how it all started.*

KG: Do you think the English translation or transliteration justify its meanings in its entirety?

ZM: *One has to be careful that one is teaching the English translation not to be taken into a stand alone context, because the true essence whatever languages the Hindi, the Gujarati, or Punjabi words will not come through. While the teacher is conveying the English recitation he or she needs to explain for example “Awal tu hi, Akhir tun hi” (You are the first and you are the last) these are not discrete components, you are talking about eternity here and there is no beginning and there is no end, that what the true essence is. Well,*

³⁴² Zulfiqar Mulji, I interviewed him in Edmonton, 2005

when I explain the transliteration to the youth I try for them to learn the language as well, therefore, whenever they sing ginan they understand its meaning. And I do my very best, that when I am asked to recite the ginan that I make sure that I understand the ginan before I ever recite it. Because the passion and the emotion do not come out, when you recite the ginan without understanding, so I think that should be the basis.

Ginan sample 1, composed by Pir Sadardin:

*Eji aval tuhi akhar tuhi
Tuhi tu sirjanhara ebi*

You are the first, you are the last
You are the creator Ali, Ali yes you are

*Zahir tuhi batin tuhi
Tuhi tu saheb mera ebi³⁴³*

You are the manifest, you are the hidden
You are my only Lord, Ali, Ali yes you are

KG: When and where did you start learning ginan?

ZM: *I got my start at home at a very young age. Ginans become a part of our every day life. I think it was my home environment that initiated me. I sang ginans throughout my elementary grades. I remember a friend of mine who was six years of age, we used to sing ginans very loudly everyday in morning Jamatkhana. And then there was a break, there were situations when I had a particular vocation, which gave me a lot of time. So I was involved in BUI (religious education) and decided to learn more ginans, so I picked up the Gujarati ginans and transliterated at the same time I start learning Gujarati, so I transliterated 72 Holy Ginan One, and 72 Holy Ginan Two books.*

³⁴³ Sadardin, Pir, “Awal tuhi”, Ginans with English Translation, Vol. 1, 2007, pp. 85.

KG: Out of your transliterated ginans, which one do you like the most?

ZM: *So being involved in the community, and teaching BUI, my favorite ginan so far is “Taren tu taran” (save me oh my Lord), it is like a lullaby, kind of nursery rhymes, when kids are asleep, the parent would recite to them, and the words I have chosen, and the resources I have collected are simple. As a result, what you are conveying to your child is to how to build your relationship with your spiritual leader Imam.*

Ginan sample2, written by Pir Sadardin:

*Tariye tu taranhar khudavand,
Avar na tare duja koi Ali tuhi tuhi tuhi*

Save me oh my savior Murtaza Ali
No one else but you can save me
Oh my Ali only you can save me

*Khan me kina ravi ras bhana,
Dhandhukar na hoe Ali tuhi tuhi tuhi³⁴⁴*

You made the universe in less then a second
Everywhere we see is you
Oh my Ali only you can save me

KG: Don’t you think that you may also find people in our community who would feel afraid about the transliterated ginan, and perhaps if they are allowed in *Jamat Khana* then we might lose our original tradition, which has been for centuries?

ZM: *People don’t need to be afraid of this creative process. There are two main reasons, one, it is just a learning tool, and the other thing is that when the Ismaili Pirs themselves went to different countries what did they do, they learned the local languages, so personally I don’t see anything wrong.*

³⁴⁴ Sadardin, Pir, “Tariye tu Taran”, *Ginans with English Translation*, Vol. 1, 2007, pp. 33.

When I teach, one of the most important and basic messages, which I like to convey to my students, is that who is the Imam? What is He supposed to mean to you? What does He really mean to you? And this is just one way in line with other methods such as through lullabies, through nursery rhymes, through ginans, from a young age, if you convey these messages through music, through melodies, I think it stays with them and they never ever forget. It is like a popular song, all the songs we learned when we were young, have you forgotten them? No, as soon as you hear them, you remember them. So I think it is an extremely valuable tool that the children in North America, when they are growing up, the English language become their first language, therefore, ginan messages need to be put through.

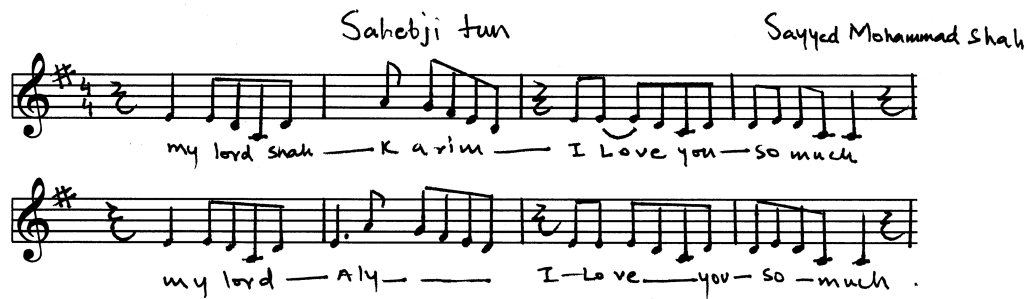
KG: Do you think programs such as *Ginan-i-Mehfil* (a ceremony of performing ginan outside the space of *Jamatkhana*) should be encouraged in our community to further motivate our youths?

ZM: *Sometimes Ginan-i- Mehfls are very receptive to young audiences when there are catchy tunes, catchy melodies, because what is the Ginan-i-Mehfil after all? One of our main objectives should be to create a feeling within the young Jamat (community), so they say “Wow” that tune is really good, right, it comes to me very easily, I remember it and even when you walk out you are really humming it, with the meaning line by line, it really makes a difference.*

KG: What role does the ginan performance or recitation play in the lives of young Ismailis?

ZM: *I will be very honest with you; I am not taking any credit away from academics here. It is necessary; academic is one way to promote our faith and to promote our devotional literature. But if you don't recite, then I think that*

feeling will not come out in you. Reading poetry is one thing, but when you recite with understanding, then that's when you get that inspiration, that's when you get chandan and loban (essence and purpose of life).



Transcription 20: Shah, Mohammad Sayyed, “Sahebji tun”, sung by Zulfiqar Murji, Vancouver, 2008

Ginan: *Sahebji Tu(n) more man bhavē, avar more chi(n)t na aave*

Zulfiqar Mulji's Transliteration: My Lord Shah Karim I love you so much.

Zulfiqar Mulji in his drive to transliterate ginans, and teach ginans to Ismaili youths in Canada has been very successful, as he believes that this tradition needs more attention for the better understanding of our faith. His main goal is to appreciate, understand and share this gnan tradition with Ismaili youth who he believes need to understand the deeper spiritual connection with the gnan. This can be only achieved when ginans' meanings are understood and only then the devotion will come through.

Ismaili Gnan and Western Choir: Hussein Janmohammed

Hussein Janmohammed experimented gnan in the Western choral music setting with his Canadian Ismaili Muslim Youth Choir. Hussein co-founded the Vancouver & Canadian Ismaili Muslim Youth Choirs and he facilitates choral music workshops internationally on the themes of collaborative creation, identity, pluralism and fostering dialogue. As a composer, he writes music inspired by Muslim cultures and societies. He has been privileged to sing in the

presence of His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan (both with his Choir as well as the singing ginan), during his Golden Jubilee visit in 2008 to Vancouver. Hussein was born in Nairobi and was raised in Alberta, Canada. He studied Western music at both Bachelor and Masters levels and shared his vision of music with Ismaili Youth across Canada. It was an amazing experience for me to personally hear him singing ginans with his Choir in Edmonton in 2007. Many people of the community were moved by this performance where apart from ginan, various devotional and culture musics were fused with a Choral musical setting.

KG: What inspires you to use ginan composition in a Western Choir setting?

HJ: *It is more tunes and the spirit of ginan that inspires me first and still I do not understand ginans completely. But I try my best to know the meaning, because it allows me to understand the spirit and meaning of ginan. There are certain ginans, which are easy to harmonize such as bandagi ginan (meditation ginan).*

KG: Did you find it sometimes challenging to use ginan in a Western choral setting, as community members mostly prefer ginans in traditional manner?

HJ: *If you want to connect to your tradition with your heart differently and maybe want to explore it, then why not. Yet there is a responsibility to art that you are not going to abuse it or create in such a way that it is not offensive. You have to be aware of sensitivities, where the community is, where the elders are. What am I finding is that the elders are connecting to it as well! They come to Choir concerts and we are singing a ginan and dhikr (remembrance) that is a pearl for them in this ocean of music. Yes, we are also singing “give ear to my words O Lord”, very Christian hymns, we are singing the song from Afghanistan, we are singing Malaika from Africa, which also connect, but in the middle we are putting dhikr or ginan, and what happens and what I am*

guessing is that still they are connecting to the ginan, no matter how it is done, as long as it maintains sacred feeling then they don't care how it is done, they just want to hear it. And what is cool is that they also want to hear everything else as well. So it opens up the community's mind, yeah there is a dhikr, tasbih (chanting of the names of Allah) and ginan in harmony, but let's hear the Christian hymns and lets be open about it, listen and see how that feels like. But I don't know how much our community has experienced that, so are we closed minded or open? It is a cross-pollination and diversity within our tradition that we are connecting to our faith in a deeper way, but we are also opening our minds to probably other faiths and cultures. So there is a dialogue, even though we are not saying there is a dialogue.

This demonstrates that in Canada, people appreciate diversity and pluralism and clearly Hussein's comments convey the deeper sense of communal as well as Canadian identity.



Illustration No 22: Hussein Janmohammed and the Canadian Ismaili Youth Choir, performing in Ottawa, 2009

KG: Do you remember any such occasion where the Ismaili Youth Choir was greatly appreciated by our community?

HJ: *Let me share with you an interesting story. I still remember it was in Calgary; we were doing the workshop and singing the ginan “Taren tu Taran” (save me my lord). So as a choir we decided to do something in which we are all familiar. Therefore we picked the ginan and sang in Jamat Khana as a big group. I remember anywhere between fifty to two thousand people singing the ginan at the same time with us. And we had four to five girls and boys who were leading the ginan. So we decided to do the same thing but a little bit twisted and do it in a new way. So we told the Jamat let’s sing the ginan ‘Taren tu taran’, all the kids and adults know it. And I asked the Jamat who knows what it means. So one elder stood up and explained in Gujarati, and I don’t remember exactly what she said after our performance, but what I remember is that “He Chokrao too kamal Kariyo (in Kachi language, “These children have performed amazingly”) “What these kids have done in their short lives, I have not been able to achieve it in my whole life. The way they sang “Tare tu Taran” Mukey Munjo Mowla Yaad Aviyo”, (I remembered my Mowla), this elder lady was crying, her friend was crying, and I am there listening to them and also started crying. Because how she attached meaning to the ginan, when she started talking about Sultan Mohammed Shah, the olden days, religion, and it became a whole dialogue to them, and remembering their Mowla (Imam).*

The above story is quite fascinating in how music creates meaning and people are attaching to their religious experiences and historical past. Although, many elder members of the community only sing and hear the traditional rendition of this particular ginan, however they were open enough to appreciate the devotion and utmost submission that was put together by the Ismaili Youth.

KG: Is it difficult to motivate Ismaili Youth to participate in ginan performance, as they might have difficulty to connect their linguistic and cultural affinity?

HJ: *We always talk about how we are going to lose our culture, our kids are not going to connect to our ginan and dhikr, what is going to happen? But what I say is that they already have it in their heart. If you create a space for them to produce it or express it in their own ways with the same kind of spirit, then they will never lose it.*

KG: What feedback do you often get from your Choir members?

HJ: *I will share with you the feedback of one of our choir members; which he sent to me via email:*

Hanif: *I have had the privilege of participating in two choirs within the Ismaili Muslim Community, as both a singer and a conductor. Both roles have contributed immensely to my identity as a musician, as a human being and as a member of the Ismaili community. Before becoming involved in Ismaili choirs, I was a musician and an Ismaili Muslim - neither world played a part in the development and growth of the other, and both remained separate. Now, the idea of the two being unrelated seems ludicrous. To me, music is a form of devotion in itself, and when performed with a spiritual undertone, the result is serene I have certainly become much more cognizant of my faith, and performing with my fellow Ismailis has triggered a series of feelings within me, which have driven me to independently learn more about the practices and ethics of my faith. In addition, the Ismaili community has provided me an avenue through which I am able to explore the world of choral music - something of which I had never been a part. With each performance I took part in, and each rehearsal I led, I felt music and faith becoming more engrained in my personal identity; it has changed me, and my community, in countless ways,*

and I am certain that this is only the beginning”.

Another Choir member Nafeesa echoes her message with the same spirit as Hanif:

Nafeesa: Honestly I can't remember a point in my life where there wasn't any music. We sing every day in mosque through devotional prayers such as ginan. I also grew up singing in choirs and my mother always made it a point to take me to music programs. Bollywood movies were always playing at my house, which is an entirely different kind of singing altogether. But for some reason, I never connected the singing at Jamat Khana with the formal singing I did in choir. Then one day, I heard there was an Ismaili Choir, and we began to make choral arrangements of some prayers and ginan. Even singing some prayers in two-part harmony brought a new beauty to a deeply religious experience. Over my years in Ismaili choir, we fostered an environment where other young people could explore their creativity, culture and spirituality and not worry about being judged harshly. There is always some tension when traditional religious standards are re-interpreted, but in Ismaili Choir, we forged ahead and melded religious fare with harmony, improvisation, Jazz and even beat boxing. The choir for me became a symbol of where my community is currently, and where it is leading. Our community is at a crossroads where young people want to take the reins and create their own understanding of their identity, but we still have one foot firmly planted in the world of our parents who came from outside Canada. The choir taught me how we can use music to express the conflicting "hats" we wear. It always amazes me how feedback from our concerts always varies. Some people get misty-eyed over our performances of traditional Swahili songs from my parents' former home in Africa. Others get emotional when we perform prayer ginans in four-part harmony. Then there are some who connect with a traditional choral piece they have never heard before because choir music is still a foreign entity to many members of our community. Regardless of how our music touches

someone, I am amazed to know the power we have to connect with people. It's a testament to how music is the ultimate bridge-builder and how the human voice is truly the universal instrument".

If we compare Zulfiqar Mulji and Hussein Janmohammed, we find similarities. Both Zulfiqar and Hussein were born in East Africa and migrated to Canada in the early 80s. Zulfiqar is ten years older than Hussein. Zulfiqar spent his early life in East Africa where the ethnic Indian languages were still widely spoken on a daily basis by the community members. However, Hussein moved to Canada at a very young age and spent almost his entire education years in Canada. For Zulfiqar, understanding and sharing the wealth of knowledge of ginan with the Ismaili youth is the key motivation, and he thinks this can be achieved only when the messages of ginan are shared with youth. Therefore, he uses word-by-word transliteration of ginans in the English language, but retains the traditional melody. When students recite one line in traditional language, the same line now will be recited in the transliterated "English" way.

As a result, Ismaili youth are able to understand the importance of their faith through ginans. For Hussein, who is trained in Western music, he appreciates more the sonic expressions, melodies and spiritual tone underlying the ginans. Hussein would like to enrich the ginan experience with choral music setting so he can inspire Ismaili youth with the richness of ginan music and also the brotherhood, peace, harmony, and spiritual messages of love and devotion to Imam, which comes out very strongly when the entire Choir sings together in harmony. Both connect with youth and contribute their expertise and knowledge of ginans, which they both believe, needs to be heard, and understood, within the cultural and social context of North America.

