

**An Introduction to the Musical Structure and Performance  
of the Nizari Ismaili *Ginānic* Tradition**

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## Introduction

Through my independent research and discussions with scholars of the Shia Ismaili Nizari tradition of *gināns*, it became apparent that the majority of the research carried out on *gināns* is centered around the historical origins and usage of the *gināns*. Significantly less research has been carried out and compiled on the performance context and musical structure of *gināns*. The first part of this paper aims to provide a brief historical overview of the *gināns* followed by an in-depth examination of the different performance settings in which *gināns* are recited and the rituals in which *gināns* play an important role. This part will draw on the existing historical research that has been done by Islamic scholars including, but not limited to, Abualy Alibhai Aziz, Ali Asani, and Karim Gillani. The second part of this paper will examine the musical structure of *gināns* including the verse structure, rhythm, and *rāga* (melody) using a popular *ginān* titled *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*. I will be using transcription as a tool for in-depth analysis of the rhythm and *rāga* beyond what can be explored when simply reading transliterations or listening to recordings of the *gināns*.

The *gināns* have traditionally been passed down orally from generation to generation, at times due to fear of their destruction and misappropriation.<sup>1</sup> As a result, *gināns* were not originally composed or written using any form of musical notation. For the purposes of this paper, western music notation and terminology will be used to discuss the oral tradition of *gināns*. It is important to recognize that the imposition of western music notation on an eastern tradition such as the *gināns* can be seen as an imposition of western hegemonic ideology. However, I believe that there is value in the use of western music notation as a tool to understand

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<sup>1</sup> Abualy Alibhai Aziz, “Miracles and Gnosis: Pir Satgur Noor and Ginans of Ismaili Satpanth” (Georgetown, USA, Senior University International, 2001), 39.

a tradition such as the *gināns*. This paper should not be read as my support for the use of western music notation as a way to pass down the tradition of the *gināns* in the Nizari Ismaili faith, nor should it be read as my support for the use of western music notation to understand all eastern traditions.

## Part One: The Performance Context

### Historical Background

To understand the tradition of *ginān* we must begin with its linguistic origins; the word *ginān* is derived from the Sanskrit word *jnāna* which has been translated to mean “supreme knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> In his speech at Claremont McKenna College titled *Hymns of Wisdom: The Ismaili Ginans of South Asia*, Ali Asani states that *jnāna* refers to a very specific type of knowledge; “it’s not discursive knowledge, it’s not intellectual knowledge...its emotive knowledge.”<sup>3</sup> Some scholars have used the term *ginān* interchangeably with the word *gnosis* indicating that the term *ginān* may be used broadly to describe any form of esoteric truth. This usage, however, is not common and the term is more regularly used to refer to the literary tradition of the Nizari Ismailis. In this paper, the term *ginān* will be used to refer to this tradition of devotional poetry.

The *gināns* were written by a group of individuals referred to as *pirs* and *sayyids* from approximately the 13th century until the 19th century.<sup>4</sup> According to “the thirty-second Ismaili Imam, Mustansir Billah... ‘a Pir is he whom the Imam has appointed. He is the Best in Creation.

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<sup>2</sup> Shafique N. Virani, “Symphony of Gnosis: A Self-Definition of the Ismaili Ginān Literature,” in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought*, ed. Todd Lawson (London: I.B. Tauris in association with Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2005), 504, [www.academia.edu/36984287/Symphony\\_of\\_Gnosis\\_A\\_Self-Definition\\_of\\_the\\_Ismaili\\_Ginan\\_Literature](http://www.academia.edu/36984287/Symphony_of_Gnosis_A_Self-Definition_of_the_Ismaili_Ginan_Literature) [www.shafiquevirani.org](http://www.shafiquevirani.org).

<sup>3</sup> Ali Asani, “Hymns of Wisdom: The Ismaili Ginans of South Asia” (Claremont McKenna College, October 23, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1anDs9Yej0>.

<sup>4</sup>“Pir,” in *The Institute of Ismaili Studies Glossary*, n.d.

And through him you will acquire the recognition of the Imam”<sup>5</sup> *Sayyids* are considered to be “lords” or “masters” but do not have the same spiritual recognition as *pirs*.<sup>6</sup> Due to a lack of historically accurate information about the *pirs*, it is unclear for scholars exactly how the *pirs* made their way from Iran, where the Imams were located during this period, to India, where the *gināns* were written. However, we do know that once in India, the *pirs* acted as “intermediaries between the Ismaili Imams in Iran and their Khoja followers in India.”<sup>7</sup> Not all of the *pirs* wrote *gināns* but we know that “all together nine Pirs and fourteen sayyids among their descendants, composed Ginans and other literature.”<sup>8</sup> Of the *pirs* who wrote *gināns*, the majority of the *gināns* were written by *Pir Shams* (115 *gināns*), *Pir Sadruddin* (236 *gināns*), *Pir Hasan Kabiruddin* (86 *gināns*), and *Sayyid Imam Shah* (189 *gināns*).<sup>9</sup> To date, there are approximately seven hundred *gināns* that scholars have uncovered. Some scholars estimate that there are over a thousand, unfortunately, many of the ginans have been lost due to “time, failure to make copies, and stolen by seceders who misappropriated the original text.”<sup>10</sup>

