Review Article

Ginanic Travails, Conflicted Knowledge

M.G. VASSANJI

Tazim R Kassam and Francoise Mallison, eds., *Ginãns: Texts and Contexts*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2010, pp. Xxvi + 225, Rs 795.

Oral traditions, by their very natures—diffuse, noncanonical, and lacking precise records—are prone to the exigencies of time, easily becoming sites for contesting ideologies and "truths." The volume under review is a collection of essays on the religious songs from western India called ginans, little known outside the community, or communities, that have preserved them; it opens some doors—if only by cracks—to new discussions and alternative perceptions of this phenomenon, while at the same time scrutinizing its management in modern times with a refreshing openness. This is also a frustrating volume, in that it reflects some of the confusions and contradictions that abound regarding the ginans and the religious ideologies and identity politics to which the communities and their oral traditions have been subjected. The term *ginan* actually belongs to the historically and ethnically related oral traditions of several groups, who today unequivocally identify themselves as either Hindus or Muslims, though in all likelihood they did not do so in the past; however, it is people of Khoja origin who have largely initiated the modern academic study of the ginans, affirming their importance as a historical, literary, and spiritual tradition, and as an area of identity contention in modern times. In this book, dedicated to the scholar Zawahir Moir, the "Ismaili Khoja" community occupies a central place; consequently it is this particular group and its relationship to the ginanic tradition that will be the focus of this review.[1]

First, for the noninitiate, a clarification of two basic terms.

Khojas are an Indian community from the Kathiawad and Kutch areas of western Gujarat,[2] now spread out in India, Pakistan, East Africa, North America, and Europe. They speak Gujarati or Kutchi and sometimes both languages, and are related to the (Kshatriya) Lohana caste with whom they share their *attak*s or family names.[3] Until recently, the majority of Khoja male first names were of forms characteristically ending in *–ji* , thus Kanji, Nanji, Ramji, Sunderji, Raghavji, Shivji, some of them very obviously the names of Indian gods. The Khoja prayer house is popularly called the *khano* (from "jamat khana"), in which congregants sit on the floor, men on one side and women on the other, reminding one of a gurudwara. There is indication from the oral tradition that the prayer house or congregation might previously have been referred to as *gata* (from the Sanskrit root *gam*, "to go"[4]). In the khano, the main prayer was in Kutchi until the 1950s, when it was replaced by an Arabic prayer consisting of Quranic verses;[5] singing of ginans, however, have constituted an essential part of the ceremonies. The head of the congregation, to this day, is called *mukhi* (Skt. *mukha*, "head"), who sits facing the congregation.[6] Services—the giving of blessings, for example—are conducted in Kutchi. (More recently, in North America, English is gradually being introduced.) At the end of services, a prasada of sooji halwa is given, called sukhreet (Skt. *sukarita*), together with "holy" water consecrated in modern times by the Imam. In my childhood, at the back of the khano was a takhat, a large, cushioned throne, on which sat the picture of the Imam. At the end of formal prayers, or indeed at any time of the day, people would go to the takhat, make a small offering, join their hands, and say a personal prayer, usually asking for favours, in much the same way people do in temples. The khano is thus in no way like a conventional mosque.[7]

The Khoja ginan tradition has been remarkably enduring. To this day, in Canada, where I live, youngsters

M. G. Vassanji is based in Canada and is the author of six novels, two collections of short stories, a biography of Mordecai Richler and *A Place Within: Rediscovering India*, a travel memoir about India

speaking only a smattering of Kutchi or Gujarati, will still learn a ginan from an elder and recite it in the khano. Their parents will recall the legendary ginan-singers and memorable ginan recitals from their time. Nevertheless, it is a beleaguered tradition, as some of the observations of this volume affirm, and how long and in what form this tradition will survive remains a question.

Arguably the most important spiritual teacher or guru of the Khojas was Pir Sadardeen, who is believed to have lived some time in the fourteenth century.[8] The uncertainty in his dates is significant, reminding us that much of Khoja history remains speculative. According to tradition Pir Sadardeen was born in Multan and travelled to Benares for sacred learning; in his compositions he refers to himself as Satguru and Guru Sahadev. The ginans attributed to him are mostly in Gujarati, and the most numerous, and are steeped in the Indian Vaishnavite tradition. The followers, or the faithful, are referred to as *virabhai* (*vira*, Skt. "hero"), *munivara* ("best of munis"), *rikhisara* (great rshi) and also *momanabhai* (momin + bhai), in the same way as Kabir exhorts the "sadhus" in his dohas.