Professional Musicians and their contributions on Ginans

When professional musicians such as Abida Parveen and Allan Faqir, both renowned Sufi singers from Pakistan, Raageshwari and Shri Trilok Lomba, well known Indian singers, and Shamshuddin Jamal and Khursheed Nurali

from within the community sing ginans accompanied with musical instruments, they intend to enhance the experience of ginan beyond its traditional ragas and sometimes compose entirely new tunes and recompose ginans. Of course there are various opinions about the contributions of professional musicians, such as that the tunes of ginans should always remain the same (traditional tunes), that is the ones which we hear in the *Jamatkhana*.

Another person would take a completely opposite view point that if ginan ragas sound good to our ear, as long as the lyrics are not changed, then we do not see any specific reason for not appreciating new ragas. The message remains the same or may become more meaningful when professional musicians give new life to the old ginans. I remember the first time I heard Abida Parveen singing ginan in 1980s in a Governor Sind house video footage, “Aye Rahem Rehman” using a completely new tune, the old one was composed in raga Kafi and the new one was in raga Malkauns with added *alaps* in the beginning. I remember the interesting comments passed by someone from the community that “I think if Hazir Imam did not enjoy the new *raga* as he might have commented that the way we recite this particular ginan in *Jamatkhana* is far better than the new one”. When I gave samples of both ginan renditions to Dr. Kamaljeet Bajwa, who is a trained in Indian classical music, she enjoyed far better than the new raga of Abida Parveen than the old one. Here we can draw certain conclusions that when the context of ginan is change from its traditional context to a professional context, or even when ginan recitation move from its sacred setting such as *Jamatkhana* to the stage performance accompanied by musical instruments it does bring changes in the ragas and overall musical experience.

Abida Parveen

Here is an excerpt of an interview with Abida Parveen:

KG: Who chose the ginan *Aye-Raheman* for you and how did you come up with its composition, when you performed it for first time in the presence of the Aga Khan?

AP: *I sang this ginan because one of my very close Ismaili friends Sadrudin Hashwani shared a moving story with me about the great mystical woman Sayyeda Imam Begum. I was touched to hear her life story therefore, I chose her ginan Aye Raheman, re-composed its tune in a bandish (composition) of Raga Malkauns, which was my father's tune. So I used that tune (i.e. a stock tune) and applied it to this beautiful ginan of Sayyeda Imam Begum"*

KG: What did the ginan mean to you especially when you performed it in the presence of the Aga Khan?

AP: *Ginans contain sounds and messages, which are full of spirituality, through which the community remembers Al-e-Nabi Aulad-e-Ali (the progeny of Prophet Mohammed) for centuries. Indeed, it is like other Sufi compositions of great masters such as Rumi and Khusrau. It is a form of dhikr (remembrance) through which one attains spiritual union (visal). Through the soulful songs and teaching of the ginans Ismailis have understood who is the Imam and what is his role for both material and spiritual growth. One has to ask the question, why in the Quran God says, that without the presence of an Imam this world would not survive for even a minute. Because, he is the mazhar (light) of Ali, the same light which fought in Karbala. Ismailis are very fortunate to have recognition of living Imam. I am very lucky to be able to perform in his presence. If you visit my home you will witness that, as I have Imam's picture hanging in my living room.*

KG: How was your experience reciting ginan in his presence?

AP: *I was not reciting ginan. He was reciting ginan through me I was not there at all. Those feelings are beyond expressions as our language is bound to this physical world. How can I express something, which is so unique, immensely spiritual and ultimately sublime? I still remember when I sang first time in the*

presence of Hazir Imam. He was so happy. After my performance he chatted with me for almost half an hour, showered his mercy upon my family and me. He expressed his desire to hear more ginans and qasidas from me and informed me that he will arrange to send more ginans and qasidas to me. I am fortunate that Hazir Imam gave me his permission to sing ginans and qasidas.

KG: How do you see the role of gnan within the larger framework of South Asian Sufis music and literature?

AP: Indeed, Ismaili Pirs were great Sufi masters and their method of composing ginans in a musical mode is very similar to other Sufis such as Shah Latif, Bulleh Shah, and Shah Inayat. They were all highly trained and spiritually elevated gurus (masters). Their teaching was beyond religion, race and color. Indeed, they were the Aulia-e-Karam of Allah (Mystic or Saints of God).

KG: When you sang the *Munajat* “*Aaj raaj Mubarak hove*”, the tune was similar to the one in which the Ismailis perform. Where did you learn this tune and why did you prefer to retain the same tune?

AP: My family friend Mr. Sadaruddin Hashwani sang in that tune for me. He was the one who taught me that tune. When I heard it from him I was extremely moved. It was a perfect tune, very similar to Kafi musical style of Sind, composed in Rupak taal (seven beat rhythmic cycle). The composition itself conveys the deepest meaning of the poetry, when I heard it, I said to myself what a soulful composition. I do not need to re-compose a new one, and I sang it that way!

KG: After hearing the tunes of ginans, do you believe that their composers were trained in the poetic and musical traditions of Sind, Punjab and Gujarat?

AP: *I have no doubt that they were very well versed in the poetic and musical traditions of South Asia in the same manner as the other great Sufis of this region. Their poetry and beautiful tunes are witnesses of their deepest knowledge of our culture and language. How can one write poetry and compose so beautifully without knowing the musical and poetic languages and culture? Similarly, all of these poets such as Waris Shah, Shah Latif, Bulleh Shah, Pir Sadardin, Pir Shams, and even Guru Nanak ji, Meera bai, they were all divinely inspired people, who chose music as a tool to their messages of peace, love and humanity.*

KG: What is the importance of gnan literature in the South Asian context?

AP: *Ginans are a wonderful treasure of mystical teachings both for the community and within the wider literature of South Asia. Through ginans people have recognized their Imam and embraced Islam, so you can imagine the ginans' elevated status. We need to share the spiritual messages of the ginans so that others can benefit from them too. I am also planning to do some new work on ginans, Mowla ki marzi hogi tou (If the Imam wishes for me then) inshallah (God willing) in near future, Amen.*

KG: When was your most precious moment in performing gnan?

AP: *Of course, whenever I had been given an opportunity to perform in the presence of Hazir Imam it does not matter what other commitments I have, Kahan roz roz hame Imam-e-Zaman ke didar ka jalwa milta hai (Not everyday do we get a glimpse of Imam of the time). Apart from singing in presence of the Imam, I also enjoy performing in front of the worldwide Ismaili audiences. Whenever I have performed for thousands of Ismailis in Vancouver or in Dubai*

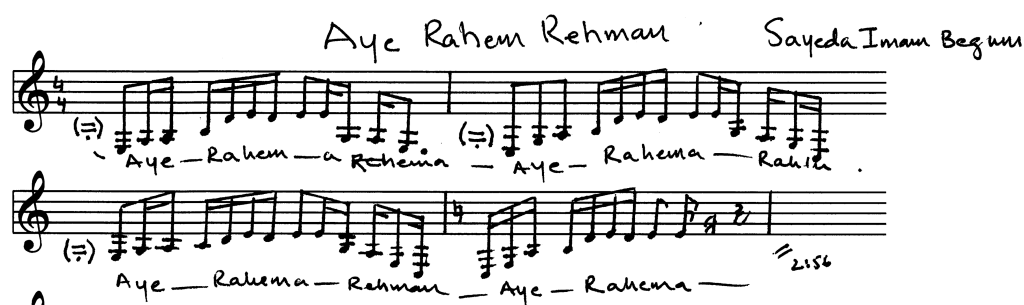
or in London, I have felt the sense of spirituality within the audience as they all know these ginans by heart and sing along with me while I am performing. This a moving experience for me. It shows how deeply ginans are rooted in the heart and soul of every South Asian Ismaili.

KG: What do Sufi music and ginans meant to you?

AP: *Music and especially the Sufi music is everything for me. It is my life. Yeh to ruh ki giza hai (music is the feast for the soul), yeh hum ko hamre rab se hamkalam karwata hai (through music one can communicate with the divine), yeh ek ruhani maza hai jo har kisi ke bas ki baat nahin, dil se nikalta hai to ruh ko chota hai, yeh who maqam hota hai, jahan banda banda naheen rehta khuda main mil jata hai (music is like spiritual enjoyment which cannot be achieved by everyone, when music comes out of heart then it touches other souls, it is an extremely elevated state of spirituality, where human beings become one with God.)*



Illustration No 23: Sufi singer Abida Parveen and Prince Karim Aga Khan, Governor Sindh House, Abida Parveen recited ginan “Aye Rahem” by Sayyeda Imam Begum (Photo Courtesy: Abida Parveen)



Transcription 21: Begum, Imam Sayyed, “Aye Rahim Rehman”, sung by Abida Parveen, Governor House Sind

Ginan: *Aaye Rahem Raheman Ab tu Rahem Karoge*

Translation: O most Gracious and Merciful; Bestow your kind mercy upon me.

Here are some comments made by the people who have heard the ginan *Aye Rehman* on Youtube:

Raziah:

I don't have any words that could describe the feelings - I am sure she will touch everybody's heart of what treasure we possess and yet we don't pay attention as much. Keep up the good work and share the joys with us daily (Nov 23, '06, edited on Nov 23, '06).

Shai4saju:

I had tears in my eyes after seeing Hazir Imam so happy especially when clapping. Please share more clips if possible (Nov 21, '06).

Imanji Salamat:

Oh my God, she is unimaginable, and not only was hazer imam listening to it but blessing every breath of hers - and she was definitely in his heart. I had tears throughout the performance, her voice, her emotions, her serenity, her

total submission to the one the ginan was recited to and for, what can I say?
(Nov 20, '06).

Nensi:

mashallah... wonderful effort... brings tears in our eyes.... especially when seeing Hazar Imam smiling right after her..first word.... shukhar alhamdullilah. Is Abida an Ismaili? Or does she belong to Gupti Ismaili group/... Only an Ismaili would have the heart to sing so deeply to Hazar Imam. And it looks like Hazar Imam is actually listening to each and every word and understanding it... He is not just looking at her presentation... but listening to her words and internalizing it... (Nov 17, '06)

Nilofardhamani:

Abida has such spiritual power which touches everyone's heart not missing even a single person really very touching voice and ginan is also so beautiful, thanks for sharing (Sep 13, '07).

Raageshwari Lomba: Ginans - Lifting the Veil

Recently during the Golden Jubilee of H.H Karim Aga Khan in 2007-08, a famous Indian host and singer Raageshwari along with her father Shri Trilok Lomba completed the new ginan album entitled “*Ginans - Lifting the Veil*” which contains eight ginans in entirely new melodies. When I interviewed Shri Trilok Lomba about this album, he mentioned that “it was a project came to them after they did one Sufi Album entitled “Sagri Rayan” which means “queen” in Sanskrit. They were approached by one of the Ismaili community members Amin Abdullah from Vancouver Canada. Amin Abdullah offered have them do a ginan album in memory of his late mother and wanted to dedicate it to Mowlana Hazir Imam on his Golden Jubilee”. When I asked Shri Trilok regarding the new ragas he said to me, “*Amin also insisted me to modify ginan, or recreate ginan tunes in a totally new ways that our youth in North American can relate to it, understand it, appreciate it, and also enjoy this*

soulful wonderful tradition of gnan”. When I asked Shri Trilok Lomba regarding his experience of composing these new tunes of ginans, he responded, *“these ginans have inspired me and my daughter Raageshwari immensely. As we are religious believers by birth, and we are Sikh and the message of Sikhism is also beyond Hindu and Muslim religions, so we really got connected with sacred poems of Ismaili ginans and we worked for this project from our heart and soul”*. He commented on one stanza of gnan *“Saheji to more man”* by Syed Mohammed Shah,

*“Eji Raam Rahemaan ek gusaanhiyaa
murakh maram na pave saahebj”*

“People worship Ram (Hindu God) or Raheman (Muslim God) the names or forms differ but in reality they are both from the same Light. The foolish do not grasp the secret of all this”. Here it is a profound message which is beyond any religion; you can call it Sufism, or Bhaktism or religion of humanity, they are all same. It has a universal appeal, and we really need this sort of message today to appreciate and understand the beauty of human nature and humanity. They teach people how to love unconditionally and be equal to all humanbeing; therefore, I got really connected with gnan message. And let me tell how much both my daughter and I have enjoyed composing and singing on this project. I have got the best possible musicians for this album and my daughter has not charged anything for her singing so here you can see that we have both, including our musicians, have put in our heart and soul and worked extremely hard for this gnan project”. Upon my request, Shri Trilok sent me the plans for launching this album and sample video.



Illustration No 24: Raageshwari Lomba, a famous Bollywood singer, (Photo Coutesy: Shri Trilok lomba)

Recently, in the online news paper India today, during the interview with Raageshwari, when the question was asked regarding her new album on ginan she responded. *“This Sufi project came to me because I did an album like Sagari Rayn. The album is filled with devotion, spiritual, Irani, Arabic and Afghani rhythms, and soulful tunes. Sufism is having belief in every religion and being secular. These songs are ginans (ancient devotional poems of the Ismaili community written by Pir Sadrudin and Pir Kabirdin)”*.

Ginan: *Saheb ji tu(n) more man bhaave, Avar more chint na aave
Duj a more man nab have, Saheb ji tun(n) more man bhave*

Translation: O Master! You are very close to my heart, nothing else cometh to my heart except you. My heart does not desire anyon else except you my Lord! You alone are my heart’s desire.

Sahebji Tun Sayyed Mohammed Shah

The musical score is written on five systems of staves. The first system includes staves for bells, violin, star, tabla, and bass line. The second system includes a female solo voice part. The third system includes a violin part. The fourth system includes a female chorus part. The fifth system includes a male solo voice part. The lyrics are written below the staves.

Lyrics:

Sa heb ji tu - mor re ma - a na bha ve. Sa heb ji tu - u mor re ma a na bha ve (violin)

A va ra mo re - chin ta na ha ve a va ra mo re - chin ta na ha ve

female chorus: A va ra mo re - chin ta - a ve du ja mo re ma - a na bha ve Sa heb ji tu -

male solo voice (que higher)

Transcription 22: Shah, Mohammad Sayyed, "Sahebji tun", sung by Raageshwari Lomba, India, 2008

Trained Western Classical Musician and an Ethnomusicologist: Ameera Nimjee

Ameera is trained in Western art music. She has been playing western classical piano since a very early age, received a bachelors of music degree from the University of Toronto, and currently is doing her MA in Ethnomusicology at the University of Toronto. There were many reasons to interview her as part of this particular chapter. First and foremost is that she is an Ismaili Muslim, born and brought up in Canada, and also a trained musician and an ethnomusicologist. She has also done a field research on ginans in the Toronto area and written a term paper. She offers a unique perspective on ginans as she comes from a strong musical background, and also ginans play an important role in her religious life.

KG: As a Western trained musician, an ethnomusicologist, and also being an Ismaili Muslim, what do you think, are we able to place ginans under the broader category of devotional music?

AN: *I very much think that the ginans are music for sure. And that's because I have a very broad understanding and the kind of very inclusive understanding of what music is. I believe as an ethnomusicologist that music is a social construct. If a 65 year old informant of mine very strongly believes that ginans are not music, that is fine, they can believe that, but I think, that music is itself an ecstatic category as well as a social and cultural category.*

KG: What is your response to listening to gitan accompanied by musical instruments or singing gitan in harmony? Does musical instruments or harmony takes away the sanctity and aesthetics of gitan?