*Gināns* are primarily an oral tradition and were passed down through generations as an intrinsic part of religious education. The *gināns* were composed in Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, and Sindhi but words from more than twenty-four different dialects were used. These dialects included Arabic, Baluchi, Bengali, Bhasha, Cuttchi, Daccani, Devnagari, Gujarati, Hindi,

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<sup>5</sup> Imam refers to the hereditary descent of the Prophet Muhammed who acts as a living guide for the Ismaili Nizari community. Abualy Alibhai Aziz, “Miracles and Gnosis: Pir Satgur Noor and Ginans of Ismaili Satpanth” (Georgetown, USA, Senior University International, 2001), 27.

<sup>6</sup> “Sayyid,” in *The Institute of Ismaili Studies Glossary*, n.d.

<sup>7</sup> Khojas were originally a caste of traders from the Gujarat and Sind regions in India that did not identify with a single religious group. During the British imperial rule in India, the Khoja community was forced to splinter along the lines of religion (Hindu/Muslim) and sect (Sunni/Shia). Following this period, a large subset of Khojas identified as Ismailis who pledged their allegiance to the hereditary office of the Aga Khan. For more information on the transition of Khoja identity see Ali Asani, “From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim: The Articulation of Ismaili Khoja Identity in South Asia,” in *A Modern History of the Ismailis* (London: The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), 99, 113.

<sup>8</sup> Aziz, “Miracles and Gnosis: Pir Satgur Noor and Ginans of Ismaili Satpanth,” 39.

<sup>9</sup> C. Shackle and Zawahir Moir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans*, Rev. ed (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Aziz, “Miracles and Gnosis: Pir Satgur Noor and Ginans of Ismaili Satpanth,” 39.

Kashmiri, Lahori, Magdhi, Marathi, Marwadi, Multani, Pali, Prakrat, Persian, Punjabi, Purbi, Sindhi, Siraiki, Sanskrit, Urdu.<sup>11</sup> Some of the *gināns* were written down in a script called Khojkī which was a mercantile script used primarily by the Khoja community in Sind from before the tenth century until the nineteen sixties. The *pirs* used Khojkī manuscripts of the *gināns* to make religious literature more accessible and to create a stronger sense of community amongst Nizari Ismailis in the regions of Sind, Punjab, and Gujarat.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, during times when the Nizari Ismaili community was being persecuted, Khojkī proved a helpful way to prevent outsiders from accessing the community’s doctrines and teachings. Over time, Khojkī was abandoned in favor of Gujarati; today, Khojkī is no longer considered to be a living script. Figure 1 and 2 offer samples of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve* written in Khojkī and Gujarati respectively. Today, *gināns* are often transliterated into English to allow those who do not read and write Gujarati to recite *gināns*. Each *ginān* usually has multiple transliterations available, each with a similar but unique way of indicating the pronunciation of specific words. For example, Figure 3a uses “ā” and Figure 3b uses “aa” to denote a long “a” vowel.<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that regardless of which language the manuscripts were written, *ginānic* manuscripts only notate the poetry in the *gināns* and do not provide any indications of the *rāga*.

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<sup>11</sup> Aziz, “Miracles and Gnosis: Pir Satgur Noor and Ginans of Ismaili Satpanth,” 32.

<sup>12</sup> Ali S. Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia*, Ismaili Heritage Series 6 (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 43.

<sup>13</sup> Moving forward in this paper, this paper will use the transliteration in 3a by Muhammad Ali Kamaluddin as we will also be looking at his translation later in the paper.



Figure 2: Gujarati Manuscript of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*<sup>15</sup>

(૭) મુંગીનાન

Sahebjī tun more man bhāve

સાહેબજી તું મોરે મન ભાવે,  
 અવર મોરે ચીંત ન આવે,  
 દુખ મોરે મન ન ભાવે,  
 સાહેબજી તું મોરે મન ભાવે. (દોઢ)

એજ જે જે માંગુ તે તુંહી દેવે,  
 એવા એવા લાડ લડાવે. સાહેબજી. (૧)

એજ ચારે ચારે જુગમાં ફરી ફરી જોયું,  
 તેરે તોલે કોઈ ન આવે. સાહેબજી. (૨)

એજ ચાલો સાહેલી વર જોવા જઈએ,  
 સો પીયા મેને પાયા. સાહેબજી. (૩)