The ginanic corpus includes devotional compositions about or directly addressed to Hari, or Krishna; spiritual or mystical ones concerned with the mortality of human life in the Kali Age and the cycle of 8,400,000 (*lakha chorasi*) rebirths facing a person in this world, and the desire to attain *moksha* or release; ginans of a celebratory nature describing the future arrival of the tenth avatar of Vishnu from the west (*pachhama desa*) to Jambudvipa (India), amidst great pomp, when he would defeat the great army of the daitya Kalinga and be greeted by, among others, the satis, Kunti and Anasuya. There are also some remarkable longer tracts of a metaphysical nature running into several hundred verses, called *granths*. Among them are the *Buddhavatar*, the life of the Buddha, the eighth avatar of Vishnu; *Dasa Avatar*, about the ten avatars of Vishnu; *Saloko Moto* (*saloko* presumably from Skt. *shloka); Atharva Veda; To Munivara Bhai*, a description of the genesis of the universe.. Their language tends to be archaic and sometimes with what appear to be mock Sanskritic endings.[9] Some of them proceed with a sub- or super-heading: "Sri Guru Bhirama ho vaca." Only a few of these granths are ever recited today.

In his "syncretistic" theology, Pir Sadardeen, or Guru Sahadev, equates the Quran with the Atharva Veda, the fourth book of the Vedas; and he equates Muhammad with Brahma, and Ali (the first Shia imam) with Vishnu or Krishna (Hari). To the simple Khoja villager, Muhammad and Ali, without their historical associations, would have been merely names; they are also much less frequently invoked than Hari, or Krishna, the familiar god depicted in icons, whose exploits were constantly related in the ambient culture. (To this day, a bhajan about the exploits of the child Krishna can bring a smile upon a Khoja face.) The typical Khoja, a villager, of course could read neither the Quran nor the Vedas.

***

The term *Ismaili* is the name of a small esoteric, unorthodox denomination of the Shia branch of Islam that existed in West Asia and was long (and sometimes still is) regarded as heretic.[10] In the last several decades, the term has come to describe people whose spiritual leader is the Aga Khan, their Imam, claiming direct descent from Ali and the Prophet of Islam. Interwoven within this seemingly simple identity, however, are skeins of complex, forgotten, and sometimes disputed histories. *Ismaili* is today an umbrella term describing various peoples of different ethnicities, places of origins, languages, religious traditions, and histories, all subscribing to some form of belief in the Ismaili Imam. Among Khojas, the Imam is (or was) the foretold tenth avatar of Vishnu, called the Nakalanki (or nishkalanki) avatar; for Afghans or Tajiks, this identification with all its richness of associations, obviously, would not have held. There is no reason to believe either that all those diverse peoples, generally poor, not educated, and rural, communicated with, or indeed were aware of, each other in premodern times.

Ismaili history in Iran and the Middle East is quite colourful and sometimes extremely tangled. In 909 the Fatimid Caliphate, under Imam-Caliphs who traced their lineage to Ali, the cousin of the Prophet, and Fatima, his daughter, was established in what is now Morocco. Later, in the 960s, the Fatimids conquered Egypt, and founded Cairo, which became their new capital. At the end of the eleventh century a succession dispute took place, as a result of which, in 1092, the child Nizar, the younger son of the deceased Caliph, was spirited away to Iran. The Fatimid Caliphate however lasted into the twelfth century, when it was finally destroyed by Saladin. The exiled Ismailis in Iran (the "Nizaris") had meanwhile occupied the Alamut ("Assassin") fortresses, which went on to become the stuff of hearsay and legend. They were destroyed by the Mongol Hulagu Khan in 1256; the Imam of the time was murdered and the Ismailis were dispersed.

***

How did the Gujarati Khojas come to be identified as Ismailis? The term "Ismaili" does not occur in the ginans.