AN: *To answer your question, ginans are music, and I don't think musical*

instruments and singing ginan in harmony takes away from the rag and its musical characteristic. Because when you sing ginan in harmony or play musical instrument to accompany the rag, this is done so in a same scale as what the rag prescribes. Because of the fact that you can have different harmonies accompanying the conjunct melodies, so as musicians, I don't think that musical instruments take away from the rendering of rag. Now I do think the rags are different than the scales, and it is so interesting in the Hindustani aesthetic what I have understood, and I understand more and more about rags, that they are not just a scale and they are just associated with the certain times of day. But there are also other characteristics, which make ragas unique, for example, a certain rendition and focus on certain notes such as in rag Kalayan, flat N that characteristically defines the rags. So adding musical instruments to rags or sometime adding extra harmony may take away the focus on the rag. As we know that in Hindustani music, melody is focus. If musical instruments are incorporated, it has to be done with the same cultural focus as the originating cultural focus of where that ginan comes from and the North Indian aesthetics. So I don't think musical instruments and vocal accompaniment, or singing in harmony takes away from the rendition of ginan. But I do think that the ragas are important, and in order to best render the rag as characteristics of the rag which are supposed to do that has to approach musical accompaniment in keeping in tune with the cultural approach to the Hindustani music because that's where ginans are geographically and culturally located.

I also think that because ginans were geographically, socially and culturally composed and written in diverse languages along with other devotional literatures, I think it is unrealistic to think that at certain times they were not accompanied by musical instruments. For examples, bhajans and other Hindi devotional genres which ginans so close resemblance out of the entire genre in the world are accompanied by musical instruments. What makes ginan unaccompanied? What is it about ginan that cannot allow for the

incorporation of physical instruments and not just a voice? What is so blasphemous about ginan anyways?

KG: As we know that the raga also varies from person to person, place to place such as you may find some ginan sung by the East African Ismaili community very different from the Indian or Pakistani community, so how could one find the right raga if they do vary due to their geographical and cultural differences?

AN: *Recently in Toronto, I interviewed a lady who is 60 years old, who was very particular on the fact that Sultan Mohammed Shah has said that if you want to learn the true ginan then you go to Junagadh, I don't know exactly whenever it is guidance or something else this is where the true ragas were originated and where our Pirs went. There is a little bit of discontinuity between that idea and other ideas that I have been reading from Ismaili scholars, such as recently I read an IIS book title "Ismailis in History" by Zulfiqar Hirji and Farhad Daftary, in which these scholars state that Pirs initially came from areas of Persia and went to India, visited Gujarat, Sind, Rajasthan, Punjab, and they went to different places so how can we geographically locate the true ginan to one place? And today you are right, I think there is a big diversity in ragas, may be someone from Pakistan would sing ginan "Malakha Jina" differently from someone who would sing ginan "Malakha Jina" from East Africa, so I very much don't prescribe to the notion that the ginans and ragas have remained unchanged until today, so it is a little bit unrealistic. Because the ginans have been around for seven hundred years, so there is no possible way that they have not changed from then to now. So I think variations in rag are going to be inevitable and I don't think we have ways to know what the true rag is or ginan is. Rather what is important is that the discourse of authenticity comes up with the people who think that the rag is so important so then people claim an authenticity, what is pure and what is impure. And in my own research, what I have found in interviews is that there is a discourse of purity, which comes in the discussion of ginan, that ginans*

have to be pure, the tradition, has to remain pure. I think that it is so important that we hear a lot about again our interpretation about the faith and kind of how we practice. Discourse of faith and authenticity is so important and I am sure you have encountered discourses of authenticity in many other types of music you studied. For example, white people practicing Jazz music which was born out of black tradition in America. So I think that there are no ways to understand which rag is true but rather I think it is important to focus, in my opinion, on the fact that rag is so important, and that it is not about singing ginan using the right notes of rag or certain nuances, which makes certain rags different from others.

KG: So as a musician do you think that the new compositions of professional and trained singers enrich the entire process of musical experience?

AN: Absolutely, I think the ginans are such a unique devotional genre because I don't think of one or other as text and music that makes the ginan what it is. It is a unique fusion and marriage of the two that help render meaning and allegorical meaning which changes from individual to individual and helps enrich the whole process.

KG: What inspires you first, ginan melodies or its poetry? And as a western classical trained musician if you had to judge ginans from its music where would you place ginan?

NN: I think they are a beautiful piece of music and I have to judge them aesthetically, excluding from their divine content, I think they remain beautiful pieces of music that compare with lot of music we hear today that is a part of classical tradition in Hindustani aesthetics. I think it comes down to what it means, what constitutes claiming of ownership, if the performer is able to get the ownership of composition, is it the composer or the text, or is it the composer of music not the text, for example in the Western tradition composers

of Opera are attributed as composers. People like Mozart, he is attributed to composing the “The Marriage of Figaro” “he is not the one who has written the text, he is the one who composed the music, accompanied the text, but he is still undisputedly the composer of “The Marriage of Figaro”. In the same way, we don’t know either that Pirs have composed the music of ginan or not, so we can claim ownership to them. And I think that is definitely an interesting question that I guess would be textually negotiated among the members of our Jamat, and in the western context, those who compose the music are those who claim the ownership to its composition.

KG: To carry on inspiring our youth in the west, what areas, as an ethnomusicologist need to be explored?

AN: There is need for an exposure and compatible interaction and openness of these ginans and traditions, and the musical traditions that are all around us, which include orchestration, which include arrangements for Choir, which are already being done. I have heard Ismaili Choir singing ginan and they are beautiful, and in order to do that we must shed some of these very dark conceptions and perception we have about the tradition as being one as pure tradition that should never be changed, or never evolve. As I said it is a little bit unrealistic to think that it has not evolved for over seven hundred years. And methodologies that are around introducing an interaction between the music because there is routine and diversity of music and aesthetic, which are around our own wonderful traditions and us. It is so important to look at our own tradition, we come to know that how these traditions came to be and how historically we have traveled from earlier stages in our community and till now.

Globalization and Glocalization

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan was the first person to introduced the term “global village” which emphasized the idea of how through the advancement of electric technology, our globe has been contracted into a village³⁴⁵ whereby there is instantaneous movement of information from every quarter to every point at the same time.³⁴⁶ McLuhan’s ideas inspired Ronald Robertson who defines this as “the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole”.³⁴⁷ Ronald also popularized the term “Glocalization” which describes the tempering effects of local conditions on global pressures. Glocalization is a combination of globalization and localization in which success in a globalized environment is more likely possible if products are not globalized or mass-marketed, but glocalized and customized for individual local communities that have different needs and different cultural approaches.

Now the ideas were shifting from old village to the intensified new world where information combines global into local. Anthony Giddens classic definition describes “intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”³⁴⁸ In this section I will examine a few individuals who have taken the “glocalization” approach towards ginan and through modern media share their version via ten thousand downloads within a couple of months.

The Musical fusion of Hip-Hop, Rap, and Ginan: Zaheed Dhamani and the Chai Wallahs

Since the beginning of 2010, I have received numerous emails from very close friends of mine with an attachment of the Hip-Hop ginan, sung and composed by three young talented musicians from Calgary, Zaheed Dhamani (vocals and

³⁴⁵ McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media*, 2003, p. 6.

³⁴⁶ McLuhan, Marshall, *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, 1987 p. 254.

³⁴⁷ Robertson, Roland, *Globalization: Social theory and global culture*, 1992, p8.

³⁴⁸ Giddens, Anthony, *The consequences of modernity*, 1990, p.65.

lyricist) Alykhan Khimji (producer and music arranger) and Bijan Mawani (Rapper and lyricist). The group in Calgary *Jamatkhana* first performed this particular piece as a part of the Arts and Culture month, and it was officially recorded and shared with the Ismaili community on 13th December 2009 through Facebook. This devotional song became extremely popular within a few months and according to ZShare Download Company, until last month this musical piece hit over ten thousand downloads. What was unique about this piece was that it has more or less every type of music, which Ismaili Youths listens to nowadays it, shares some affinity with other groups because it has Hip-Hop groove, Tabla, Rap, techno, and the one verse of ginan which repeats throughout the composition. When I heard this composition, I had mixed responses and I was keen to interview the key singer, Zaheed Dhamani, who sang ginan portion.

KG: When and where did you start learning and performing Ginan?

ZD: Prior to joining the Canadian Ismaili Youth Choir, my experience of reciting ginan was at the Jamati level. My exposure to music comes from Jamatkhana. I have been reciting ginans for many years in Jamatkhana. I have learnt a whole range of ginans, some from BUI (Religious education), and then over the years when I used to get varas (opportunities) for certain majalis (religious gatherings), you get to learn some new ginans, and sometimes more complicated ginans. Apart from that my father also knows many ginans, so I have been learning ginan from my parents as well. And as you attend Jamatkhana, you hear more ginans and I began to learn more ginans. As you know that certain ginans are more popular than others, and there are ginan classes that happen in Calgary as well so I have taken ginan training as well.

KG: How did you come up with the idea of sharing your Hip-Hop version of ginan on Facebook?

ZD: *We wanted to get our name and music out. We came together with our very first piece “Sahebji tu” as a group, but Alykhan Khimji, who is a music producer; he and I have been working together since November and our first song, which we did together, was “We are one Jamat”. We wanted to do something for the Arts and Culture month, this was happening in November 2009, and I always had this idea in my mind to contemporize the ginan “Sahebji tun”. Because when I was in the National Ismaili Muslim Youth Choir, one of our singers actually came up the alternative tune of ginan “Sahebji tun”, and what he did was he interpreted in R & B (rhythm and blues) musical style, it was beautiful, but I would say 85% of it resembles the original tune, but it was more contemporary and so I fell in love with this piece, it was very beautiful. My idea was always to write a song and have him sing the chorus and I should sing the ginan. As this idea was always in my mind and this opportunity from the Ismaili Arts and Culture committee came, so I wanted to do something new and fresh, then I approached the member of Arts and Culture and they said yes, so we wanted to put something together to see, what we can do. At the same time, I had heard this rapper, and also wanted to work with the Ismaili rapper, Bijan Mawani, he has been rapping for a couple of years and has his own group. Actually he is a friend of my brother and I remember my brother initially sent me some of his music and they were really good. So I got in touch with Bijan, and I said to him that we are hoping to do something for Arts and Culture month and the idea is to give the jamat and our youth something fresh, something they have not heard before. But something that is contemporary and something that contains the spiritual message or some connection with the Jamat to make, so something with Ismailism or Islam in general.*

KG: From where did you get the inspiration to incorporate various forms of music especially contemporary Western musical styles with ginan?

ZD: *I think rap has never been incorporated in any form of Ismaili expression in Canada. Because during the Golden Jubilee I came across music from UK and there were a couple of tracks that employed the rap, R n B, and Hip Pop music and when I heard that and when I heard some of the geets from Fez Meghani in English in my mind was that kind of my desire to do something similar, so I said yes we can do it. Because my aim and ambitions came from November 2008, I listened to the Golden Jubilee releases, your CD Jhoom Jhoom was wonderful, when I heard a similar kind of music that was coming out across the country, I thought we should be able to do something too, and at the time nothing had been released from Calgary. So in my mind I really wanted to do a song, when these guys can do it we can do it too. We started writing lyrics and lines some way better than others, we are one Jamat (community) in which we have many languages and if you listen to it, it was inspired by Hazir Imam's speeches and Golden Jubilee logo in which there is a Quranic ayat in Surah 4, Ayat 1 says:*

*O mankind !
Be careful of your duty to your Lord
Who created you from a single soul
and from it created its mate
and from them twain hath spread abroad
a multitude of men and women”*

So this whole notion of being one heart, one soul, one jamat that is where the inspiration came from, this I think was an extension of that. I really wanted to create something special as an Ismaili and I really wanted to do something in which our youth can relate. So I talked to Bijan, he was on board, I contacted Aly Khan, he was on board as well, and then it was just a matter of meeting together in person and doing something together. I found some music online, some instrumental that I would play around with, the chorus of the ginan “Sahebji” works for a lot of them, so we came together and said look let's

make something original but again to make it something related to the Jamat, that should have elements of Indian music. You should have elements of contemporary music which North American youth listen to, so given the background of members involved, Aly Khan has a very strong background in Hip-Pop music, and Bijan has a very strong background in Rap music, and I have a mixed background in Choral music, Indian music, ginans, a range of different things, so what you hear now Sahebji tu is a combination of our strength, our styles, our tones, our own preferences of music as well. We wanted to come up with something that we would also like to listen to and our goal was to put or create something, which has the credibility so it can make it to youth's iPod, CDs and stereos. Of course this was not the intention of the crafting the song, the purpose was to put together something for the jamati performance. And it was after the track we came up the Chai Walahs group name, and shared our music with others.

KG: How was the overall feedback received in Jamatkhana?

ZD: I think it was November 17, or 28,th we performed at the North West Jamat Khana and I believe it was Friday or Saturday, it was followed by the Golden Jubilee tribute movie therefore, many of Jamati members were gone. So we decided to stay back because it was the Arts and Culture month. There were two units traveling from Jamatkhana to Jamatkhana. One unit was with the Calgary Ismaili Muslim Youth Choir and the second unit was the performers in that there was one dance group, Central Asian music group, and another Hip-pop music group as well, so we all were touring the Jamatkhanas. Our first stop was North West Jamatkhana, so one thing I realized was that we showed up in Jamatkhana for about 5:00 pm for sound check, at that time a lot of seniors were there, so when we were doing the sound check, I was singing the ginan as a part of chorus. When we finished our sound check a lot of seniors said, you sang very nicely, so that was initial feedback we received. Of course the Arts and Culture members liked it as well. And on that evening we actually

performed it. No one knew what was coming, because of the introduction, and when we got to the ginan portion people were looking at us and thinking, oh my goodness what is this. There was tapping back and forth. I think they liked it because they can tap their feet to it, and of course they were clapping their hands. When Bijan's part came on, and every body at the end applauded when they heard it. First of all a lot of them have never seen an Ismaili rapper, and of course no one had ever heard the rap preceded by the ginan, and then we came back to the ginan again, that people applauded and they were wondering what is going on, and then the Urdu verse comes in which is a little bit more natural. I mean natural in a way that everyone is familiar with Urdu and Hindi in our jamat, and then Bijaan and I go back and forth, he said something and I sing it, and then we go back to our Chorus again so that song had a wonderful applause and by the end the Jamat was singing the ginan. I think the best thing we did was that we stuck to the traditional raga of the ginan, we did not change it too much. As a result, many jamati members were able to sing along with us.

So many people came up to us and said that you were amazing; we never knew that we could do that. As you know that rap is not universally enjoyed or appreciated. So when you hear the rap and mention Hazir Imam and Sirat-ul-mustaqim (quranic term meaning a true path, often used by Ismaili Pirs such as Sathpanth, means true path) and tasbih (chanting) people say that my God these are the things in which we are so familiar, it was so interesting to hear them. So now all of a sudden it is emotional, it is not crap or it is not rude, it is respectful, it is artistic and it is communicated in a way that is familiar, comfortable and innovative.

KG: You must have heard many different kinds of comments, some may be motivating and others may be critical about your work; what sort of critical comments have you heard so far?