જસરે વીના ઘડી દોહોલી જાવે,  
 સો પીયા મોરે મંદીર આવે. સાહેબજી. (૪)

એજ જસકારે સાહેબ અયસા હોવે,  
 સો દુઃખીયા કયું કર કહાવે. સાહેબજી. (૫)

એજ દોષ દયાલજીકુ કયું કર દીજે,  
 કરમે લીખીયા સોહી પાવે. સાહેબજી. (૬)

એજ રામ રહેમાન એક ચુસાહીઆ,  
 મુરખ મરમ ન પાવે. સાહેબજી. (૭)

એજ બોલ્યા સૈયદ મહમદશાહ શરણુ તુમારે,  
 તુજે છોડી દુજે દુવારે કહાં જાવે. સાહેબજી. (૮)

Figure 3a: English Transliteration of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*, version 1<sup>16</sup>

Sāhebjī tūñ more man bhāve,  
 Avar more chint na āve,  
 Dujā more man na bhāve,  
 Sāhebjī tūñ more man bhāve,

Eji je je māngūñ te tūñhi deve,  
 Evā evā lāḍ laḍāve, sāhebjī tūñ...

Eji chāre chāre jugmāñhe phari phari joyūñ,  
 Tere tole koi na āve, sāhebjī tūñ...

Eji chālo sāheli var jovā jaie,  
 So piyā maen ne pāyā, sāhebjī tūñ...

<sup>15</sup>Mahān Īsmāīlī Dharmapracārak Sayyad Īmāmshāh Ane Bījā Dharmaprachārak Sayyado Rachit Gīnānono Saṅgrah 4 (Bombay, 1954), 218.

<sup>16</sup>Muhammad Ali Kamaluddin, 50 Ginans: With English Translation and Glossary, vol. 5, 2010. The seventh verse of *Sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve* has been added to this transliteration.

Eji jisre vinā ghaḍi doheli jāve,  
So piyā more mandir āve, sāhebji tūn..

Eji jiskāre sāheb esā hove,  
So dukhiyā kyūn kar kahāve, sāhebji tūn...

Eji dosh dayālḷjiku kiyūn kar dije,  
Karame likhiyā sohi pāve, sāhebji tūn..

Eji rām Rahemān dono ek gusānya,  
Murakh maram na pāve, sāhebji tūn...

Eji boliyā Sayyed Muhammad shah sharan tumāre,  
Tuje chhoḍi duje dvāre kahān jāve, sāhebji tūn...

**Figure 3b: English Transliteration of sāhebḷi tūn more man bhāve, version 2**

Saahebaji tu(n) more man bhaave,  
avar more chi(n)t na aave;  
dujaa more man na bhaave,

Eji Je je maagu(n) te tu(n)hi deve;  
evaa evaa laad ladaave - saahebaji

Eji Chaare chaare jug maa(n)he fari fari joyu(n);  
tere tole koi na aave - saahebaji

Eji Chaalo saaheli var jovaa jaie;  
so piyaa mene paayaa - saahebaji

Eji Jisare vinaa ghadi doheli jaave;  
so piyaa more ma(n)dir aave - saahebaji

Eji Jisakaare saaheb aesaa hove;  
so dukhiala kiyu(n) kar kahaave - saahebaji

Eji Dos dayaalajine kiyu(n) kar dije,  
karame likhiala so paave - saahebaji

Eji Raam Rahemaan ek gusaa(n)hiala;  
murakh maram na paave - saahebaji

Eji Boliala Sayyed Mahammed Shah sharan tamaare;  
tuje chhodi duje duaare kahaan jaave - saahebaji

The *gināns* are performed today in three distinct performance settings: *jamā'at-khāna*,



*ginān mehfīl* (also known as a *ginān mushā'iro*), and in personal practice. The following section will describe in greater detail when and how *gināns* are performed within each of these contexts and how the performance settings differ.

### The Performance Settings of *Gināns*

Nizari Ismailis hold their daily congregational prayers in buildings which they refer to as *jamā'at-khānas*. The word *jamā'at-khāna* is derived from the Arabic word *jama'a* meaning “group” or “community” and the Persian word *khana* meaning “house.”<sup>17</sup> Collectively the word *jamā'at-khāna* means “the house of the community.” Nizari Ismailis have the opportunity to attend *jamā'at-khāna* twice a day for congregational prayers and ceremonies, once at dawn and once in the evening. During these ceremonies, aside from special occasions to be discussed later, a specific set of prayers is recited.

