Typographic development of the Khojki script and printing affairs at the turn of the 19th century in Bombay

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OVERVIEW

The Khojki script is an Indian script whose origins are in Sindh (now south of Pakistan), a region that has witnessed more than 1,200 years of interplay between Islam and Hinduism. After the gradual occupation of the region by Muslims from the 8th century onwards, the script took on different usages among its community, the Khojas.

Sindh, Punjab and Gujarat, were the first places that received gradual Muslim religious incursions into Hindu communities, to which language and writing constituted the first barrier for conversion. It is believed that one prominent Muslim *pir* (Pir Sadruddin) was very much active inside the Hindu Lohana community in the 14th century, a caste of merchants and traders. As a way to approach and transmit the teachings to the people, the *pir* adopted the Lohānākī script of this community. Later on, the converted came to be known as the Khoja caste.

Significantly, a totally different creed, known as *Satpanth*, grew inside the community after the blend of these cultures. Academic interest has been stimulated by the special nature of the *Satpanthi* literature and its place in the Indian subcontinent. It has emerged as a fascinating example of an Islamic religious movement expressing itself within a local Indian religious culture. The evidence of the existence of Khojki is found in manuscripts with *Satpanthi* poetry and hymns, commonly known as *ginān*s.

Nevertheless, the script was unrefined and rudimentary, limited to mercantile uses. For this reason, in order to record religious



Figure 1
The map shows the regions in the Indian subcontinent with current political borders in bold lines. After partition in 1947, Punjab straddles the border created after the division. [Illustration by Juan Bruce. Not to scale]

literature, the script went through several refinements during its history. The gradual result is what we know as the current Khojki script. This step forward allowed Khojki to achieve, later in history, a considerable typographic development with the design of a set of metal types for printing by the end of the 19th century, in Bombay.

The Khojas were of significant importance in the region, and the impact of their transition, from an Hindu merchant caste to a broader Muslim community, is critical to the development of the script and the role it plays in the identity of the Khojas. Nowadays, different versions regarding the ownership of the script are in dispute. The Nizari Ismailis Khojas, Muslims from the Shia branch of Islam, claimed that the script, as well the teaching of the *gināns* by the *pirs*, were used to convert the Lohanas from Hinduism to Shia Ismailism. However, al clues suggest that this perspective was first publicly articulated in the 19th century.

Comparative analysis of printed Khojki texts show inconsistencies in the narrative of the Khoja Ismaili community regarding dissemination of printed literature and origins of the presses involved. Moreover, the term *Satpanth* has been historically used by Ismailis that claim to be Muslim, as well as by adherents of

subgroups that claim to be Hindu. Plurality in identity has been a prominent characteristic of the Khojas.

This diversity lead to important conflicts within the community in the 19th century. But the most relevant conflict was triggered after the arrival of the Aga Khan, exiled from Persia, who came to Bombay in 1842 to re-order the community as their Shia Imam (leader). The presence of the Imam upset some traditional groups, leading to intense disputes in the British courts of Bombay. In the aftermath of the famous 'Aga Khan Case' in 1866, the Khojas who remained loyal to the Aga Khan came to identify themselves as Ismailis (also 'Aga Khanis'). During that trial, the *Satpanthi* literature, as well the Khojki script, had a significant role in the resolution of the case when a text called *Das Avatar* proved, somehow, that it was a Shia document, thus their followers. "While the first nine chapters of the *ginān* focus on Hindu avatars, the final chapter focuses on Ali (the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law and the first Imam in Shia Islam) and regards Ali as *Nakalanki*, the tenth avatar".[1]

Hence, under the status of being the official script of the Shia Ismaili Khojas, the publication of religious literature in Khojki was centralized and brought under the direct control of the Aga Khan, who introduced a programme of reforms (*farmans*), through the official Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, to align the process of identity transformation from an Indic caste to a Muslim denomination.[2]

The texts were standardized, and independent presses were discouraged. These were few of many reforms lead by the dynasty of Aga Khans among the Khoja Ismailis, making their Indic traditions soon incompatible with an evolving Islamic identity.

The polarization and tense atmosphere under the British colonial rule, which narrowly demarcated 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', pressured the Khoja to reshape their identity. Plurality was then difficult to sustain against prevailing modernity. In the decades that followed, the script gradually began its decline when the presses stopped the production of texts in Khojki. The script gave way first to the Gujarati script, and later on to Arabic.

The encounter between Hindus and Muslims generated the creation of the script centuries ago. Later on, and due to the polarizing forces of religious nationalism in the Indian subcontinent, was it this same encounter which caused its final demise? As an Indian script, its death seemed inevitable in a community that responded with equal survival instinct to the growth of Muslim nationhood, a scheme to which they began to be part of, only when they removed their Indic roots.

1 PUROHIT, TEENA. *The Aga Khan Case*, 2012. p. 48.

2 ASANI, ALI S. *From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim*, 2010. p. 4.

PRINTED KHOJKI

The print industry in Bombay flourished from the end of the 18th century particularly with the Gujarati script. Most of the time, the metal types were cast by employees of the companies, such as with the Curier Press, the first one in the region. Later in 1812, the first vernacular press was established, and they also used Gujarati types of their own production.[3]

Alternatively, as the metal types had to be brought from Germany (later questioned in this paper), the presses founded by the Khoja with Khojki type were only established a century later. Therefore, the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th were of special importance in the history of Khojki, as by that time, at least two presses were active in the business of recording *Sathpanthi* literature with the Khojki script.