ZD: Some responses were that why are you playing with the traditions and Aly Khan responded that his knowledge of gnan was used as a tool for communication with locals, to teach them about Ismailism, about our faith, ethics and many other things. As we know that gnan has been a medium for communication and education for centuries what he kind of expressed that our songs maintained that spirit the only difference is that we have interpreted it in our own ways.

The next thing that people will ask that is it allowed to recite in Jamat Khana or take the gnan's one verse and combine it with other sort of music. Or are we allowed to combine them with rap? Generally speaking, rap is perceived as a very disrespectful art form in the mainstream media. Usually the backdrop scenes, which are associated with rap songs, are not necessarily artistic. Generally there is a perception that rap is all about sex and drugs and violence. A few people approached us in Jamat Khana and said that Pirs have wrote these gnan with a certain intent in mind, I don't remember the conversation in its entirety. What it was like that we cannot change the format of gnan, only Imam is allowed to make any changes. Gnan was created in certain settings and in a very different cultural context and we are not allowed to change it or modify it according to our needs.

A very respectful person, and whom I looked up to said, he didn't necessarily address the song at all, but he had a couple of comments about what gnan is and how Pirs wrote this wonderful tradition, and Pirs had a certain intent in their mind when they were composing gnan. There is an integrity that the gnan maintains so I think the argument is that it was done for a certain purpose. And the lyrics which we sang in our song may or may not directly relate to the gnan, as Bijaan rapped his poetry, it is very much complementary what the gnan stands for and the messages it is trying to impart, and I would say the same thing with Urdu verses very much trying to maintain the spirit of the gnan, or we are not sure what the spirit of the gnan was except what

ginan tells us exclusively. So I think a little bit artistic license comes in but again the argument is, well, are we allowed to take the license from the devotional literature such as ginans.

KG: What kind of response are you receiving from Ismaili youth?

ZD: We often hear from our youths that we did know that it was actually ginan, when you have put it in a song form it has become catchy, so now I find myself singing this ginan when I am walking to school or driving my car, so now I recognize our ginan even more especially when I hear this ginan in Jamatkhana. So I found it really interesting. Many people are saying to us that thank you; you are exposing us to our tradition, otherwise we had no idea about this before hand. And now it is catchy, it has hip-hop grooves, it is musical, and so in that sense it is allowed. And I used to understand, and as we have explained that we do not compose this ginan, Syed Imam Shah composed it. What we are trying to do is to interpret that meaning into our own understanding. Therefore, many youths have appreciated because now they have heard ginan in a more contemporary way than what the ginan refers to. But I think it is risky what we are trying to do because whatever you do has two sides, those who appreciate and validate and those who perhaps have some apprehension so I appreciate that. And I know not everyone is going to appreciate it or like it. And also for those who like it may have their own reasons of liking it. May be there are reasons, may be very superficial ones, such as you have good groove, good beat and rhythm or it may have nothing to do that it is a ginan or spiritual aspect of it. Similarly, for those people who don't like it may have various reasons such as they don't like the incorporation of ginan or interpretation of ginan so that is something that comes through from the comments as well. For us it was a way to connect with the Ismaili youth, and I think we succeed in it.

Now I will move on to the Facebook Discussion on the hip-hop version of “Sahebji” ginan:

Suhala Dhanani: *this is really good, but i think it is very disrespectful since it is twisting our traditions, not to be the devil's advocate because other than mixing the Holy Ginan...it was very meaningful...keep it up but try to not abuse our traditions...*

December 14, 2009 at 5:09pm

Shehrose Noormohammed: *agreed. Its a way of expression.. as is this.. its just "disrespectful" bc you wouldnt say this is khanne.. bc well.. its not allowed, for reasons we do not know.. ginans used to be played with music before too.. same concept for the Kurban songs with quranic iyaats.. you guys keep doin your thing! :-D*

December 14, 2009 at 6:32pm

Suhala Dhanani: *I understand that, and like i said, it was good (and creative)..i just don't think it was appropriate and (i don't even think it's allowed, may want to check with Tariqah board plus) plus other people may find it offensive because Ginans are mediums that allow one to reach a higher, intellectual and spiritual level, not JUST a prayer form...which this song takes away from..* December 14, 2009 at 6:44pm

Aliya Dossa: *it's definitely allowed :) my bait ul ilm teacher, who was trained in london through the 2 year STEP program practicum, plays songs with ginans integrated within them (similar to this) for us all the time! and Chai Wallahs, i love this! great work! :)*

December 14, 2009 at 6:57pm

Suhala Dhanani: *part of the reason it isn't allowed is because it takes away from the esoteric meaning and makes it common, the way the Pirs have written the Ginans are meant to be that way (they are musical lyrics which is why*

"normal" music added has been denounced) I was just sharing my (and other peoples) thoughts through constructive criticism, if the group thinks it's appropriate and want to carry on, they can...

December 14, 2009 at 7:01pm

Ali Vira: *If it takes something like this to get the newer generations interested in our faith and our history I feel it is worth it. Great idea, I look forward to hearing it soon.*

December 14, 2009 at 7:40pm

Fez Meghani: *I don't think that this rendition, in any way (at least for me and my family) takes away from the intellectual or spiritual feeling one can attain through reciting or listening to Ginans. If anything, it actually enhanced it. I believe that it is all a matter of perception and all those who take offense are just, perhaps, missing the point. We live in the 21st century, and if our youth are carrying on this wonderful tradition of ours by mixing it with what the majority can relate to, then we should commend them, salute them and encourage them by asking for more. If we hadn't, Ismaili music would still be done on just Tablas and harmoniums. We need to open our minds to newer horizons and let new forms of devotional expressions touch our hearts & souls...*

December 14, 2009 at 7:42pm

Shaista Hasham: *Some very interesting points are brought up here. I definitely agree that ginans are not just forms of prayer, but allow one to reach higher intellectual and spiritual realms. I don't think the song takes away from ginans though, but rather adds to them, because merging ginans with other forms of expression can allow individuals to reach higher elevations, in mediums that are a little more familiar to them – especially for most of the youth (and myself!). I don't think it takes away from the esoteric meaning or makes it common. More than anything else, I feel it adds to the esoteric*

meaning. If adding normal music has been denounced, the meanings remain exoteric. One can only dig deeper into the realms of spirituality and intellectualism through mediums that transcend into the esoteric, and music being one of many.

I'm sure the Chai Wallahs have got a lot of different types of chai brewing in their kettles though! I've seen them perform and they've got some really cool stuff. Recently at the I-STAR awards, they performed a hot track, which didn't involve any ginan.

To The Chai Wallahs: I recognize that making a track that combines traditional with modern involves risk and I raise my mug to you guys! I love my chai hot and fresh, and different each time, so keep it coming! :) Can't wait!! :)

December 14, 2009 at 8:15pm

Al Mawji: *Personally, I'd say that if someone took a ginan, in its entirety, and changed the raag or added their own words here and there, I'd find it offensive. However, in this case, I don't see these boyz tryin' to pass it off as a ginan, but rather, taking a verse and incorporating it into their devotional tribute.*

As long as it is distinctly different, and it cannot be mistaken as an effort to skewer the original rendering, I can enjoy it for what it is.... a tribute from three young hearts in our jamaat.

To my understanding (and I'm just a layman here..), the musical accompaniment was frowned upon coz people started deviating from the original raag and taal to make ginans fit more 'filmi' tunes, and some even added their own "improvements" to the lyrics (like substituting 'Karim Shah' instead of "Ya Shah" for example). That, I highly disagree with, and understand the reluctance of the governing bodies to have music accompany ginans. However, if you listen to say garbis of Pir Shams, your mind will process a beat in the background. I'm pretty sure (although again, I'm a layman), that in previous times, or maybe even when they were conceived, it

was to musical accompaniment.

December 19, 2009 at 8:06am

Throughout my field research, I have collected many recordings, field research audios of ginans compositions, and one thing I have always found is that the text or poetry has always remained the same. It does not matter who is singing, they are always the same, and people have never attempted to change the poetry, or take one stanza from one ginan and compose a song. Because, ginans for many Ismailis are not just a form of devotional literature, but it is beyond the category of devotion, and for many believers it has a significance of a sacred literature. That is why you may have heard that some Ismailis associate the word ginan with sharif, or “Ginan-e-Sharif” along with “Quran-e-Sharif” (most respect and sacred), or Irfani Adab (Spiritual literature). It does not mean that Quran and ginan have the similar status; it is all about the devotion that has been always given to the ginan by the Khoja Ismailis.

My opinion is that in his composition, Zaheed has taken one verse of a ginan rather than the entire ginan, and added to it other styles of music and poetry such as Urdu verses on a hip-hop style and English verses of Rap music. This seems to have appealed to the younger generation who has less connection with the cultural roots of the Indian Subcontinent. However, this fusion may have changed the meaning and context of the ginan, therefore it may or may not be accepted to the older generation for a ginan. They may look at it as a recreation or re-shaping of an authentic ginan into a completely different musical piece, which does not fully convey the poetry and deeper meaning embedded in the ginan. Although, these pieces are some how related to Ismaili devotion, they change the context and become hip-hop songs and the ginans only remains just one portion. In my opinion, ginan’s poetry has been preserved since early eighteenth century and has some how been given sacred status by the *jamat*; therefore, one needs to be sensitive and careful about respecting these needs in order to gain acceptance.

**Ginan accompanied with acoustic Guitars and featuring on Youtube:
Sheryar Nizar**

One day I was listening to the Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's song on Youtube. Suddenly I searched under the category of ginan, and heard a beautiful rendition of *Sahebjī tuun*. I was extremely impressed by the devotion, feelings and simplicity of his performance. It is the same ginan that Zaheed Dhamani, Zulfiqar Mulji and many others have used it as a part of their performances' and CD, the reason is that it is one of the most famous *venti* (supplication) ginans. After that I contacted Sheryar, who presently lives in Karachi and interviewed him in March 2010.

Sheryar was born on April 13th 1984, and music has been an essential part of his life. Since the age of fourteen, he has been playing guitar and enjoys singing ginans and composing music. Even before he began playing guitar, ginan was always his favorite subject. He gives the credit for his learning of ginans to his religious center teacher Miss Nusrat, who always appreciated his renditions of ginan, praised his voice, and often asked him to help others by teaching them ginan.

During his early 20's, he became a teacher at the Ismaili religious centre and taught ginan to grade 5th students. He said "I really enjoy teaching ginan and discussing the importance of ginan with students and discussing how this tradition is contributing like a spiritual force which always guides us and also reminds us to stay on the right path (*Sirat-ul-mustaqim*).

KG: When and how were you initiated into the ginan with musical instrument?

SN: *I remember, when the first time, I sang and recorded the ginan with acoustic guitar in December 2008, I was wearing home clothes, and posted my video on Youtube. I never realized that my rendition of ginan would help*

Ismaili youth to listen and appreciate more Ginan and feel the love of their religion through it. Whatever happened wasn't intentional and God is the greatest and He is everywhere. Later on, I found out from my friends from UK that the teachers from the Secondary Teaching Education Program, also known as STEP in IIS London, are also using my rendition of ginan as a part of their material, and after hearing that I thank to my God from the deep bottom of my heart.

I believe that words of love and affection, and words of wisdom from the heart can be better said through music, which is a gift of God, and one should use it wisely without harming the soul of Ginan. And as we know that it is human nature that when one gets so happy or one gets to know the truth, he starts singing and showing his happiness. I believe when our Pir realized the reality within them they couldn't stop themselves singing Ginans and loving mankind and expressing the truth through music.

KG: How did you choose the medium “Youtube” to share your work?

SN: I shared the ginan on Youtube without realizing that it will be liked and watched and at the same time create some problems as it was shared publicly on Youtube, which is the most popular site. However, this method of communication was not acceptable to some influential members of the community. After many discussions and arguments, I finally decided to respect their wishes, and consequently, these ginans have been removed from all the sources and cannot be searched from any search engine I believe.

KG: What types of music do you listen to?

SN: I listen to all kinds of music, which touches my soul, and makes me say amazing things about God who is the greatest and He is everywhere. Although I play mostly Blues genre, as I feel comfortable with the musical styles of Blues.

KG: How far can one go when arranging the Ginan's music, is there any limits?

SN: *Human Intelligence has no limits and Human intelligence is a vital part of Islam at the same time one has to be careful that when rendering ginan into music they should not harm the soul of Ginan, sanctity should remain.*

KG: How can we motivate our Ismaili youth today to participate in learning ginan?

SN: *I realized the fact that there are less youth involved in teaching and learning ginan. However, I believe that they should understand the importance of society and people with better ethical and moral values, which can be learned through the teaching of our soulful ginans.*

We can also incorporate musical instruments with ginan which can provide some interest to learn ginan however it can also be dangerous, especially when we would like to build bridges with other Muslim communities, as other Muslims might not appreciate music as a part of religious function. At the same time introducing music in ginan can enrich the whole sound and experience of ginan and some how I believe that initially ginans were made on music. Also, we can create more awareness of ginans by arranging workshops, seminars through which we can explain our youth the essence, the interpretation and importance of this wonderful tradition. Moreover, we can also show our youth how music can help to learn and appreciate ginans.

KG: Where did you get an inspiration to put together the ginan's album entitled "Wisdom and Belief" accompanying with acoustic guitars?

SN: *Acoustic guitar is what I can play better than any other musical instrument. As there are seven Surs (notes) in music and that can be played on any instruments, so every instrument is capable to express the same love and soul without losing the actual soul of gnan. Gnan with music can be appreciated and feel more if you have love towards your religion rather than just for the sake of enjoying the music only.*

Solo with guitar accompaniment
Transcribed is voice, with roman numerical analysis
if chords

Sahebji Tun Sayyed Mohammad Shah

Sa he - ba - ji - tu - n - more - man
(I) na ve - (vii) - (vi) Aa mor ee (iii) chin ta - na -
na - ve - (vii) // 11:04

Transcription 23: Shah, Mohammad Sayyed, “Sahebji tun”, sung by Sheryar Nizar, Karachi, 2008

Ginan: *Saheb ji tu(n) more man bhaave, Avar more chint na aave
Duja more man nab have, Saheb ji tun(n) more man bhave*

Translation: O Master! You are very close to my heart, nothing else cometh to my heart except you. My heart does not desire anyone else except you my Lord! You alone are my heart’s desire.

Following are a few comments from Youtube for Sheryar’s gnan rendition:

Ashif Lakhani: *Awesome brother, I cannot find words to your exuberant work. I hope u keep adding more ginans, this is the best way to help more and more youngsters to get in amazing spiritual world. Please keep on doing the great work, May Mawla bless you and your talent, amen.*

Apna 7865: *When I heard this ginan on Youtube just one word came out of my mouth..... AMAZING! Shrayarnizar, I wish that u may come out with some more similar kind of videos and attract the new generation like us today to be on siratal mustakim...*

Rahim: *WOW .. woww, like I don't know how to express my emotions to your ability to inspire me. Wow please, please, please, I beg you to upload more videos! Once again...so amazing touches my heart truly...keep up the EXCELLENT work*

Aly Sunderji: *Sheryar May the Mowla-e-Kainat (spiritual leader of the whole universe) listens to this endeavor of yours. It is mesmerizing!*

Through my interview with Sheryar, I have encountered two conflicting views on how ginans are used and transmitted. Sheryar used the ginan “Sahebji tu” without changing the existing tune, and added the rhythm guitar through a solo web cam performance, and transmitted it through Youtube. His intention was to use music and available technology to share his love and affection for the Imam through the ginan with a wider community at no additional cost. My interviews with Sheryar indicates that his experience as a BUI ginan teacher motivated him to find new ways of inspiring and connecting with the younger generation to take interest in ginans and experience this wealth of knowledge for themselves. On the other hand, there is a group that believes with conviction that the ginans are sacred and should not be shared in a public forum that allows postings of any kind and sharing of opinion on the subject matter in public.