In my travels throughout Kathiawad,[11] whenever in some village I asked for an Ismaili or Agakhani, I would meet a perfectly blank stare; it was only when I asked for a Khoja or the Khoja khanu (khano), that a finger would point out, to a paan stall, a vegetable seller, some trader. Over the past several decades, a Grand Narrative has been constructed to reinforce the Khoja=Ismaili identity that, to put it mildly, raises some questions. Interestingly, and perhaps appropriately, other grand narratives have been constructed by historically related communities, for example the one at Pirana in Gujarat, at the prominent shrine of Imamshah, a grandson of Sadardeen.[12]

The Ismaili-Khoja Grand Narrative runs as follows. Centuries ago, Ismaili missionaries (dai's) were sent from Iran to western India to bring converts to their fold. How to convert the Indians, steeped in their ancient, idolatrous culture and religion, with its joyful forms of worship and multitudinous and endless stories, into an austere and mystical faith whose stories occur in desert lands, and often involve betrayal and bloodshed? A tactic came forward: why not couch Ismaili and Islamic concepts in Hindu terms? Thus, refer to Ali as Hari (for the time being), and to Muhammad as Brahma, and so on. It is as though some masterminds some hundreds, or thousands, of miles away, like le CarrÈ's spy master Karla, had planted Ismaili "sleeper" notions or concepts as "moles," to emerge and come into action in the future when the time was appropriate.

***

Tazim R Kassam, one of the two editors of this volume, in her contribution, "Reframing Ginanic Studies: Thoughts on Multiple Positions and Heuristic Tropes," considers first the different perspectives from which the ginans can be studied, before getting down to business and engaging with the Grand Narrative, in the process contesting the simplistic idea of conversion (a concept to which she admits ascribing in the past). According to the author, "The conversion theory as a framework for understanding the Ginans was first put forward in 1866 CE by the British judge Sir Joseph Arnold in the Bombay High Court when he ruled on what came to be known famously as the Aga Khan Case." (9) Those British again; whether the attribution is strictly accurate or not, in modern times the idea of conversion has been enthusiastically embraced and propagated at a brisk pace by scholars and promoters of the modern Ismaili identity: the dichotomy is easy and convenient, lending itself to binary notions of true and deviant, Muslim and non-Muslim, Hindu and Muslim. However, as Kassam points out, "The confusion that this trope is responsible for has resulted in mishandling of the Ginan tradition including possibly a large-scale burning and destruction of Khojki manuscripts by the Ismailis [sic] themselves that occurred in the early 1900s, and, as many scholars... know from first-hand experience, the continued blocked access to existing manuscripts of Ginans collected and housed in the community's centralized library collections [especially, one presumes, the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London]." (8) Furthermore, is the so-called conversion a rejection of the old "Hinduism" or is it a transformation? For the Khojas, devotees of Hari, an avatar of Vishnu and Lord of Vaikunth, it was definitely not rejection.

There is also the ethical consideration to which I have alluded above: the conversion story implies that the Khojas were essentially duped by their pirs; in the words of the author, "[the logic of conversion]...casts aspersions on the da'wa [the missionary system] by more or less suggesting that it devised a sophisticated system of entrapment to win converts to the cause."(13)

This important paper then breaks new ground in ginan studies; unfortunately it suffers from the tendency to couch in jargon and academese what are in essence very basic ideas that could have been boldly and simply stated. Perhaps this obscuring cloak is necessary to foil the extremist fringe, always active on the Internet with sticks and stones. My more serious objection to this paper, however, is that it appears to hedge its arguments, unable or unwilling to set aside the same "politics of representation" it censures. While affirming the problems associated with the "use of such generic, essentialist, and abstract terms 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' (or 'Ismaili')," (11) it still manages to trip over them. Thus: "Ginans are a repository and reflection of over eight centuries of Shi'a Ismaili Muslim activity and creativity in the Indian subcontinent." (1) This is a big claim indeed, against whose premises I will take issue below. It assiduously avoids the term "Khoja" (except when speaking of the Aga Khan Case, when it cannot be avoided), a term still used by the community everywhere to describe itself, more so in Gujarat. She prefers "Ismaili Muslim," which is doubly abstract and could as well refer to a Syrian or an Azerbaijani, but we are speaking of Gujarati Khojas. It is as though the term "Methodist Christian" were enough to describe a person from Accra, Bangkok, or Philadelphia.