The evening ceremony begins with a *ginān* that is decided upon by the reciter and is followed by selected verses (the specific number depends on the time available to the reciter) from a specific *ginān* titled *jug patī jug nāth srī īslām shāh*, within the community this *ginān* is more commonly known as *āshāji*. Following the recitation of the *gināns* is the recitation of the Nizari Ismaili *duā* which is a prayer that consists of Quranic verses as well as the genealogy of the Imams (but not the *pīrs*).<sup>18</sup> This is followed by a recitation of a specific *tasbīh*, which is a form of *dhikr* or remembrance of god and then the recitation of another *ginān* (to be chosen by the reciter). After the *ginān*, the ceremony continues with the reading of a *farman* which is “an

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<sup>17</sup>“The History of Jamatkhanas and Their Significance,” *The Ismaili*, September 24, 2017, <https://the.ismaili/history-jamatkhanas-and-their-significance>.

<sup>18</sup> Shackle and Moir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia*, 13.

address by the Imam to his community.”<sup>19</sup> Finally, the ceremony concludes with a second recitation of the *duā*.

The prayer ceremonies at dawn are quite similar to the evening prayers in that they both include recitations of the *duā*, a *farman*, a *ginān* and *tasbīh*. The main differences are the order in which the prayers are performed, and that in the dawn ceremony the *duā* is only recited once. At the conclusion of the dawn ceremony the congregation engages in a Nizari Ismaili ritual called *Ghat Paat* which consists of “the ceremonial distribution to the congregation of Holy Water (nowadays water blessed by the Imam).”<sup>20</sup> Certain *gināns* are reserved to be recited during this particular ritual.

It is important to note that on certain special occasions such as *Navroz* (the Persian new year), specific *tasbīhs* and *gināns* are recited on those days. In the case of *Navroz*, the *ginān navarōj nā dhin sohāmṇā* is typically recited. Aside from special occasions and the performance of *āshāji* in the regular evening prayer ceremonies, reciters are typically permitted to choose which *ginān* they would like to recite. However, just as with *rāga* music, specific *gināns* are meant to be recited at certain times in the day and the appropriateness of a *ginān* is taken into consideration in the selection of a *ginān* for any occasion or ceremony. For example, the *ginān* we will be examining later in this paper titled *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve* is typically meant to be recited as a part of evening prayers.

In other Islamic music traditions such as the *qawwālī* tradition, the music is most often performed by trained professors and their disciples. This is not the case with the *ginānic* tradition. Any *murid* is permitted to recite a *ginān* during the daily prayer ceremonies.<sup>21</sup> Prior to

<sup>19</sup>“Farman,” in *The Institute of Ismaili Studies Glossary*, n.d.

<sup>20</sup> C. Shackle and Zawahir Moir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans*, Rev. ed (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 13.

<sup>21</sup> The term *murid* is used to refer to “‘one who seeks’. Sufi tariqas developed around the relationship between the *murids* and a spiritual master (called *murshid*, *pir*, *shaykh* or *qutb*).”

“Murid,” in *The Institute of Ismaili Studies Glossary*, n.d.

the prayer ceremonies, specific *murids* are assigned to recite one of the daily rituals. When it is their turn to recite, they will approach a podium with a microphone and face the other *murids* who are in attendance. Unlike the recitation of the *farman* and the *duā*, when *gināns* are recited, the entire congregation is permitted to sing along with the reciter.

The way in which *gināns* are recited has been taken under strict scrutiny by the governing institutions of the Nizari Ismaili community. *Gināns* are not permitted to be performed with instrumental accompaniment during dawn and evening prayer ceremonies in the *jamā'at-khāna*. Ali Asani indicated in his speech at Claremont McKenna College titled *Hymns of Wisdom: The Ismaili Ginans of South Asia* that the reason behind that decision is out of fear for the Nizari Ismaili community being called *kāfirs* (infidels) by other muslim denominations.<sup>22</sup>

While instrumental accompaniment is not permitted within the *jamā'at-khāna*, outside of that space *gināns* have historically been performed alongside instruments, specifically the Indian harmonium and the tabla.<sup>23</sup> One of the settings in which this occurs is during *ginān mehfil* (also known as a *ginān mushā'iro*). A *ginān mehfil* is “a gathering outside the *jamā'at-khāna*, often in a private home, where singers and instrumentalists join to perform solo or unison choral renditions of ginans along with instrumental accompaniment.”<sup>24</sup> A *ginān mehfil* is similar to a *qawwālī* performance or gathering for Sufi devotional recitation.

*Ginān mehfiles* offer musicians the opportunity to meet each other and, in the past, musicians who have met at these events have created formal groups to perform and record different arrangements of *gināns*. One such musical group is called the Chai Wallahs. In 2010, the duo created a rendition of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve* in which they sing a traditional

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<sup>22</sup> Asani, “Hymns of Wisdom: The Ismaili Ginans of South Asia.”

<sup>23</sup> Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment*, 42.