In a general perspective, there is no right or wrong answer. Each viewpoint is based on an individual's background, beliefs, perceptions, and fears. However, in today's technological and knowledge based society, where individuals are encouraged to share knowledge, it would be very difficult to control the

sharing and transmission of ginans, in whatever form they are, with the wider community.

Cultural Hybridity:

Another important term, which is often used in academia to describe diaspora and immigrant experiences, is “Cultural hybridity”. It refers to two diverse concepts: First, it is certainly informed by Nestor Garcia Canclini’s analyses of the postmodern conditions in Latin America in which so-called “traditional” and “modern” elements of culture and society coexist simultaneously in specific cultural productions, rituals, and spheres. This definition of hybridity looks at (1) the mutual transculturation of the traditional by the forces of modernity and new technologies and (2) the infusion of traditional arts and cultures into the spaces of modernity.³⁴⁹

Introducing the new tunes of Ismaili Ginans: Shamsu Jamal

Shamsuddin Jamal is one of the most accomplished Hindustani classical musicians among the Ismaili community in North America. Shamsuddin has been singing bhajans, ghazals, ginans and other forms of music for over fifty years. His views parallel that of a professional musician as follows:

“Sometimes we hear ginan which is finished within four to five notes, where as structure should be using whole octave and beyond, to complete banta hai gana (then songs gets complete) then I went and change it to rag Shivrani and it is really nice..... the ginan Tado tado mitharoon”

³⁴⁹ Nestor Garcia Canclini, “Musical Migrations: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridity in Latin/o America”, 2003



Illustration No 25: Shamsuddin Jamal, Vancouver, 2008

KG: When and how did you start composing new tunes of the ginan?

SJ: *Dar-es-Salam was a place for music, where small groups used to get together and perform on every Wednesday and Saturday non-stop. During that time, my music group wanted to do something new, eventually ghazal party and music party started, during the same time we started the ghazal parties in which Aziz Tejpar was the pioneer of changing and composing new ginan ragas and he looked up to us as upcoming young artists. He would always call us; we would sit at his house every Wednesday, to do new ginans ragas and composition, and new research. At that time two or three visiting Hindu musicians, who came from India to perform in East Africa, were also sometimes helping us. I did not get to learn anything from them they will not teach you anything, not only that, there were an embarrassing situation where one day we were sitting including Aziz Tejpar, Shamsu Tejpar, Mehdi Bawa, one Hindu musician told Aziz that why don't you give this ginan to Shamsu, he basically wanted to check my ability to compose new tunes, and by the grace of Mowla, I was able to fix the ginan right away in Raag Malkouns.*

KG: How many ginans have you re-composed and where can we find those recordings?

SJ: *We have composed over hundred ginans. It was for only ginan-mehfil not for Jamat Khana recitation. I remember one day Aziz Tejpar read a letter to us, sent by the Imam Sultan Mohammed Shah in which he was giving him special blessings and appreciating his work towards ginan and suggesting him to continue his efforts. It is hard to find those recordings however, Aziz Tejpar may have some 70 mm records*

KG: When and where did you start singing *bhajans*?

SJ: *I had another friend in Dar-e-Salam, his name was Shamsu Lalji Ramji, and we used to call him Lallu. He was fond of bhajans and I used to help him, adding some spices here and there, as I did for the ginans. An organization called "Hindu Pareshat" in Dar-e-Salam started a Bhajan Samelan (Hindu devotional songs called bhajan gatherings and public performances) every month, in which they started a bhajan competition, in which there would be a group prize and an individual prize. And I and my friend Shamsu, we always participated, and people were so fond of us that whenever our names were called, and we were going up on the stage, everybody started clapping so we get 50 marks right there, before we start. Four years in a row we got first prize. Every time Ismailis were getting the prizes therefore, they had to shut down the competition, because their purpose was to provide incentive to Hindu people; however the Ismailis were the ones who were winning therefore, they shut down the competition.*

One needs to see the above case very carefully, as *bhajans* have been as appreciated by the East African *Jamat* as other forms of Muslim devotional literature such as qawwali by the Pakistani community members. However, you may not find a similar situation within the Pakistani *Jamat*. I still remember interviewing my *wadi maa*, (my father's older brother's wife) who

was born in Gujarat. She remembered her early days when even Hindus used to compose Ismaili geets (songs) and were allowed to participate in Ismaili social gatherings. One may find a similar case with East Africa where many from the Hindu and Ismaili community lived side by side and shared their devotion and cultural spaces with each other. Dr. Balwant Jani shares similar views from India and asserts this claim that even today we would find many Hindu communities who very much share religious and culture affinities with Ismailis. *Garba* and *rasara* are one of the significant examples, which are equally cherished and enjoyed by both Ismailis and Hindus in their social and religious gatherings. And even today *garba* plays a significant role in the Ismaili celebrations both in the Indian Subcontinent and in North America.

KG: What similarities and differences have you found in the recitations of ginans and *bhajans*?

SJ: *I have a strong feeling that the compositions of ginan were not entirely done by the Ismailis. I think the Hindus have some part to play in it. I sense the higher help because it is very much identical with Hindu bhajans such as “auth jag musafir...jo sowat hai wo khowat hai, jo jagat hai, who pawat hai.. (Oh traveler don’t sleep, don’t you know that those who sleep never attain anything and for those who keep awake find everything), so hear you see the message is very much alike, and you may find many ginans related to these themes and the style of music is alike as well.*

KG: So, how do you think these ginans were composed in the first place?

SJ: *Ginans, first of all are based on music, based on ragas, if not totally then surely some components of ragas are there. I see that some help has been taken from people who knew ragas for sure. Let me give you an example, if you want to do some renovation in your house, or you want to fix your account book you go to an accountant, you don’t want to become a chartered accountant. What I think is that Pirs must have approached people who knew ragas. Our common*

knowledge within the community is that our Pirs knew everything. You don't need to, if you want to write poetry you need a poet, guidance must have been given by the Pir. I have no doubt about that, but this is my understanding that it is an integrated work, who could have been Arabs or Persian, for them learning a language, learning a music, it does not drive with me, they might have taken the help of musicians to compose the ginans. One thing is sure that it is not done single handedly.

Perhaps if we take the above statement and apply it to other South Asian devotional literature, we may find similarities with other religious communities such as the Sikhs. It is commonly accepted by the Sikhs historians that Guru Nanak, who was the founder of Sikh community, were mostly accompanied by Mardana (a Muslim rubab player) who played a vital role in the compositions of Guru Nanak's poetry.

KG: Do you think Ismaili ginans are based on Indian classical music or has it taken inspiration from other forms of music as well?

SJ: *There is a mixture of classical and folk, and then perhaps if you take one raga, one or two notes you may find it extra. It is a part of a composition, usually one odd note is allowed. However, if you announced that you are playing classical then your hands are tied, they never changed. For sure, ginans are based on ragas, but if you are talking about classical, if you put them on classical rhythm in most cases you will get stuck in one or two words. If you take bhajan rhythm such as deepchandi, (14 beats, 3 + 4+ 3 +4) then the ginans are not always coming on the sum, therefore it tells us that, all the ginans are not metered properly. Although when we play accompanied with musical instruments we are making it. However there is a hit and miss, the later composed ginans are more according to the musical meter. Perhaps while composing gnan the rhythm may not have been in mind, or we may have lost it somewhere.*

The above statement is true that it is sometimes quite difficult to keep track of a continuing rhythm cycle. If one needs to know why then perhaps due to its performance, as we know that ginans are performed daily in *Jamatkhana* without musical instruments. It has its own significance and merit, such as anyone can perform ginan with or without understanding of music. Also within Muslim contexts parallel to *madah*, *naat* and *hamd*, where the essence lies in devotion rather than understanding of music, it becomes a kind of a prayer.

KG: To what extent should one have liberty to change the existing ginan ragas?

SJ: *The problem is that if you want to stay with what is currently available such as our oral tradition, then I don't see any problem. If we stay with the major body of ginan, however a little bit of polishing and fixing the things should be allowed, it should be allowed to the certain tunes. If it is fitting on the rhythm, or if you want to add such as "aavay Shah" (Imam came) to "aavay Maro Shah" (my Imam has arrived), if there is a place in which we are not getting the sum then I don't see any problem. It could be any printing error, little bit of change, if that is not throwing, I think that should be allowed. Particularly in Ginan-Mehfil we should have much leverage for rhythm and musical accompaniment, sensible leverage, it does not mean to mutilate the ginan. Such as some times you may have heard that the word "Sahebji" has been deliberately change to "Mowlaji" I discourage these sorts of changes. However, minor changes should be allowed. Down the line, what has been missing, what has been added, and what has been taken out, no body knows it.*

KG: But then how can one define the limits of allowing changes, if everyone starts changing the ginan tunes then it creates problems, doesn't it?

SJ: *When you sing outside the Jamatkhana nobody can stop you, you can compose it, as long as it is not mutilated, or sounds bad, or sounds like Bollywood song, it has to be based on ragas, and it has to sound much better than what you hear originally in Jamatkhana. The question does not arise whether it is allowed or not allowed? No one can do anything about it. If I go to gINAN-mehfil, I sing it in my own composition, but it sounds way better than the original gINAN, that means I am doing some justification to that gINAN. I am enhancing it, I am working towards up and down, this is my feeling, therefore every time I perform people say that “aaj to maza aah giya” (today we have enjoyed listening to your gINAN).”*

One thing is certain that only those who are musically trained are able to re-compose the new melodies of gINAN. Therefore, it is not uncertain that many professional musicians when they recite the gINAN bring their own creativity and devotion to the performance.

Asimilar case can be applies to various South Asian devotional literatures, such as the famous Kafi “*Bulla ki Jana main kon*” (I don’t know who am I Bullah) composed by 18th century Sufi Baba Bulleh Shah can be heard in various melodies, which plays a deeper role in the appreciation of music, devotion and poetry to the masses beyond its tradition.

Trained in Hindustani Classical *Sangit*: Khursheed Noorali:

Khursheed Noorali is one of the most renowned Ismaili singers among the Pakistani, Indian, East African and North American Ismailis. She has been fortunate to sing in the presence of H. H. Prince Karim Aga Khan eight times and has also sung on Pakistan television and Radio Pakistan. She took the classical Indian vocal training from a very early age and soon after became famous as a play back singer. She also learned gINANS from Jafersadiq Surmawala in Pakistan. She has sung and performed live in many countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, East African countries, UK, Europe, Middle

East, USA, and Canada. Currently she resides in Vancouver.

KG: You have been known to the Khoja Ismaili world as a renowned *geet* and *ginan* singer for the last four decades; tell us when and how did you start learning music?

KN: *I was born in 1943 in Dar-es-salaam lived in a small town called kido kaloo, and moved to Pakistan at a very early age. Music was always a major part of my life since childhood. My father saw that I have talents so he wanted me to train. From a very tender age I learned Khathak dance from Gullam Hussein Khataki in Karachi, learned Khathak dance for four years and also performed at various places. My grandmother at that time spoke to my father that I don't like her dancing on stage, why don't you try to put her in singing so that chapter closed and I started learning vocal music. My father brought me to Ustad Umroo Bando Khan in Karachi, and then he especially took me to Bombay for six months and I also learned under Hafeez Ahmed Khan. He was the one who recommended me to transfer my singing from harmonium to tanpura (drone Indian instrument). Since that time I have retained that. At the age of fourteen, I was singing on radio Pakistan, the program called "Shokia ganey wale" (amateur singers) and I started singing ghazal there, then people said my voice is good so why not take her to the commercials. I remember by the time I got married to Noor, I had almost 90% commercials on Karachi radio, I was the first lady to sing "Chai Chaye, kon si janab, lipton hi to hai" (would you like to drink a tea, which one, only Lipton). Then, I met renowned musicians including Sohail Rana, Niaz Ahmed, Zafar Khursheed, Nisar Bazmi and they all became our friends. I also sang with Allah Rakha Sarangi wale. During that time Sohail Rana gave me a song in the Pakistani movie "Arman" (Wishes) followed by "Yeh Karachi hai" (This is Karachi), "Heera or pathar" (Diamond and Stone).*

KG: When and how did you start singing *ginans*?

KN: *My mother was a very religious person and always used to think that Khursheed has got a good voice so why not we can put her in ginan singing. I still remember there was a ginan-mehfil that was arranged by Jaferadiq Surmawala in Garden, Karachi, and I think that had such an impact on me. Because, it was first time that I heard them recite ginan accompanied with musical instruments. Jafer bahi was there, Mehdi bahi, Jafer's brother was on harmonium, Kulsoom Rajan, which nowadays lives in Lisbon, and Gulshan bahi Rahim, it was around in 1960s. So I became very interested to join the ginan class. The ginan class by that time in Garden Karachi was full. But due to my family's request, and my personal interest to learn the ginans I was given an opportunity to learn from him. I remember, my mother used to tell me that because of your voice there is a barkat (blessings) in our home. And really wherever I have lived including Pakistan, Dhaka, East Africa, Zahir, USA, Canada, I have taught ginan to the students and also released two cassettes of ginan in East Africa.*

KG: I have also heard that you have been fortunate to recite ginan in front of H.H. Prince Karim Aga Khan, so what has been your experience of reciting in His presence?

KN: *I have no words to express my feelings. I have been the most fortunate human being who has recited in the presence of Mowlana Hazir Imam eight times especially ginan and geet. I remember first time I sang ginan in front of MHI was in 1963, thrice in 1964, twice in 1970, and once in 1978 and once in 1982 at the opening ceremony of Burnaby Darkhana Jama tkhana in Vancouver where I sang "O, Canada". Recently, during His golden Jubilee I have been asked by the grace of Mowla to sing again at the Mystical Journey performances in Paris.*



Illustration 26: H. H. Prince Karim Aga Khan is blessing Khursheed Nurali, after her recitation of ginan, Didar, Dhaka, East Pakistan, 1970. (Photo Courtesy: Khursheed Nurali)

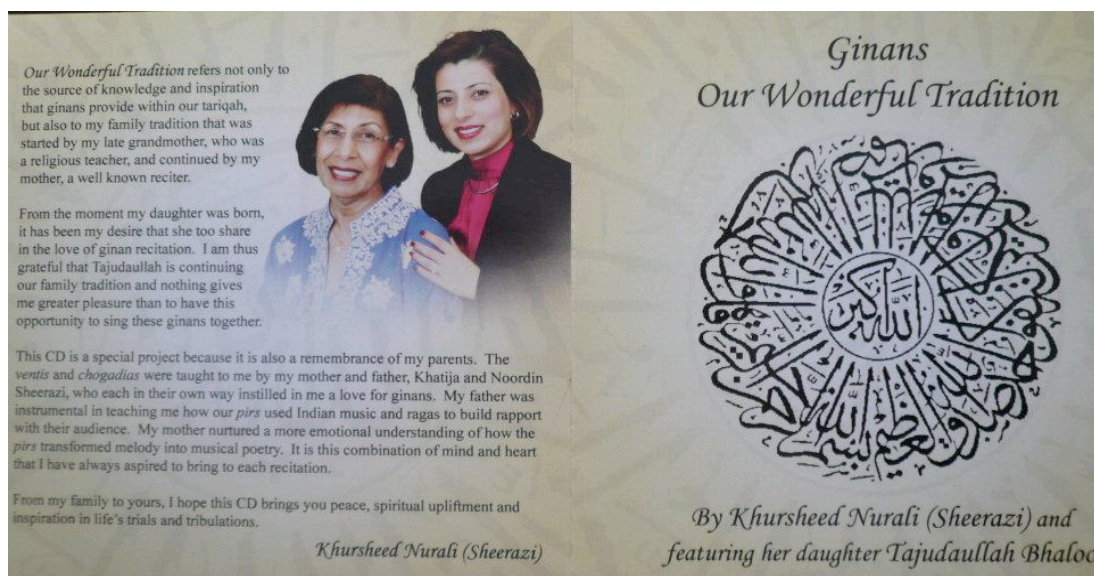


Illustration 27: Khursheed Nurali featuring her own daughter Tajudaullah Bhaloo, Vancouver, 2011

KG: So far what have been your experiences of reciting ginan in front of Mowlana Hazir Imam, please do share your own experiences?