If the ginans are not coded "Ismailese," then what are they? They were, says the author, "an act of creativity that formulated Ismaili ideals anew within a different cultural setting, and it was premised on a genuine appreciation of the richness of myths, symbols, and religious insights that existed within the Indic environment." (15)

Unfortunately, this is not as great a leap forward as it first appears. What does "appreciation" entail? It sounds like patronizing by a detached observer, in which case it is not far from deception. A believer does not see the stories of his religious culture as myths and symbols; rather, they are vital forms of belief, devotion, and contemplation. Furthermore, who was it who "formulated" the "Ismaili ideal"? According to local Indian belief, Krishna's kingdom was at Dwarka, in Gujarat, a stone's throw (loosely speaking) from the homes of the Khojas. What did the formulators, who sound more like academic aesthetes, or subtle propagandists, make of that?—wink and pretend to believe, while they knew for themselves that the real Hari, who was Ali, had lived and ruled in Arabia? Here the text is abstruse, but it appears that Kassam resorts to the Da'wa system to explain the creative process, and we enter the realm of Islamic theology.

What was the Da'wa? It was the Ismaili Imam's missionary or propaganda organization.13 The impression is given, here and elsewhere in this volume, of the Da'wa as an extensive mastermind network existing since Fatimid times (the tenth century) to define, control, and propagate a uniform, canonical Ismaili faith. According to Kassam, "The Ismaili Da'wa...is an institution headed by the Ismaili Imamat that must provide pertinent spiritual guidance and moral teaching or hidayah, intellectually appropriate and meaningful within each unique cultural and historical setting and encounter." This is pure faith or ideology. The reality is murkier. As Daftari, more or less the official historian of the Ismailis, states, after the fall of Alamut (1256) in Iran, for several centuries the Ismaili Imams lived in obscurity; "practically nothing" is known about them until the later part of the fifteenth century.[14] For some period there were, in fact, two competing lines of Imams.[15] The Da'wa system during this period was virtually nonexistent, and the Ismaili communities (wherever they were) existed independently.[16] When the Da'wa emerged as a central propaganda network in Anjudan, in Iran, this was at least a hundred years after the legendary Sadardeen had wandered through western India.

The presence of an outside, manipulative influence on the Gujarati Khojas, the followers of Guru Sahadev, is too simplistic a conception, though no doubt convenient for propaganda. But even if such an agency existed, it is hard to believe its influence would have permeated into all the little communities scattered over western Gujarat, including the Khojas, the Piranapanthis, and others. Indians at the folk level are independent, flexible, and creative—some might say anarchic—in their worship. I have come across Khojas in Kathiawadi villages quietly worshipping at their own private shrines side by side with carrying on their other more regular practice, in spite of the central doctrinaire organization in existence today. In India, even today, people of all and no religious beliefs visit Sufi shrines and follow various gurus according to their current needs and inclinations.[17] There is also the question of authorship of the texts and of revisions at the local level.[18] Where does the outside formulator and appreciator come into this scenario? Daftari says, of the oral tradition, "The ginans and other sectarian religious writings and traditions are often inaccurate on chronological details...frequently mixing legend with reality...."[19] This implied criticism should be turned on its head: what it says, in effect, is that the Indian oral tradition was not in touch with what was happening in Iran.

Another, more complex, narrative seems to me more plausible, in which we have parallel traditions, independent of central authority, some Vaishnavite, some Shaivite, some Tantrik, and so on, all inspired by the presence at one time or another in the distant past of a guru or pir who came from the Ismaili tradition. Moreover, we would not expect these various Indian traditions to have remained static. This does not place the Khoja tradition, if indeed there was a single one, in the centre as the real one, with others as mere offshoots or deviants.

