

Field Research on Khoja Ismaili Muslim Hymns Ginans

I would like to direct my ethnographic field research on the Shia Ismaili Muslim community in Punjab and Sind. My research will explore the religious hymns (Ginans) of the Shia Ismaili community. Ginan literally means divine knowledge or gnosis. The Shia Ismaili Muslim shared a long history of living in Sind and Punjab regions since early ninth and tenth centuries. In fact, the Fatimid Ismailis have once ruled the region of Multan in the early tenth century and their regime was brutally ended by Mahmud Ghaznavi. Since then, the community has migrated to southern part of Sind and Punjab and observed taqiyya (dissimulation, hide their religious identity to avoid persecution). From 11th CE to 18th CE many Ismaili preachers came from Iran to spread the *dawa* (religious mission) and converted large communities of Hindus and Buddhist to Islam. Their mode of teaching was primarily based on the religious hymns Ginan, through hymns they have shared the Quranic teachings in a local vernacular languages. At present, there are over one thousand Ginan hymns, which were composed by numerous Ismaili Preachers in various languages including Sindhi, Punjabi, Sriaiki, Hindi, Gujarati and local vernacular local dialects and languages. Each ginan has its own distinct tune (raga), which was composed in various indigenous music found in Sind and Punjab including *Kafi, Wai, Bait, Sur* etc.

My ethnographic field research will be based on two folds. First of all, I would like to conduct my field research at the tombs of Ismaili preachers including Pir Shams Sabzwari in Multan, Pir Sadardin in Uch Sharif, Pir Hassan Kabiruddin in South of Uch Sharif, all of them in Punjab, Pir Tajdin in Tando Bhago, and Sayeda Imam Begum in Karachi, Sind. I will conduct historical research about the tombs and will also take interviews with the shrine keepers, visitors, local residents, singers, and musicians regarding their connection with the Ginan tradition. Secondly, I would also like to conduct dialogical research and interviews with the community members who reside in Punjab and Sind and regularly recite Ginan as a part of their daily devotion. In Punjab, the community is known as Shamsi (followers of Shams) and in Sind they are known as Khoja (derived from the Sindhi word Khawaja, means respected community). Currently, most community members are living in Multan, Talwandi, Gujranwala, Sahiwal, Lahore and in Sind, Mir Pur Khas, Tando Mohammad Khan, Badin, Haiderabad, Karachi, etc.

Research Outcome:

Based on my previous PhD research, the current research will assist me greatly to publish my upcoming monograph book on Shia Ismaili Ginans from Pakistan. The entire duration of my field research will last three months from April 2016 to June 2016.

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