KN: *I remember in 1978, when I got an opportunity to sing ginan in front of Mowlana Hazir Imam in a big majlis (religious gathering) where I sang ginan “darshan diyoo mora nath” (Please bless me your vision oh my lord”, and I asked my mother what should I do. She always used to say, bandi giniz, in Katchi language (tie him with you) and a verse from ginan “Te din sami mone pas teravjo... pakri lejo maro hath dasi choon teri” (On the day of judgment O Mawla call me to your presence and hold my hand, I am your female devotee). And I have said the same thing to Mowla, you will be singing through me. And after I recited the ginan and went to Hazir Imam for duas (prayers) He said “You sang ginan most beautifully”.*

KG: Where did you get the inspiration and power of performance?

KN: *I have given my entire life to Him, and never proud of any thing, because it is always His, because I remember Him in every second of my life. I have told many people to pray, after praying you will see the power of your performance and you will see that He is with you in every single moment of your life.*

I also got an opportunity to talk to Khursheed’s husband Noor Ali Wali Bhaloo regarding his experience of living with her and asked him a couple of questions, which I think are very important to also add in this paper because it shows a deeper part of her life which is to live and breathe in the devotion and love of *Imam-e-Zaman*:

KG: What has your experience been living with her? And I know without your support it would be very difficult for her to carry on with her passion of music.

NB: *I feel proud when the people make good comments about her. I remember when people used to hear her in the Dhaka television, they told us, she has something magical in her voice, and we don't have even voice in India like her. What she has and what other people don't have is the feeling in her heart. There are many Ismailis who have beautiful voices and even in the wider community there are thousand of people who have good voice. I think what makes Khursheed stands out is the feeling she brings out in her recitation. It is not a superficial feeling; it is everything in terms of love for Hazir Imam. It is not something made up in three minutes or five minutes or whatever. It is a continuous 24 hours process with her, she lives our religion in every minute of everyday, and this is something very unusual and I have not found anyone like her. I am sure there are others but I have certainly not met them yet. And the core is complete and utter belief in Hazir Imam, the love of Imam she has is just extra ordinary, I have not seen it like that, utmost devotion, complete devotion.*

KG: What experiences and feelings can one get from her performance?

NB: *You can study religion, you can be a scholar, but the feeling that is there in religion, that you cannot get from the books, which you cannot get from reading about purely knowledge; you have to meet somebody like Khursheed who can convey to you. And what she has given me, a true understanding of Ismailism and the Imam, that I don't think I have got from any books, or any discussion or any number of scholar, so this is my point of view, I am truly grateful, I don't know what I did to deserve this.*

To sum up, the above life stories and interviews encapsulate various underlying themes related to modernity and tradition. If we divide the people I interviewed according to their age groups then we would find some differences in their approaches and understanding of ginan. Shamsu Jamal, who is perhaps in his early 70s would not accept the Hip-Hop ginan version at all. For him this type

of music does not have the capacity to maintain the sanctity or the ecstatic beauty of our ginans that can please our ears. For Shamsu, “*Music to aisa hona chai ke rooh kosh hojaye or ginan ka maza das guna bar jaye*” (music should sound as that it touches your soul and listeners should enjoy them ten fold). For Shamsu and Khursheed, who are both above sixty years of age, the ragas and the poetry are important factors, as they both speak ethnic languages and they both are well trained musically. Therefore, their understanding of ginan is strongly rooted in their traditional interpretations of its sounds, however due to their Hindustani classical training, they do appreciate the new ragas can be if justified both musically and poetically.

For Hussein Janmohammed, Shams Soomar, Sheryar Nizar, and Zaheed Dhamani, all of them are between the ages of 20 to 40, music or melody is significant. Apart from Sheryar, who lives in Karachi, Pakistan, the above three musicians neither speak the ginan languages and do they have deeper a affinity with the Indian culture. Therefore, their interpretation of ginan comes from their own personal experiences of Western culture and also from participating in the religious ceremonies in *jamatkhana*. Ameera can also be placed in the same group. During one of my interviews, I asked a question to a lady from Edmonton, “Do you listen to ginans with music outside of *jamatkhana*? If so, what is your experience with listening to ginans with music”? And she replied, “yes I listen to ginans both with and without music at home and in my car. My experience is very positive when I listen to ginans, both with and without music. In fact, I was listening to a ginan with music just before this interview - “*Ugamiya soji deen athamia*”. It is a ginan that reminds us about death and the shortness of life on this earth.

So if I ask myself how I felt about listening to this ginan, I would have to say that it did not matter whether it was with or without music. The essence was that it was a soothing ginan, and I felt what our Pir wanted to convey in his poetic language - the reminder of death for every human being on earth. I

thought back to a gathering I had just attended to pray for a friend who had passed away about forty days ago and associated the ginan with her death. I also made a promise to myself not to get attached to worldly things and to focus on good deeds and actions which will help me in the life here after”.³⁵⁰

It is often said that music has no boundaries and it can reach anyone and everyone. Does music adapt according to different time and space? Or does music evolve according to time and perhaps re-creates, redefines its new meanings and interpretations? Does music have any boundary? According to Giddens, “boundaries are a metaphor, something we construct, and even reify, to create order out of chaos and to make sense of our world.”³⁵¹ Therefore, it can be assumed that boundaries are socially constructed; it can be created and re-created through various social forces. Boundaries are constantly changing; they can be twisted, negotiated, elaborated, eroded and deconstructed according to time and need. Does tradition only represent the historical past? Or does it represent the present as well? According to Nanji, “Diversity is built in the ginan tradition, so it is not a question of saying we should not have diversity, it is already there, and part of it is that diversity develops over the period of time. We do not have recordings of earlier recitations and I think even we were able to get the recordings of the earliest ones in twentieth century, you would already find that diversity embedded and just as there is diversity in the way linguistically ginans were appropriated”.³⁵²

The traditions are like a river that flows through various deserts, mountains, cities and countries, and takes various indigenous elements from every place it has gone through but always contain its uniqueness and identity. I will end this chapter with the following excerpt from His Highness the Aga Khan’s speech which he made on 16th November 2008, at the Avignon Forum, titled “The

³⁵⁰ Mulji, Almas, I interviewed her in Edmonton, 2010.

³⁵¹ Giddens, A, *The Construction of Society*, 1984.

³⁵² Nanji Azim, I interviewed him in University of Alberta, March 30th 2011.

value and importance of cultural diversity and its role in promoting peace and development” in France:

*“In a world that claims to be globalised, there are some who might regard cultural standardisation as natural, even desirable. For my part, I believe that marks of individual and group cultural identity generate an inner strength which is conducive to peaceful relations. I also believe in the power of plurality, without which there is no possibility of exchange. In my view, this idea is integral to the very definition of genuine quality of life”.*³⁵³

³⁵³ His Highness Aga Khan made a speech in France, on 16th November, Avignon Forum, titled “The value and importance of cultural diversity and its role in promoting peace and development”, source <http://www.akdn.org/Content/695/Speech-by-His-Highness-the-Aga-Khan-at-the-Avignon-Forum>

Conclusion

“Repeat the word (*japa*, *dhikr*) day and night
 And rejoice in the [inner] temple (*mandir*)
 When concentration (*surti*)³⁵⁴ is fixed between the brows,
 Rejoice in Immortality (*amar*)
 The concentration (*surti*) should be like the string
 Which remains intact when stretched.
 Then the un-struck sound will play
 And the even breathing of “I” and He” sets in
 When you thus sit absorbed in concentration (*surti*)
 How can the wicked distract you?
 When concentration (*surti*) is fixed between the brows,
 You will bathe in the Light (*nur*)”.³⁵⁵

This dissertation aims primarily to investigate the function and the role of ginan music both in the rituals as well as in the daily life of Khoja Ismailis. It also sheds light on the emotional and spiritual meaning community members continue to derive from these hymns. How do devotees attach meaning to the performance of ginans? This study offers new perspectives, which look at both “Tradition” and “Transformation”, or “Continuity”, and “Change” at the same time. On one hand, this study explores the ginan’s musical and poetic traditions, which are profoundly embedded in the socio-cultural and ritual traditions of South Asia. On the other hand, it demonstrates continuity and transformation in the modern period of time and the significance of ritual space and function. What effect does music have when it shifts from one geographical location to another? Does music evolve, change, and re-shape according to various socio-cultural and geographical contexts?

The ginan tradition is rooted in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent has now become a part of global practice through migration. Just as the Sufi Qawwali, which is functionally rooted in Northern India and Pakistan has in recent times through performers such as the Sabri brothers and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan has

³⁵⁴ *Surti* or it could be *Shurti* which according to the Hindustani classical music means the smallest interval between two notes such that the difference between them is perceptible.

³⁵⁵ Sabzwari Shams Pir, Kassam, Tazim, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance*, 1995, p 334.

become mainstream World music. This journey of religious music and its experiences can also be seen among the other immigrant communities and their devotional music such as Sikhs and Hindus. Depending on where the community has migrated, new socio-cultural and geographical environment affects its religious and cultural identity.

Ginans in the larger Muslim Context

Diverse styles and forms of religious sonic expressions are widely practiced by the Muslims across the world. Among them, Quranic recitation plays a pivotal role. In this study, it was vital to situate ginan within the larger framework of the Muslim sonic context, where right from the advent of Islam, (*qirah*) recitation and hearing of the Quran played a significant role.³⁵⁶ This study has explored how other forms of regional and vernacular literatures and poetry have become popular and made a significant impact on Muslim cultures and societies. Thus, for many Persians, the inspiration in the Mathnavi of Rumi is more or less equivalent to the teaching of Quran (not in its literal sense). For Sindhis, Shah Latif's poems have a similar high sacred status close to almost scriptures. Similarly ginans are also seen by a majority Khoja Ismailis as divinely inspired knowledge through which their ancestors embraced Islam.

This study has identified how in the South Asian context various Sufi, Hindu, and Bhakti poets used common mode of vernacular poetry and regional music as a tool to spread religious teachings. We have discovered various common themes and concepts shared among Sufis, Ismailis and Bhaktis in a more pluralistic cultural environment beyond that of a strict interpretation of Arab centered Islam. Finally, we have identified the critical role of *taqqiyya* (dissimulation) in the practice of Ismaili teaching. History reveals that Khoja

³⁵⁶ Nelson, Kristina, *The Art of Reciting the Quran*, 1987. Frishkopf, Michael, *Sufism, Ritual and Modernity in Egypt: Language Performance as an Adaptive Strategy*, 1999. Rasmussen, Anne K. *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*. 2010.

Ismailis were brutally persecuted many times by various extremist groups. Therefore, to secure their religious identity, the oral practise of ginan recitation have played a momentous role both in terms of preserving the tradition in their heart and memory for centuries and also in practicing the faith through rituals.

Ginans in the Musical Context

This dissertation also explores the music of Ismaili ginans in a systematic manner where ginans have been studied within the various indigenous socio-cultural, religious, ritual and poetic contexts of South Asia. This study reveals that ginan is one of the most profound musical genres that are deeply rooted in the regional and local traditions of Sind, Punjab and Gujarat. This is the first ethnomusicological study that reveals the wider musical, as well as poetic and cultural contributions of Ismaili *Pirs*, as they were among the pioneers and perhaps the oldest composers of *Kafi*, *Wai* and *Bait*, regional musical styles and languages such as Punjabi, Gujarati, Sindhi, Hindi and Siriaki.

This study shows the richness of this heritage. Because of its religious and sacred appeal the Ismaili community has preserved this tradition throughout many centuries. Scholars in the fields of history and religious studies have rarely explored the musical context. Most of those studies specialize in textual investigations and have not examined musical sound and performance. Using ethnographic tools – i.e. an ethnomusicological approach to examine the musical performances – this research explored the deeper connections of ginans with other regional and musical traditions, as well as how the community defined its deepest spiritual and cultural roots through performance and recitation of ginans.

What is significant here is the discovery of the musical and poetic heritage of South Asia. This research is a valuable contribution to the field of South Asian Studies as well as to religious studies and ethnomusicology in general.

Although the community has been practicing ginans for centuries, it is generally unaware of the connection to the larger heritage of South Asia. The essential element of ginan is based on its performance. The structure of poetry is set according to its regionally based music, which draws influence from various kinds of regional folk like devotional and Hindustani classical music.

As far as musical transmission is concerned, it is mainly based on oral tradition. The text is always written down. The music is remembered through oral memory, which requires daily practice and performance. This study has shown that how various methodologies were carried out by the Ismailis to retain the music of ginan. First and foremost, I have reviewed the two major catalogues of Khoja Ismaili manuscripts and rarely found references to musical modes or ragas, and even if mode or ragas were mentioned, it was very difficult to identify these according to Hindustani music. But after carefully exploring the other regional musical styles and forms, one can find similar patterns of musical styles such as *Dhal* music of Gujarat, and the *Kafi*, *Wai*, *Bait* musical styles of Sind and Punjab.

In the catalogued manuscripts I have found that ginans were preserved according to their ritual function and time of performance such as *Sobah* (morning) and *Sandiya* (evening) hours. Another system of retaining the ginan tunes was found in the form of *Jodilo* (stock tunes or parallel tunes). I have also determined that, to retain the larger ginans known as granths in 1920, Lalji Bhai Devraj published a book entitled “Rag mala” (A garland of tunes) in which various symbols were used to show the *Jodilo* (stock tunes) granths. This further supports the argument for keeping and retaining the importance of tunes within the Ismaili tradition.

This research has also demonstrated that how one can situate ginans within the South Asian cultural performance. Thus from Guru Nanak to Kabir, from Waris Shah to Shah Latif, from Bulleh Shah to Pir Shams Sabzwari, all used

popular songs employed Indic symbols and motifs as a tool to share religious messages. All these poets have composed their hymns in the form of music so the messages could be shared and practiced among the wider communities. Various musical styles of ginans were explored with the help of Western notation to identify their musical structure, sound pattern and rhythms.

This dissertation further explored the impact of standardizing ginans and their effects as a case study in Karachi. This study revealed interesting findings, as it was not the poetry through which the argument regarding the standardizing ginans arose. It was the tunes or music that became the main reason and concern of ginan transmission and domination of certain groups. Three models were adopted namely “Traditional tunes”, “Classroom method” and “Hindustani classical music”. This research demonstrates that each of these models prioritizes pedagogy and classification. A study of ginans according to the regional, cultural, poetic and musical features from Sind, Punjab and Gujarat could enrich these approaches with relevant musical and contextual information.