<sup>24</sup> Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy, “Sacred Songs of Khoja Muslims: Sounded and Embodied Liturgy and Devotion,” *Ethnomusicology* 48, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2004): 259.

version of the *ginān* and in between the verses they rap. These types of musical groups offer musicians the opportunity to create original arrangements of the *gināns* that integrate the tradition with other musical styles such as rap, choral music, and bollywood. While this type of appropriation is permitted, musicians who deviate too far from the traditional structure of melody of the pieces do experience adverse reactions from members of the community who prefer to strictly adhere to the traditional recitation of the *gināns*. The reason behind strict adherence to the traditional performance styles is that in *gināns* there is a strong connection between “the poetry, the message of the poetry, the *rāga*, and the mood it’s supposed to evoke” and to change the poetry or the *rāga* too much would lead to a change in the mood and impact of the *ginān*.<sup>25</sup>

The final common performance setting for *gināns* is in personal and family spaces. Asani describes some of these spaces in his book *Ecstasy and Enlightenment*: “individual versus can be quoted as proverbs; verses can be recited in homes to bring *baraka*, spiritual and material blessings; housewives, in a usage that stresses the links between *gināns* and folk tradition, often recite them while working or as lullabies; audio cassettes with *gināns* sung by ‘star’ singers or recordings of *gināns mehfiils* can be found in many an Ismaili home and even in their cars!”<sup>26</sup> These performance settings are much less formalized than that of *jamā ‘at-khānas* or *ginān mehfiils*. In Islam there is no distinction between *din* (faith) and *duniya* (world) and as a result traditions like the *ginānic* tradition are not confined to formal congregational settings, rather, the integration of these traditions into daily life is a reminder to remember *Allah* at all times.

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<sup>25</sup> Asani, “Hymns of Wisdom: The Ismaili Ginans of South Asia.”

<sup>26</sup> Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment*, 29.

## Part Two: The Musical Structure of *Gināns*

The *ginān* to be explored in part two is titled *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*. This *ginān* was composed by *Sayyid* Nur Muhammed Shah who was one of *Sayyid* Imam Shah's sons. *Sayyid* Nur Muhammed Shah passed away either in 1533 or 1534.<sup>27</sup> Both *Sayyid* Imam Shah and *Sayyid* Nur Muhammed Shah are considered to be controversial figures in Nizari Ismaili history because after *Sayyid* Imam Shah's death in 1520, *Sayyid* Nur Muhammed Shah claimed that he was the rightful Imam of the time (i.e. that he was a direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammed). This claim led to a separation of the Nizari Ismailis; many individuals who lived in Gujarat, where *Sayyid* Nur Muhammed Shah lived, broke away from the Nizari Ismailis and followed his leadership. These individuals were called Imamshahis. Today the Imamshahis are united by their devotion to *Sayyid* Imam Shah and *Sayyid* Nur Muhammed Shah and embody a mixed Hindu and Muslim identity. While the history of Imamshahis is a riveting topic to explore, it is not the topic of interest in this paper. Despite the role of *Sayyid* Nur Muhammed Shah in dividing the Nizari Ismaili community, his *gināns* as well as the *gināns* of *Sayyid* Imam Shah are frequently recited in the Nizari Ismaili community, particularly the *ginān sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*.

From English translations of the *ginān sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*, we learn that the *ginān* is about the relationship between a *murid* and their Imam. The *ginān* describes this relationship from the point of view of the *murid* and it articulates the overwhelming love of the *murid* for the Imam. While this overarching message is conveyed in all English translations of the *ginān*, there is variation across different translations. Figure 4 shows two translations from

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<sup>27</sup>*Sayyid* Nur Muhammed Shah's death year is marked as 1533 on page 8 of Shackle and Moir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia*, whereas on page 114 of Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali, *Brief History of the Shia Ismaili Imams*, his death year is marked as 1534.

different sources. The first is from Aziz Esmail's book titled *A Scent of Sandalwood: Indo-Ismaili Religious Lyrics* and the second is from Muhammed Kamaluddin's *50 Ginans with English Translation and Glossary*. One of the most significant differences between the two publications is that in Kamaluddin's translation, the seventh verse is entirely omitted. Another difference is that Kamaluddin's translation includes the exclamation of "Eji" (translated as "O") that begins each verse. What is interesting in Kamaluddin's translation is that there seems to be a subject following each exclamation of "Eji" that seems to have been added by the translator. Another difference is that Esmail's translation is framed as a poem in English whereas Kamaluddin offers his translation in paragraph form. The reason for these discrepancies is likely because the act of translating *gināns* is very difficult. The *pirs* and *sayyids* frequently use philosophical metaphors and symbolism and when combined with the use of words from over twenty four different dialects, translating *gināns* becomes a very daunting task. As noted by Abualy Alibhai Aziz in his dissertation, this difficulty has led to the incorrect translations and misrepresentation of *gināns*. Aziz advises readers that "one cannot read the Ginans to grasp the message without the help of an experienced teacher."