***

The ginans present a conundrum for many who so desperately seek their and their community's legitimation in the universe of Islam. Why a professed devotee or mystic has the need to be identified, absolutely and desperately, with one or the other of the larger mainstream traditions reflects a predicament of our age. Perhaps, to modern Khojas, this identification lends the prestige of a solid and grand—as opposed to a folk and obscure—history, and the reflected glory of historical and intellectual triumphs, however foreign and distant they are in reality. One should not, however, discount the pressure from outside, mainline forces, especially in the subcontinent, as demonstrated in Pakistan recently (January 2011) in the blasphemy controversy.

Besides the destruction of Khoja manuscripts in the past and the "blocking" of access today, as alluded to by Kassam, there have been revisions and constant attempts to interpret them from Islamic viewpoints. Michel Boivin in his contribution to this volume documents this "management" of the "religious heritage." As he notes, "From the middle of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, the Khoja tradition was

reconstructed several times." (37) (The middle of the nineteenth century is when Aga Khan I arrived in India from Iran, as a guest of the Raj and the foretold avatar. Modern Khoja history, including the assorted conflicts and splits, as well as a systematic "management" of the tradition, begins with this intersection of history with mythology.)

A lot of information is presented by Boivin about attempts made in Sindh to link the ginans to Sufism and Vedanta, for example, but unfortunately the article gets somewhat confusing, reading like a list of all Sindhis who had anything to say on the subject. Self-interested, individual interpretations are quoted but we don't know how broadly accepted they were. Some dates would have helped. Moreover, Boivin's explanation of ginanic terms without reference to a ginan needs more convincing. We need convincing too that the ginans were originally composed in Sindhi and then translated. Are we talking of all ginans? Surely not. And where are the Sindhi manuscripts? To say, pace Zawahir Moir, that "19 percent of the total vocabulary used in the Ismaili [sic] Ginans is Arabo-Persian," is neither here nor there: as Boivin himself and others in this volume attest, revisions have been constant; furthermore, these terms are not uniformly distributed throughout the corpus—the granths would have a tiny percent of such terms, for example; and many of these terms—duniya, qayam, didar, iman—are common in everyday Gujarati and Hindi and can be found in the available dictionaries. He uses the already contested terms such as "conversion," "Hindu," and "Muslim" without question. To say that "Naklanki is the Hindu word to designate the saviour, the Mahdi of the Muslims," (40) raises problems at so many levels that it is best to say nothing more here. And the Panjabi Indian Ismailis are not Khojas, they are called Shamsis.

"Like most sacred literature," writes Dominique Sila-Khan, "the Ginanic heritage cannot be considered as an immutable literary tradition that has been created and transmitted without any change, since an 'ideal beginning' to the present time.... the Ginans must have undergone a series of gradual transformations that render meaningless the very concept of 'original' texts or of a perfectly 'pure and pristine' tradition." This much is obvious and it is refreshing to see it plainly stated. Not only do alternate versions of ginans exist; their language varies from the archaic to that which is easily understandable to modern audiences and could not possibly have come to us unaltered.[20] Sila-Khan considers the extensive rewriting of the ginans in modern times undertaken by the Imamshahis of Pirana, in parallel with the rewriting undertaken by the Khojas. The comparison, illustrated by the example of the canonical *Das Avatara* is fascinating. The Khoja version contains a lot more "Islamic terms" than the Pirana version, and indeed more than any other ginan of Pir Sadardeen that I have come across. The *Das Avatar* was recited every day up to the 1950s. Despite the extensive revisions it was officially banned, along with other ginans, at a conference in 1975, because of its "Hindu" elements. It is still fondly recalled by people and is available in a private recording.

Thontya and Malleson give two ginans apparently common to the Khoja and the Barmati traditions. The Khoja versions were, however, published by a "defector," one Sachedina Nanjiani, during the contentious period of the late nineteenth century, and are unattributed—do not have a signature line—and also do not exist in any Khoja compilation today. What the authors mean by calling them a faithful reproduction of the "chaotic oral form of the texts" is mystifying. Nanjiani must have edited the text. Balwant Jani gives us some more ginans, these ones attributed to unknown composers. The article "The Entanglement of the Ginans in Khoja Governance" by Amrita Shodhan is worth reading for an appreciation of the ideological climate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries during which the Khoja compilations and editions were made.