Ginans within the Ritual Context

Another key area of this dissertation was to situate ginan within its wider liturgical context and explore the role of ginan within the wider Ismaili ritual context. What is the function of the *Jamatkhana* space in the Ismaili ritual setting? And how are various Ismaili rituals connected with the sounds of ginan? Ginan manuscripts show that ginans have always been preserved and sung according to their ritual context and various ginans are set to create the proper mood for specific ritual. From the *Ab-e-shafa* (water for cure) to *didar* (the physical glimpse of Imam), from *Bayat-ul-Khyal* (early morning meditation) to funeral ginans are all performed according to its specific context. As this study shows, ginans are, not merely a silent feature of the Ismaili ritual. Rather they are the sonic/musical medium through which one attaches meaning and emotions within specific ritual.

This study also shows how the performance of selective ginans on specific occasions brings emotion and sentiments to the community members and provides a medium to them as one voice in the congregation. Through sounds and collective performance the community comes together as one large united family. It is sound which shapes the ritual and makes it sacred and meaningful. This has been shown in detail for the various Ismaili rituals as part of the function of gnan music.

Why was Khoja Ismaili ritual included in this dissertation? Because it was through the ritual that Ismaili ginans have played an important functional role throughout the centuries. It was in a liturgical setting that ginans were performed according to the various ritual occasions. Hence I have argued that ginans are not just devotional songs in praise of the Imams; they are far more than that. “Our Pirs have masterfully contained every form of knowledge inside the vast ginanic literature. From guidance concerning death to business, from good deeds to health, one can find absolutely everything inside the large repertoire of ginans. In fact “*ginan ma to Saheb che*” (the literal meaning is that Imam resides within gnan) but it actually means that through gnan one can find his Imam”.³⁵⁷ Therefore, ritual provides us with a creative window to analyze the function of gnan and how the community derives layers of meaning from gnan. From *Jamatkhana* services to *didar* and from funeral services to celebratory *Kushali*, ginans share deeper socio-cultural and emotional meanings with their community.

Migration and Transformation

What happens when people migrate, and both culturally and physically travel from one geographical situation to another? How does music affect people when the socio-cultural contexts are changed? Various contexts of performing

³⁵⁷ Karamali, Taufiq, I interviewed him in Edmonton, November 2011.

ginans were explored – Western choral settings, Hindustani classical music, professional musicians and their contributions with hip-hop versions and different teaching methods. The ethnographic exploration reveals that it is music that provides room for interpretation and creativity. Through sounds, many individuals in the West are trying new ways to remain steadfast to this ginnan performance tradition and yet share these through various mediums such as Youtube, websites, CDs, and Facebook to appeal to everyone, especially youth who have little socio-cultural background of ginans.

Various people, who have invented new creative ways to perform ginans were selected to hear their voices. From instrumental rendition to Western choir settings, from transliterated ginans to the hip-hop, from the famous Abida Parveen's Sufi style of ginnan rendition to Indian pop star Raageshwari's version, this study shows how traditions are gradually transformed, shaped, re-shaped, localized, globalized, and glocalized according to their settings and contexts.

Due to various linguistic and cultural challenges faced by the community in North America, new media and styles are silently encouraged. This also applies to other devotional genres such as Sufi Qawwali, once performed only at the Sufi shrines, but has now become a big label under 'World Music' and can be heard around the world.

The Challenges of Canada and the use of Electronic Media

In this study, the role of Canada and its cultural context is of utmost importance, as it provides various challenges as well as opportunities for diaspora immigrant communities to practice their faith freely and use a variety of media. In Pakistan the pressures are different as community institutions strictly control the religious materials. In that country, Ismailis are the part of the Shia religious minority and always feel threatened by some of the radical and extremist influences within the Sunni Muslim majority. Therefore, to protect community members the dissemination of religious materials (both

books and audio recordings) is strictly controlled. Moreover, financial issues are also a key factor, since if someone would like to record a ginan album and distribute among the community, it would be difficult to bear the cost.

Canada, on the other hand, because of the secular nature of its society, offers immense freedom. As a result, one can find various levels of community members contributing their time, knowledge and energy towards preserving, recording and distributing ginans at their own expense. Although the institutions often do not encourage such independent dissemination of religion-related material, religious freedom and general prosperity encourage individuals to contributing to the overall repertoire of ginan tradition.

Arzina Mehrali from Edmonton has professionally recorded various ginan albums at her own expense because of her personal interest on recording and preserving ginans heritage. Nargis Balolia of Ontario has recorded three CDs, at her own cost (with accompaniment of musical instruments, music composed and arranged by the renowned ghazal singer from Agra, Sudhir Narain). Amin Mawani from Toronto has recorded two CDs independently in Toronto at his own expense with (accompaniment of musical instruments, arranged and music composed by the Pakistani Artist Nadeem Ali). One can also see the examples where an individual can afford to engage renowned singers at their own expense such as Raageshwari who re-composed new ginans tunes and recorded in her own studio in India. When I interviewed both Nargis Balolia and Amin Mawani both attested that they would like to preserve this unique Ismaili heritage of ginans in a professional manner and the only way to do that was to take the initiative independently. “I share them with my friends and family at a very reasonable price, which barely covers our basic expenses. Indeed, it is a labor of love and therefore we have received blessings from so many community members”.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ Mawani, Amin, I interviewed him over the phone, Toronto, 2011.

“One” Correct Version of Ginan Recitation

The other challenge is related to an assumption of having only “one” correct version of ginan recitation. Similar debates can be found in almost every religious community. In Islam, many people believe that “any practice or any new thought not sanctioned by tradition must be rejected as innovation (*bida*). But the history and diversity of people converted to Islam obviously required responses to many circumstances not foreseen in either Quran or the hadith. To be integrated into the tradition, these responses required sanction and sacralization either by reference to utterances of the Prophet or by use of a method of reasoning called juridical *qiyas*, often translated as “analogy”.³⁵⁹ In the case of ginan, it is almost impossible to find only one frozen way of recitation. The manuscripts themselves do not provide sufficient information to follow one method. In fact, both in terms of language and musical recitation, diversity is deeply embedded in the ginan tradition.

The idea of having only one fixed way of reciting ginan would be difficult to accept, the notion of having only one fixed way of practicing Islam is a dangerous notion when the practices are as diverse as in the history of Muslims and their cultural and regional differences. Throughout my field research even in various parts of Pakistan it was quite obvious that one found different variants of ginans. Sometimes the tunes were totally different but they were widely accepted by the locals in their own regional contexts. Even in Canada sometimes one can hear the stereotyped view of tunes as if one would prefer to hear the pure traditional ragas of ginan, and interestingly assume that the only rendition of Junagadh, Gujarat is correct or sometimes prefer to learn ginan only from the recordings of a particular individual. According to Arkoun “this pair of ideas, tradition and innovation, must not only undergo analysis in terms of theology and law but must be treated more generally as an inherent dialectic

³⁵⁹ Arkoun, Mohammed, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, 1994, p 50.

in any society where several ethno-cultural groups struggle either to augment their dominance or to protect themselves from foreign elements.”³⁶⁰

Future Directions and Contribution

As far as ethnomusicological study of ginan is concerned, this research offers a detailed exploration of ginan recitation beginning with its traditional roots within the poetics and musical heritage of Pakistan and India. At the same time it also explores its ritual context in detail and the function of music within its liturgical setting.

At times it was difficult for me to explain to the community members what I meant by the music of ginans. It is not normal practice to attach the term “music” to ginan. I believe that being an insider; it was an easier task to access knowledge especially as I was aware of the linguistic, cultural and sacred aspects of the community. It is not a normal practice in ethnomusicology to conduct field research as an insider, though some great insider works do exist. The insider researcher has both advantages and disadvantages as a field worker. However, in the case of my investigation it is almost impossible for an outsider to study ginan, not because of an outsider’s lack of competence but due to the absence of sources material available for them. Many times during the course of my fieldwork, I found myself placed more as an outsider than an insider. Although, I am connected to the musical practice of ginan as a reciter, yet I found certain local, regional contexts to be quite unique and fascinating and outside of my experience.

What has to be done now? What avenues need to be further explored? And what possible direction should be taken? There are still areas that require further investigation, such as the area related to the media and its history of recordings. Ginans recitations have been recorded since the early twentieth

³⁶⁰ Arkoun, Mohammed, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, 1994, p. 50.

century through various mediums such as spools, audio cassette, CDs and electronically. It would be a worthwhile investigating various recorded sounds, media and contexts in which ginans recording were produced and used for religious transmission in East Africa, Pakistan, India, North America and Europe.

One could also critically study the new modes of transmission of ginans such as Internet, Youtube, CDs and MP3s. Although, I have shown these influences in some detail in my last chapter, their impact could also be studied in more detail applying ethnographic field research tools.

Another area of inquiry would be a critical examination of various offshoots of Satpanthis such as Imam Shahis, Nizar Panthi, Mahamargis, Guptis, Shamsis, Momanas, and Barmati, who have continually used gitan performance tradition as a part of their daily ritual ceremonies. It would be fascinating to compare their versions of ginans with the existing Khoja Ismaili repertoire and find parallel musical and poetic influences.

As far as the recordings of gitan are concerned, there is no single institution available which has undertaken any major work on preserving gitan in its sonic form. There are some individuals who have taken a personal initiative to preserve the gitan repertoire. However, due to the difficult and painful process of preserving hundreds of gitan recordings, it is almost impossible to find any valuable collection of gitan recordings available for ethnomusicological research. Moreover, it is also necessary to encourage academics, private scholars, collectors, and religious missionaries, to further engage themselves into preserving and exploring the sonic recitation of gitan. Moreover, the treasure of gitan recordings needs to be preserved under the aegis of an academic institution, for permanence and for access to scholars as well as community members, especially teachers and students of gitan.

All in all, this ethnomusicological exploration on the Ismaili music of ginan has shown that Ismaili *Pirs* and *Sayyeds* were all well versed in both the poetic and musical traditions of Sindh, Punjab and Gujarat. They carefully incorporated regional musical genres such as *Kafi*, *Wai*, *Bait* and *Dhal* to compose these ginans. This study shows that the ginan tradition is not a textually static or culturally bound tradition. It has always been transmitted through various means and is continuously evolving in its socio-cultural, linguistic and musical contexts, and continues to be a vital source of profound spirituality among the Khoja Ismaili community.

Ethnographic Field Research and Oral Sources

I conducted detailed field research during the winter of 2005 and 2007 in various part of Pakistan. After obtaining preliminary information about the Ismaili settlement in Pakistan from some of the local Ismaili scholars, I conducted an ethnographic field research in the following cities: Multan, Lahore, Gujranwala, Kasor, Talwandi, Sahiwal, Sindh, Hyderabad, Khyber, Bhit Shah, Mir Pur Khas, and Karachi. Upon conducting various interviews I gathered a vast number of ginan recordings and information from reciters, community experts, scholars, Shrine keepers, and musicians.

The interviews were conducted mostly in three age groups: Religious Centre Students: Ages ranging from 15 to 25 years; Teachers or community experts: Ages ranging from 25 to 60 years including local Al-Waiz; and thirdly, the senior community members above 60 years of age.

In modern times, with a large numbers of diverse Ismaili jamat living in Karachi, from locals from Punjab, Sindh and the Northern Areas to the migrated Ismaili community from India, especially Gujarat, Kutch, Katiawar, Bombay and some East African community, one can find various styles of reciting ginans. Until the last two decades, reciting ginans in a slightly different regional tune was quite acceptable in Karachi. Since the early 1990s, various new ways regarding the tunes evolved. I have conducted over three hundred interviews, attended a large number of music performances and analyzed over 500 hundred ginans recordings from Pakistan, United Kingdom, USA and Canada.

Some of the details of this work are as follows:

List of places where Field Research was conducted:

Pakistan

Karachi

Hyderabad

Lahore

Multan

Talwandi

Gujranwala

Sahiwal

Sialkot

United Kingdom

London

Edinburgh

United States of America, USA

Chicago

Dallas

Canada

Edmonton

Calgary

Toronto

Vancouver

Ottawa

Montreal

Performers and Reciters within the Khoja Ismaili Community

Taufiq Karmali (USA)

Nargis Balolia (Toronto, Canada)

Khursheed Nurali (Vancouver, Canada)
 Shabnam Merali (Edmonton, Canada)
 Karim Nathoo (Edmonton, Canada)
 Jafarali Surmawala (Edmonton, Canada)
 Jafer Sadiq Surmawala (Karachi, Pakistan)
 Malek Gillani (Chicago, USA)
 Sumshuddin Jamal (Vancouver, Canada)
 Ameerah Nimjee (Toronto, Canada)
 Hussein Janmohammad (Vancouver, Canada)
 Sheriyar Nizar (Karachi, Pakistan)
 Zulfiqar Mulji (Vancouver, Canada)
 Karim Bhoja (Calgary, Canada)
 Mehboob Kamdia (Toronto, Canada)
 Badar Alidina (Edmonton, Canada)
 Mehboob Merchant (Edmonton, Canada)
 Allauddin Khalfan (Edmonton, Canada)
 Shafik Lalani (Edmonton, Canada)
 Pyar Ali Jiwa (London, UK)
 Aly Sunderji (Vancouver, Canada)
 Hassan Chatriwala (Edmonton, Canada)
 Almas Murji (Edmonton, Canada)
 Amin Mawani (Toronto, Canada)
 Shabnam Merali (Edmonton, Canada)
 Barkat Ali Kerai (London, UK)
 Barkat Ali Mohsin (Calgary, Canada)
 Shams Soomar (Dallas, USA)
 Zaheed Dhamani (Calgary, Canada)

Interviews taken from the scholars in the field

Dr. Gullam Ali Allana (Pakistan)
 Zawahir Moir (UK)

Dr. Ali Asani (USA)
 Dr. Azim Nanji (USA)
 Dr. Dominique Sila Khan (India)
 Wafi Momin (Pakistan)
 Dr. Françoise Mallison (France)
 Dr. Shafique Virani (Canada)
 Mumtaj Ali Tajdin (Pakistan)
 Sheikh Mohammad Iqbal (Pakistan)
 Rizwan Mawani (Canada)
 Dr. Kristina Nelson (Egypt)
 Dr. Amy Catlin (USA)
 Dr. Balvant Jani (India)
 Otambek Masti (UK)
 Late Gulshan Merchant (Edmonton)
 Rahim Gillani (Dallas, USA)
 Kamran Hussein Khimani (UAE)
 Shumaila Himani, (Pakistan)

Field Research interviews in Pakistan

Students and Community members include:

- 1) Lahore, Punjab
- 2) Multan, Punjab
- 3) Talwandi, Punjab
- 4) Gujranwala, Punjab
- 5) Sailkot, Punjab
- 6) Sahiwal, Punjab
- 7) Khyber, Sind
- 8) Hyderabad, Sind
- 9) Karachi, Sind

Religious missionaries/Waizeen:

Kamaluddin Ali Mohammad
 Zarina Kamaluddin
 Punjab's missionaries, Kushi Muhammad
 Late Abu Ali
 Alwaiz, Amlana
 Shiraz Bandali
 Aman Haji
 Zainulabdin