**Figure 4. Translations of sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve**

	<b>A Scent of Sandalwood: Indo-Ismaili Religious Lyrics by Aziz Esmail<sup>28</sup></b>	<b>50 Ginans with English Translation and Glossary by Muhammed Kamaluddin<sup>29</sup></b>
<b>Extended Refrain</b>	My lord, My heart is fond of you. I think of no-one else. None else pleases my heart. My lord, My heart is fond of you.	Lord! You please my heart; no one else occupies my thought and heart. No one else pleases my heart. O Lord! You please my heart.
<b>Verse 1</b>	So readily, my lord,	O Lord! Whatever I ask for, you

<sup>28</sup>Esmail, *A Scent of Sandalwood*, 128–29.

<sup>29</sup>Kamaluddin, *50 Ginans: With English Translation and Glossary*.

	<p>You give me Whatever I ask of you. You indulge me In so many ways, My lord.</p>	<p>grant it to me; you spoil me in many ways.</p>
<b>Verse 2</b>	<p>In all four ages, I went about, Looking hard. I found none To match you, my lord.</p>	<p>O Lord! I have visited and seen all the four yugas, there is none like you.</p>
<b>Verse 3</b>	<p>Come, come, My maiden friends, Let us go To view the groom. He's the one, the beloved I've attained.</p>	<p>O friends! Come, let us go and see the Lord; I have obtained that Lord.</p>
<b>Verse 4</b>	<p>He comes to my home, The beloved, He but for whom A minute is hard to pass.</p>	<p>O brother! The beloved without whom it is arduous to pass even a moment, is coming to my house.</p>
<b>Verse 5</b>	<p>How should we call him Unhappy - He whose lord Is one such as this?</p>	<p>O brother! How can one be unhappy whose Lord is such?</p>
<b>Verse 6</b>	<p>How should we find fault With the merciful? What's written In our karma Is what we shall have.</p>	<p>O brother! Why blame The Merciful Lord? Whatever is destined by deeds will be obtained.</p>
<b>Verse 7</b>	<p>Ram and Raheman Are but one Deity. Of this mystery, The fool is quite unaware.</p>	<p>[No translation provided]</p>
<b>Verse 8</b>	<p>So said Saiyad Mohamad Shah: I am bonded to you, My lord. Leaving you, At what other door Am I to knock?</p>	<p>O Lord! Sayyad Mohammad Shah (r.a.) entreats that I have taken refuge in you. How can I leave you and approach another</p>

Now that I have established the historic background of *gināns* in general and *sāhebji tuñ*

*more man bhāve*, part two will explore the musical structure of the *ginān*. Specifically, I will be looking at the verse structure, rhythm, and *rāga* (melody).

### Verse Structure

*Gināns* are organized into verses; “the number of verses in a *ginān* varies tremendously: the shorter compositions may contain four to ten stanzas while the longer ones may comprise of over five hundred.”<sup>30</sup> For example, *Sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve* has eight unique verses. In addition to verses, most *gināns* also include a refrain which can also be called a *tek* or *varaṇī*. In the case of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*, the refrain is the same phrase as the title of the *ginān*: “sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve.” This specific *ginān* begins with an extended version of the refrain before going into the verses:

Refrain	Sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve,
Extension of Refrain	Avar more chint na āve, Dujā more man na bhāve,

At the end of each of the verses, the refrain is repeated to hold “together the different ideas expressed in the various verses of a *ginān*.”<sup>31</sup> This repetition is denoted differently in each transliteration of a *ginān*. In the transliteration in Figure 3a, Kamaluddin ends the verse with a comma followed by the first two words of the refrain and an ellipsis to indicate that the reciter should sing the refrain after the verse.

Eji je je māngūñ te tūñhi deve,  
Evā evā lāḍ lāḍāve, sāhebjī tuñ...

<sup>30</sup> Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment*, 38.



What may be confusing about this notation is that some readers take the ellipses to mean they should repeat the refrain alone, while others interpret it as an indication to repeat the refrain and the extension of the refrain. Some reciters will recite the refrain alone, without the extension, for the first seven verses but will conclude the last verse with the refrain and the extension of the refrain. Without clear instructions, this is left open to the interpretation of the reciter.

The last verse of a *ginān* usually includes “a *bhanitā* (sometimes called *chāp*) or signature line, which identifies the composer of the work.”<sup>32</sup> In the last verse of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*, Sayyid Nur Muhammed Shah includes a signature line:

Eji boliyā Sayyed Muhammad shah sharan tumāre,  
Tuje chhoḍi duje dvāre kahān jāve, sāhebjī tuñ...

As can be observed from the use of a refrain, repetition plays an important role in the recitation of a *ginān*. Aside from the repetition of the refrain, reciters will often repeat the verse lines as well; this repetition is not usually reflected in manuscripts, transliterations, or translations. For example, many reciters will repeat the first and second line of each verse so that the recitation is as follows:

Line 1	Eji je je māngūñ te tūñhi deve,
Line 1	je je māngūñ te tūñhi deve,
Line 2	Evā evā lāḍ laḍāve,
Line 2	Evā evā lāḍ laḍāve,
Refrain <sup>33</sup>	Sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve.