***

There is a central presumption that runs through most of these articles. It is the idea that a pure Ismaili (or Nizari Ismaili) tradition existed at one time in India, from which others have deviated or fallen away. It is remarkable how revision soon becomes fact, as does an unsubstantiated idea repeated often enough. If it does not make sense to speak of "an ideal beginning," as Sila-Khan says, and so much history, centuries old, is so much myth and revision and ideology, what sense does it make to speak of "branches" that "eventually...separated from the Satpanthis" instead of simply considering the different sects as parallel traditions? (The term *satpanth*, "true path," is sometimes used in the ginans to denote the faith or path of the devotee; it could be purely descriptive and in that sense is probably widely used by diverse communities, ginanic or otherwise. The term *Satpanthi* appears to be a recent trend among some academics to describe the community or communities associated with the ginans. The Khojas never refer to themselves by this description.)

We do not know, as far as I am aware, what ginans were collected from where; it is very possible that various Khoja communities had their own ginans that they had preserved, in the same way as other, non-Khoja, people did. We do not even know (there is no proof) that, until

the nineteenth century, there was a central, organized Khoja community. The fact that there were so many splits in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, into Sunni, Shia, Ismaili ("Agakhani"), Arya Samaj, and presumably other factions[21] indicates an absence of uniformity and strong coherence. It is possible that there were a number of separate communities spawned in various regions by gurus or pirs who passed through and were never seen again and were remembered subsequently only through songs and legends.

What is often forgotten in studying the ginans is the obvious fact that words are not simply words, they arose within a cultural matrix. The devotional ginans belong to the bhakti tradition; many of their terms, their tropes are common to other bhakti poets. Those who know their ginans are often delighted at the familiarity of Meera bhajans and Kabir dohas. Moreover, to the people who recited and listened to them they were charged with cultural associations and beliefs going back a millennium or more. Thus Hari is not equal to Ali, as x=y; Hari is Krishna, born in Mathura, he is the butter thief, the teaser of gopis, the slayer of demons, and so on. The listener conjures up these pictures of Krishna aided by icons and paintings. To the Khoja in a village, until recently, and perhaps even now, Ali was a cipher, a name for Hari. It has been an unfortunate tendency of modern scholars, having studied Islam in the academies, to come to the ginans armed with Arabic and a toolbox of medieval Islamic terms, but without appropriate knowledge of Indian languages and cultures; with academic respectability the tradition begins to see itself as an extension of "Islam" that looks to the Near and Middle East and away from its roots in India.

The ginans should be studied for what they are, an Indian literary form inspired by Ismaili esoteric influence centuries ago. To be sure they contain their characteristics. The mystical and devotional themes and images in them are, of course, common to many faiths, Indian or otherwise; there are linguistic peculiarities, and versions of Indian mythology: the awaited arrival of the nishkalanki tenth avatar of Vishnu from the west, his defeat of the daitya Kalinga, and wedding to the virgin, vishwa kunwari (kumari); the story of Harishchandra and Tara Rani, which was so beloved in the East Africa in which I grew up, recited especially on New Year's eve (it was also beloved to the famous Kathiawadi, Gandhi); the elevated status of Kunti (Mata Kunta), Draupadi, and Anasuya; references to "Pahelaj" (presumably Prahlada) and "Jujesthana" (presumably Yudhisthira). There is, remarkably, the near-absence of Shiva or Kali[22] (though one must not forget under what conditions the compilations were made). These are wonderful stories; they are Indian stories; and they are Khoja stories.

A K Ramanujan, has famously called attention to the "many Ramayanas"[23] of India, including Jaina and folk versions, besides Valmiki's canonical one:

> How many *Ramayanas?* Three hundred? Three thousand? At the end of some *Ramayanas*, a question is sometimes asked: How many *Ramayanas* have there been? And there are stories that answer the question. Here is one.

And the Khojas have a *Gita*,[24] and their own versions of canonical stories. One might expect that the community would treasure such an inclusive heritage that defies rigid, fundamentalist divisions that cause so much havoc in the world. Instead, the modern tendency is to root out what is "Hindu" in this heritage; that this tendency has not been without its contradictions, and has not been easy or without resistance, proves a point.[25]

When the Bamyan Buddha statues were proposed to be destroyed, because the Afghans had surpassed their ancient Buddhist faith, so the Taliban said, it was proposed that a curtain be placed over them so that they did not offend.[26] They decided to go ahead and destroy them.