Professional Musicians and Poets:

Abida Parveen
 Sudhir Narayan (India)
 Trilok loomba and Raageshwari (India)
 Dr. Hyder Alidina (Pakistan)
 Dr. Kamaljeet Bajwa (Canada)
 Dr. Wasanti Pranjape (Canada)
 Kamran Khimani (UAE)
 Kamal Taj (USA)
 Amrit Pal (Canada)
 Ojas Joshi (Canada)

Ethnically different community members:

Urdu Speaking Pakistani
 Sindhi speaking
 Punjabi Speaking
 Bheel Hindus in Sindh
 Meghwar Hindus in Sindh
 Gujarati speaking Indian in London, USA and Canada
 Gujarati speaking East African Ismailis in Canada
 Kutchi Speaking East African Ismailis in Canada

English Speaking second generation Canadian and US Ismaili Youths and Adults

Spoken to Diaspora Hindu Gujarati community at Navrati Festival in Edmonton

Visited Hindu temples in Edmonton

Visited in Sikh Gurdwaras in Edmonton

Conducted Ethnographic Field research at a number of Shrines in Pakistan:

Pir Shams Sabzwari

Pir Sadardin

Pir Hassan Kabiruddin

Pir Tajuddin

Sayeda Imam Begum

Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai

Lal Shahbaz Qalandar

Bahauddin Zakria Multani

Shah Rukhne Alam

Baba Bulleh Shah

Shah Hussein

Mado Lal

Data Ganj Baksh

Bibi Pak Sarkar Daman

Abdullah Shah Gazi

Syed Baba Shah Jamal

Baba Talwar Shah

Shah Yousaf Shah Gardezi

Musa Pak Shaheed

Participated and performed Ginan with various musical groups:

Festival of Light: University of Alberta

Ek Sham Sufiana Kalam ke Naam: Enthralling Evening of Sufi music, U of A

Ek Sham Sufiana Kalam ke Naam

Ginan-e-Mehfil, Edmonton Jamat

Performed Ginan in Calgary accompanied with musical instrument

Ruh ki Avaz (Voice of the Soul) Calgary group

Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board's Ginan Mushairas

Sufi music ensemble

South Asian Sufi music ensemble

Satpanth Sufis

International House, University of Alberta

International Week, University of Alberta

World Music Samples, University of Alberta

Oral Sources:

1. **Alidina, G. Hyder.** Karachi, Pakistan, at his home, December 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2011.

He is originally from Pakistan. By profession he is a medical doctor. He is trained in Indian classical music. It has been almost two decades that he is exploring ginan in the line of Indian classical music. He has released two cassettes of standardizing ginan accompanied with musical instruments. In his ginan volumes he has also provided a brief detail about the raga of each ginan.

2. **Allana, Ghulam Ali.** Hyderabad, Pakistan, at his home, October 2003, 2006 and 2009.

He is a very well renowned scholar on linguistics, philology, literature and history, originally from Hyderabad, Sind. He has written over twenty-five

books and various academic articles in Sindhi, Urdu and English languages. Some of his books entitled *The Arabic Element in Sindhi* and *Sindhi Boli ji Lasani Jagrafi* and most recently *Ismaili Movement in Sind, Multan and Gujarat* are prominent.

3. **Ali Mohammed, Kamaluddin.** Karachi, Pakistan, at his home, December 2003, and 2006.

Kamaluddin is a prominent religious scholar and a renowned Ismaili *al-waiz* missionary from Pakistan. He has published over ten books and various academic articles, particularly for the Ismaili community. Some of his recent books are *Al-Kawaqib* and *Ismaili Tariqah*. He has been serving as a professional *Al-waz* for the Ismaili Tariqah Board Pakistan for the last twenty-five years.

4. **The Late Amlani, Amirali.** Conversation over the phone, July 2004 and 2005.

He was a very renowned Ismaili missionary and had served community for over four decades. His was considered by many as an authority of ginan literature. He was also a great teacher of Ismaili teachings and Gujarati language.

5. **Asani, Ali.** London, UK, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, June 2011.

Ali S Asani is currently Professor of the Practice of Indo-Muslim Languages and Culture at Harvard University and also been serving as a visiting faculty at the Institute of Ismaili Studies. His main areas of interest are in Ismaili and Islamic Sufi literatures, mysticism and Islamic civilizations with a particular focus on India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. He also offers instruction in various South Asian and African languages. He is well versed in Urdu, Hindi, Sindhi, Gujarati, and Swahili. Professor Asani is the author of many scholarly journal and encyclopaedia articles, book chapters and several books on the devotional literatures of Muslim

communities in South Asia, including the *Bujh Niranjana: An Ismaili Mystical Poem* and *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literatures of South Asia* are prominent. He has provided me guidance from time to time over the phone as well as in informal discussions.

6. The Late Aziz, Abu Ali. Vancouver, Canada, at his home, August 2004, and 2005.

He was born in Amritsar, India on August 21, 1919. He had served the Ismaili community as an al-waiz (missionary) for more than sixty years. He was well versed in many languages including, Punjabi, Urdu, Gujarati, Sindhi, Persian, Arabic and English. After spending almost forty years in East Africa, and moved to Canada and lived in Vancouver Canada. He was the author of over ten books on the topic of Islam in general and Ismailism in particular. In April 30, 2001, he also obtained his Ph.D. from the International Senior University Wyoming, USA. His thesis entitled *Miracles and Gnosis, described the life and work of Pir Satgur Nur*. His had a keen interest on Ginan, therefore, he remembered hundreds of ginan by heart.

7. Bawa, Sohail Amir Ali. Karachi, Pakistan, at his home, June 2003, 2005

He is originally from Pakistan. He is a very good singer and often performs ginan, *git* and Sufi songs at various occasions.

8. Charania, Fatimah. Edmonton, Canada, at the University of Alberta, August 2004, 2007. She was born and raised in Edmonton, Canada. She has a melodious voice and often recites ginan at Ismaili *jamatkhana*. Her entire family is famous for performing ginan and *git* at various Ismaili occasions.

9. Chatriwala, Hassan. Toronto, Canada, at his home, July 2003, 2007.

He is originally from Pakistan, and currently lives in Toronto, Canada. He has learned ginan from various teachers including Jafersadiq Surmawala, and Zarina Kamaluddin from Pakistan. He often recites ginan in *jamatkhana*, and used to teach ginan at the Ismaili Religious Schools in Karachi.

10. Gillani, Rahim. Karachi, Pakistan, at my home, June 2003, 2007, 2011.

He is a good poet and has an excellent command on the Islamic and South Asian art, literature and poetry. He also enjoys listening and singing ginan.

11. Gillani, Yousuf. Toronto, Canada, at his home, July 2003, 2005.

He is originally from Pakistan, lived in Toronto for a while before moving back to Karachi. He often recites *ginan* in the Ismaili *Jamatkhana*. He has a good historical background on Ismaili teachings and *ginan*.

12. Haji Aman. Toronto, Canada, at my home in Edmonton, April 2005.

He is originally from Calgary, Canada. He finished his *waizen* training program from the Institute of Ismaili Studies in 2003. He has a keen interest on ginan, and often uses ginan as a source of his *waz* materials in *jamatkhana*. He is also a good reciter of ginan.

13. Hussainaly, Nawaz. Edmonton, Canada, at the Centre for Ethnomusicology, University of Alberta, November 2007.

He is originally from Edmonton, born and raised in Canada. He has recently earned a Bachelors of Science in Electrical Engineering from the University of Alberta. Nawaz serves as a Religious Education Teacher for Ismaili Muslim youths in grade 10, and also served as a Camp Counselor at

Camp al-Ummah for youths aged 13-17 in the summers of 2003 and 2005. He always enjoys learning and singing *ginan* inside the Ismaili *jamatkhana*.

14. Jiwa, Pyar Ali. Edinburgh, Scotland, at his home, August 2009, 2011.

He is originally from East Africa and currently lives in Edinburgh, Scotland. He has collected a large *ginan* audio and book repertoire. He has been creating the database of Ismaili *ginan* for academic scholars and researchers for the last six years.

15. Kamaluddin, Zarina. Karachi, Pakistan, at her home, December 2003, 2005

She is originally from Bombay, India, and for more than two decades she has been living in Pakistan. She is a prominent Ismaili scholar and a missionary. Her expertise is on the Ismaili *ginan*. She has served as an *Al-waiza* (missionary) for Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education board, Pakistan for over two decades. She has been teaching *ginan* for the last eleven years in Karachi. She has recorded approximately seven hundred *ginans* with her the ITREB *Ginan* group.

16. Kassam, Tazim. London, UK, at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, April 2002.

She is a historian of religions, specializing in the Islamic tradition, and serving as a director of graduate studies at Syracuse University, USA. Her research and teaching interest includes gender, ritual, devotional literature from South Asia. She has written many academic papers on various topics of Islam, gender, mysticism, and devotional poetry. Her book entitled *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance* explores the origins and creative synthesis of Hindu-Muslim ideas expressed in the Ismaili *ginan* tradition. Informally, she has been sharing her expertise and knowledge on *ginan* with me for over two years.

17. Kanji, Shiraz. Edmonton, Canada, at my home, April 2006.

He is originally from Tanzania and a graduate of University of Nairobi. It has been nearly three decades he has been living in Edmonton. He speaks several languages and has a keen interest on the Ginan literature. He is an IT professional and a trained honorary al-waiz . He has also served the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious education board of Edmonton in a various key positions. He also enjoys learning and reciting ginan.

18. Kara, Inayat Ali. Karachi, Pakistan, at my home, 2003, and 2009.

He has been learning and teaching ginan in the religious school in Karachi for the last ten years. He has a melodies voice and also performs ginan in Ismaili *jamatkhana*.

19. Merali, Arzina. Edmonton, Canada, at the Centre for Ethnomusicology, University of Alberta, June 2004, 2006.

She was born in East Africa, and currently lives in Edmonton. She has a keen interest in recording and preserving ginan. She has recorded over three hundred ginans in an audio CD format.

20. Merali, Shabnum. Edmonton, Canada, at the Centre for Ethnomusicology, University of Alberta, May 2003, and 2007.

She is originally from Karachi, Pakistan, and has been living in Edmonton, Canada for more then two decades. She has released almost eight ginan CDs, and two *ghazal* CDs. She is professionally an accountant, but always engages in learning and teaching ginan. Often she conducts ginan *mushairos* in Edmonton.

21. Moir, Zawahir. London, UK, at her home, January 2005, 2009 and 2011.

She has contributed immensely in the field of Ismaili ginan. She is originally from Pakistan and currently lives in London, UK. She has

published various articles in academic journals on the topic of Ismaili ginan. She has also written a book with Dr. Christopher Shackle entitled *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the ginans*. She is well versed in Gujarati, Sindhi, Urdu, and Hindi. On many occasions formally and informally she has shared her knowledge on ginan with me.

22. **Mulji, Zulfqar**, Edmonton, Canada, at her sister's home, June 2005, and 2010.

He currently lives in Vancouver, and teaches Ismaili religious schools. He always enjoys singing and listening ginan. One of his missions is to teach ginan to the Ismaili youth in Canada.

23. **Mumtaz Tajuddin**, Karachi, Pakistan, at the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board, Pakistan, November 2003, 2005 and 2009. He is originally from Pakistan. A private scholar, historian and has written over seven books, specifically on Ismaili history. He has also collected various ginan manuscripts mostly from Sind, Pakistan, and has been serving as a teacher for the Ismaili Tariqah Board. Some of his famous books are *Ismaili s through History*, *Glossary of Holy ginan s*, and *101- Ismaili Heroes*.

24. **Nathoo, Karim**. Edmonton, Canada, at the Centre for Ethnomusicology, University of Alberta, May 2003, and 2008. He is originally from East Africa, and has been living in Edmonton for the last two decades. He enjoys singing ginan and light Indian music. His family often recites ginan in the Ismaili *jamatkhana*.

25. Surmawala, Jafer Ali. Edmonton, Canada, at my home, April 2004, and 2007.

He is originally from Pakistan, and he has lived in Tanzania for eight years and is currently living in Edmonton. He is also the instructor of the Ismaili *ginan* in Edmonton, for the religious school. By profession he is a Chartered Accountant (FCA and AITM). He follows the same method of teaching *ginan* as his father Jafersadiq I. Surmawala. He has also recently released two CDs of Ismaili *ginan* with the help of Arzina Merali.

26. Surmawala, Jafersadiq I. Karachi, Pakistan, at his home, December 2003, 2007.

He was born and raised in Bombay and migrated to Pakistan after independence. He served as a religious teacher in Bombay Ismaili religious schools. He is one of the founders of Garden Orchestra, Karachi. He has played a very significant role as a *ginan* teacher and taught *ginan* for thirty-two years in Karachi, Pakistan, under the guidance of Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board. His students are wide spread all over the world and continue learning and teaching *ginan*.

Ginanic Sources

Devraj Laljibhai formed a Text-Book Committee to provide text-books to students. Master Hashim Bogha and Manji Ghulam Hussain assisted him in his initiative. Master Hashim Bogha published “Ragmala” in 1906 to enable the students to learn the *raga* of the *ginans*.

Ginan by Pir Shams Sabzwari 13th CE, *Brahm Prakash*, (Divine Light) verse number: 71

Ginan by Pir Sadardin, “*Ginan bolo re nit noray bharia*” first verse is taken from the book

Ginan by Pir Shams Sabzwari, *Saloko Moto*, entitled *Jawahir-e-Ginan*, published by the Shia Imami Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board of Pakistan, 2002, verse number 105.

Ginan by Pir Shams, cited from Esmail, Aziz. *A Scent of Sandalwood, Indo-Ismaili Religious Lyrics*, p. 53.

Ginan by Pir Hassan Kabiruddin, *Eji Khadiya padiya*, cited from Ginans, with English Translation and Glossary, volume 2, compiled by Zarina Kamaluddin and Kamaluddin Ali Muhammad, Z.A Printer, Karachi, Pakistan, 2007.

Ginan by Pir Hassan Kabir-u-din, ginan “*Eji Dur Desh thi aya*”, verse 2, cited from Ginans, with English Translation and Glossary, volume 2, compiled by Zarina Kamaluddin and Kamaluddin Ali Muhammad, Z.A Printer, Karachi, Pakistan, 2007.

Ginan by Pir Hassan Kabiruddin Volume 2, ginan “*Eji Piyu Piyu kijiye*” p 124.

Pir Shams in his ginan Valek Moto, verse number 63 said “O Brother! The Momin has found Satpanth, yet the foolish one did not obtain the secret”,
Compiled by Zarina Kamaluddin and Kamaluddin Ali Muhammad, English Translation by Yasmin Sher Ali, Karachi, Pakistan, and year is not mentioned.

Pir Hassan Kabir-u-din, ginan Eji Dur Desh thi aya, verse 2, cited from Ginans, with English Translation and Glossary, volume 2, compiled by Zarina Kamaluddin and Kamaluddin Ali Muhammad, Z.A Printer, Karachi, Pakistan, 2007, p.111.

_____ ginan “*Eji Piyu Piyu kijiye*” Volume 2, compiled by Zarina Kamaluddin and Kamaluddin Ali Muhammad, Z.A Printer, Karachi, Pakistan, 2007p 124

Pir Tajdin, *Ginan Sharif with translation*, vol II, ginan number 31, the Shia Imami Imaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board, Pakistan, 1992, pp, 101-102

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