In my research I have not come across an explanation for this improvisational repetition.

However, repetition plays an important part in Islam across different types of rituals. For

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<sup>32</sup> Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> This marks the location after which some reciters will continue into the extension of the refrain before moving on to the next verse.

example, the practice of *dhikr* involves the repetition of the names of *Allah* or His attributes. Through repetition, *dhikr* aims to bring the *murid* closer to *Allah*. Another example of repetition in Islamic practices is through the musical tradition of *qawwālī*. Similar to *gināns*, *qawwālī* is “mystical poetry...set to music.”<sup>34</sup> In the practice of *qawwālī*, repetition is very important: “repetition with its concomitants expresses and conveys intensification.”<sup>35</sup> In the performance of *gināns*, I hypothesize that the use of improvisational repetition similarly offers an opportunity for the reciter to emphasize the lines and create an intensifying experience for themselves and the congregation to whom they may be performing.

### Rhythm

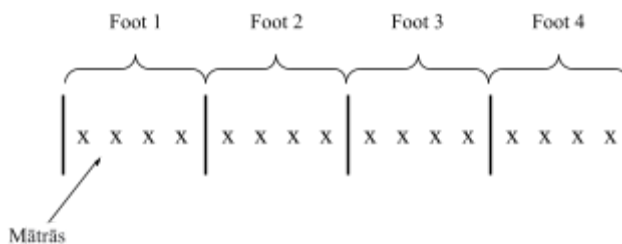
The rhythm of *gināns* has been briefly described by Asani as well as by Shackle and Zawahir. Asani provides us with a potential framework with which to understand the rhythm of *gināns*. He provides us with three common meters that are used: the *dohā*, the *caupāī*, and the *soraṭha*. The *caupāī* meter “consists of a quatrain each of whose four lines comprises 16 *mātrās*. These 16 *mātrās* are arranged into four ‘feet’ each containing a fixed number of *mātrās*. The *caupāī*’s rhyme scheme follows the pattern AAAA or AABB” (Figure 5).<sup>36</sup> The *dohā* has 24 *mātrās* in each line and 2 lines. Within each line the *mātrās* are split into one division of 13 and one division of 11. The *soraṭha* is the same as the *dohā* but the division of 11 comes before the division of 13.

#### **Figure 5. Caupāī meter**

<sup>34</sup> Regula Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context, and Meaning in Qawwali* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 83.

<sup>35</sup> Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan*, 216.

<sup>36</sup> Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment*, 38.



While Asani’s rhythmic framework seems to be quite straightforward, Shackle and Zawahir remind us that “deviations from a strict metrical count may be found in all the ginans...and should be borne in mind in applying the underlying pattern given at the beginning of the notes to each hymn to any given verse.”<sup>37</sup> Shackle and Zawahir make an important point here as reciters frequently deviate from having any rhythmic structure in their recitation of a *ginān*. In the case of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*, I found that each recording had a different rhythmic structure and it was very difficult to pinpoint a standard metre simply from listening to recordings. Shackle and Zawahir have observed that “the most seemingly complex stanza-patterns occur in the long ginans of Sayyid Nar Muhammed Shah” which made the task of transcribing this specific *ginān* more challenging.<sup>38</sup>

To conduct a rhythmic analysis of this piece, I listened to multiple recordings available through Ginan Central, a formal digital curation of the *gināns* offered by the University of Saskatchewan. By listening to the different recordings and comparing them against Asani’s framework, I was able to identify that the meter of the piece was most aligned with the *caupāī* meter. In Figure 6, the first verse of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve* has been transcribed. In the transcription, *mātrās* are represented by each measure and feet are represented by 4 bar phrases. In the whole verse there are 4 feet and a total of 16 *mātrās* or framed in western classical music notation, the piece is written in 4/8 and each verse is 16 bars of music.

<sup>37</sup> Shackle and Moir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia*, 25.

<sup>38</sup> Shackle and Moir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia*, 26.

Figure 6. Transcription of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*, verse 1

According to Asani, the *caupāī* is also meant to have a specific rhyming scheme of AAAA or AABB, however, upon examining the transliteration of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve* according to its feet (Figure 7a) the *ginān* does not align with this rhyming structure. Some verses, such as the first verse, of the *ginān* follow an ABCB rhyming structure. Unfortunately, this rhyming pattern only applies to some and not all of the verses of the *ginān* (Figure 7b):

Figure 7a. Rhyming structure of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*, verse 1

Foot 1	Eji je je māngūñ	A
Foot 2	te tuñhi deve,	B
Foot 3	Evā evā laḍ	C
Foot 4	laḍāve,	B

Figure 7b. Rhyming structure of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*, verse 2