***

I am grateful to Mohamed Alibhai for carefully reading an earlier version of this essay and his corrections and recommendations; and to Ghulam Sheikh for an enlightening discussion on the subject of Kathiawadi folk traditions.

Notes

1. Other Indian and Pakistani Ismailis are the Mumnas of Gujarat and the Shamsis of Punjab.
2. There are Khojas in Sindh too, see article in this volume by Boivin.
3. My description of the Khojas here is based on personal observation, in East Africa from the 1950s onwards, and therefore are of a time and place. Obviously they reflect practices brought over from Gujarat.
4. I make this observation from its usage in the ginan "gatamahe avine..." but would be happy to be corrected.
5. The old prayer was recited, as is the new one, by a single person while the rest of the congregation sat cross-legged on the mat.
6. Beside the mukhi sits an assistant, the *kamadia*; in the women's section the wives of the mukhi and kamadia preside, facing the women.
7. There were other ceremonies and practices which have gone out of use, for example, on special days, the *ghadi*, an elaborate procession consisting of pairs of women, each pair with an older woman holding a ghadi (pot) over the younger woman's head, that went around or through the seated congregation;

the *nyani*, in which an odd number of girls (typically seven) would be fed by a family in their home and given presents, in expectation of blessings; the story, told in Kutchi, of a woodcutter and his mother, recited on the fast of the seventh day after the new moon. The fast itself was referred to as *sati ma jo rojo*, the Fast of the Sati-Mother. It is worth noting here that the haj, he Ramadan fast, and reciting of the Quran have not been part of Khoja religious practice.

8. Farhad Daftari, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines* (London: Cambridge UP, 1990) p. 479. Also, Abualy A Aziz, *A Brief History of Ismailism* (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 1974).
9. For example, *Athar Vedam* begins: "shri nakalanki narayanam alakhiam niricanam..."
10. In this essay, the Nizari Ismailis are meant. The Musta'ali Ismailis, another Ismaili branch, include the Bohras of India. For histories of the Ismailis, see Daftari, *The Ismailis;* Abualy A Aziz, *A Brief* History; and Marshall Hodgson, *The Secret Order of the Assassins* (Philadelphia: ...).
11. An account or my travels in Kathiawad can be found in M G Vassanji, *A Place Within: Rediscovering India* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2009; New Delhi: Penguin, 2010).
12. Some years ago, you were told at Pirana that Imamshah was the son of Hassan Kabirdeen, who was the son of Sadardeen, and so on. Now the story is that Imamshah was the son of Brahmin parents and brought up by a Muslim couple.
13. Daftari, p. 559.
14. Ibid, pp. 446, 451
15. Ibid, pp. 446, 448.
16. Ibid, p. 474.
17. I was told of a group of Khoja Ismailis in Toronto who recently invited a guru from India, apparently as a part-time spiritual guide; and of a family in Nairobi, Kenya, who invited Sai Baba.
18. On the wall of a patola workshop in Patan, I came across a much-loved ginan verse, unattributed; the same devotional verse is present in a recording of bhajans in my possession, attributed in this case, but not to a Khoja pir.
19. Daftari, p. 478.
20. Two copies of the long ginan *To Munivara Bhai* in my possession differ by one verse; there also appear what seem to me like interpolated verses that warn against the corruption of youth and taking tobacco.
21. In one Khoja village I visited, children were being given names like Ashok, and a mukhi recited abhajan in praise of Gandhi to school kids.
22. A rare occurrence of Shiva and Devi, in my experience, occurs in the ginan "Girbhavali Shastra Likhiyate, Shiv Devi Samvad," a conversation between the two deities.
23. A K Ramanujan, "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation." in *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991.
24. I have in mind a Khoja edition of the *Nakalanki Gita* by Imamshah, Sadardeen's grandson, who is worshipped at Pirana.
25. It should be pointed out that Ramanujan's point of view is not without its own purist detractors, cf. http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?236875.
26. Abdulsalam Zaeef, *My Life with the Taliban*, Delhi: Hachette, 2010.