Foot 1	Eji chāre chāre jugmānhe	A
Foot 2	phari phari joyūñ,	B
Foot 3	Tere tole koi	C
Foot 4	na āve	A

*Rāga*

As mentioned earlier in this paper, *gināns* are composed using classical Indian *rāgas*. *Rāgas* provide a melodic framework for the *gināns* but also help the *gināns* to convey distinct moods and themes. Different *rāgas* are associated with different times of the day and because *rāgas* are the foundation of *gināns*, *gināns* also share this time-related nature (i.e. certain *gināns* are meant to be recited for dawn prayer ceremonies and others for evening ceremonies). *Rāga* music, like *gināns*, has historically been an oral tradition, and as a result, the *gināns* have never had their melodies written down. The transmission of *gināns* from generation to generation has occurred through a combination of teaching, poetry manuscripts, and (more recently) sound recordings. Without manuscripts to describe the structure, rhythm, and melody of the *gināns*, “ginanic prosody ‘suffers from great inexactitude.’”<sup>39</sup> One of the ways in which this “inexactitude” manifests is in the way the *ginānic rāgas* have transformed over time. The growth of the Nizari Ismaili diaspora has led to geographic differences in the way that *gināns* are sung; today, the same *ginān* may be sung across the world in different *rāgas* or in the same *rāga* but with a different tune.

The *ginān sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve* is most commonly sung in *rāga* Yaman. This *rāga* is meant to be sung in the early evening. *Rāga* Yaman is used to express a mood that is “serene, calm, and peaceful and at the same time joyful and lively.”<sup>40</sup> The *rāga* has *aaroha* (ascending notes): Ni Re Ga Ma# Pa Dha Ni Sa and *avroh* (descending notes): Sa Ni Dha Pa Ma# Ga Re Sa. In western music scales, this correlates with the following fixed Do solfège: ascending Ti Re Mi Fi So La Ti Do and descending Do Ti La So Fi Mi Re Do. In Figure 8, this raga is demonstrated with Sa/Do on C, with this representation of *rāga* Yaman, it resembled the

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<sup>39</sup> Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment*, 38.

<sup>40</sup> A.A. Bardekar and Ajay. A. Gurjar, “Empirical Study of Indian Classical Ragas Structure and Its Emotional Influence on Human Body For Music Therapy,” *Journal of Management Engineering and Information Technology (JMEIT)* 3, no. 4 (August 2016): 2.

western scale of D major. However, it is important to note that unlike western music scales, *rāgas* can begin on any note and maintain the same *aaroha* and *avroh* pattern. Thus, the reciter can choose to begin the piece on B or any other note that is comfortable for their vocal range.

**Figure 8. Transcription of *rāga Yaman*, written beginning on B**



In the following transcription (Figure 9), of the first verse and refrain of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*, the notes align perfectly with those in *rāga Yaman*. While the transcription provides a skeleton for the piece in *rāga Yaman*, many reciters will add in additional improvised grace notes and trills throughout the *ginān*. These improvised notes contribute to the rhythmic ambiguity of the *ginān* when it is recited.

**Figure 9. Transcription of *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*, verse 1 and refrain**

The purpose of transcribing both *rāga Yaman* and *sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve* is to provide a visual representation of the piece’s rhythm and melody. It allows us to see how the piece aligns with the *rāga Yaman* and the *caupāī* meter. Moreover, the value of having

transcriptions of the *gināns* goes beyond the analytical benefits for this individual *ginān*. Transcriptions allow us to find common ground upon which to compare and contrast different musical traditions. Upon further analysis, we may realize that we find insights into the historic relationships between different musical traditions. This paper is simply the first step towards understanding the tradition of *gināns* from within its musical structure and framing.

### Conclusion

This paper began with a historical overview of the *ginānic* tradition of the Nizari Ismailis which included an examination of who composed the *gināns*, how many were composed, and in what languages. Part one also looked at the different types of settings in which *gināns* are performed and engaged. The first half of the paper aimed to provide a foundation upon which to explore the musical structure and form of this tradition. Part two of this paper took an in-depth look at the *ginān sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve*'s verse structure, rhythm, and *rāga*. Through the use of musical transcriptions, we can conclude that the commonly recited *ginān sāhebjī tuñ more man bhāve* is written in the *caupāī* meter and is most commonly sung to the *rāga* Yaman.

The purpose of this paper was to offer new analysis on the musical structure and form of *gināns* and to take note of some of the musical features that had not previously been explored such as the use of repetition in *gināns*. In addition to fulfilling this goal, this paper has also demonstrated that transcription can act as an important tool to help future researchers create connections across different Islamic and non-Islamic musical traditions that may have arisen around the same time as the composition of the *gināns*. I hope that this paper provides helpful

analysis for future researchers looking to explore the *gināns* from an ethnomusicological perspective.



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