The dispute of the Khojas by the 1860s, became a source of growing tension and was having significant consequences in the second half of the 19th century. Differentiation among the communities was being asserted more fiercely. In fact, the split probably stimulated the beginning of the printing presses in order to promote and disseminate their own literature.

The printed *ginān* texts were under extreme vigilance in order to not mistake the sources and representation of the creed. However, the Khojki script was caste specific; hence was their *Satpanthi* literature. For this reason it was very hard to classify the literature of the Khojas within one group or another.

The printing presses

Lithography and Metal type methods

By the end of the 19th century, various lithographs* were published in the Khojki script under the auspices of individual members of the community. Samples of Khojki lithographs from this period were published around 1890s by Kasam Bhai Karim Bhagat through the Datt Prasādh Press in Bombay (Fig. 2 next page) and by M. Sale Kasam through the J.D. Press, Bombay.[4]

A few decades earlier, the Aga Khan II, Aqa Ali Shah (1830–1885), launched a campaign in Sindh, Kathiawar, Gujarat and Cutch to collect old and rare manuscripts of the *gināns*. He delegated Lalji Devraj, a proficient Ismaili business man, to unearth them.[5]

In Gujarat there are villages that are totally *Satpanthi*, such as Pirana, near Ahmedabad. For this campaign, Devraj also went to Pirana to search *ginānic* manuscripts. Many Ismailis delivered him their collections; whether sold, donated, or borrowed. It is said that Devraj also received extra encouragement from Aqa Ali Shah

* From antient greek (λίθος) *lithos*, meaning 'stone', lithography is a method of printing originally based on the incompatibility of water and oil. In a nutshell, the image is illustrated on a flat stone to produce the matrix that would serve to transfer a mirrored image onto paper several times.

3 PRIOLKAR, ANANT K. *The Printing Press in India*, 1958. p. 73.

4 ASANI, ALI S. *Ecstasy and enlightenment*, 2002. p. 108.

5 TAJDDIN S.A., MUMTAZ. "Laljibhai Devraj." *101 Ismaili Heroes,* 2003. pp. 281–287.

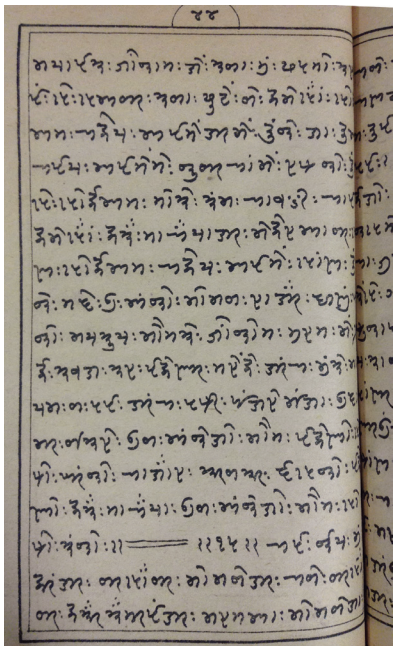


Figure 2 *Rasālō ēmām jā'aphar sādhikjō.* Printed by Datt Prasādh Press. Bombay, 1896.

Fidelity to calligraphy was prized. For the printing of books in Europe lithography remained a marginal technology (mostly used for illustrations), but among Muslim communities of India and Southeast Asia, lithography became the premier printing method, especially for reproducing religious texts with Arabic script. The presses required less financial investment to establish and less skills to operate. [ROSS, F., and GRAHAM SHAW. *Non-Latin scripts. From metal type to digital type.* London: St. Bride, 2012. pp 23–25]

to start the press, who also seem to have financed the project. For about six months, he employed a number of scribes to make copies of the *gināns* in Khojki and then distribute them among the people of the community.[6] In contrast to what is later said in this paper, according to Zawahir Moir, "the printed material appear to have consisted of almost verbatim copies of the content of the Khojki manuscripts, particularly works belonging to the *ginān* genre, with very little editing".[7]

When the demand increased, he started to print with lithography to supply more copies, but apparently not even this media was enough. After further demand from the community, he made up his mind to prepare Khojki metal types for more efficient printing.[8]

It is presumed that Devraj travelled throughout India but he could not find anyone capable of designing the Khojki type. After this failure, he read in a newspaper that a foundry in Hamburg, Germany, was capable of preparing the printing metal types of any script.[9] "He visited Germany in 1903 for a period of three months and succeeded to prepare the Khojki types for the first time".[10] After his trip, he went back to India and with a brand new Heidelberg machine, he established in 1903 the Khoja Sindhi Printing Press in Palkhi Mola, Bombay, under the auspices of being the official community press.[11]

Ghulam-i Husain Chapakhanu Press

This whole version of how Devraj was the first person to bring the Khojki metal type to India is very inconsistent. It is of common agreement, nontheless, to assume that with the development of metal type printing, the lithographs were gradually replaced. In the same vein, according to Mumtaz Tajddin Sadiq Ali, author of the book 110 Ismaili Heroes, the press Ghulam-i Husain Chapakhanu, which operated from 1880s, published the *gināns* only in litho printing. Actually, he remarks that these litho books were very costly, thus the Ismaili people could not afford them. He then implies, that with the Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, the people was finally able to afford the cost of such literature. This version presumes that the Khoja Sindhi Printing Press overtook the business of Ghulam-i Husain Chapakhanu Press, and rapidly made it obsolete due to their higher printing costs. This might be true, but not because it is a cheaper technology, but probably because it was sponsored by the Aga Khan, as lithographs presses were quite popular in India and Muslim communities because they were cheaper to establish and easier to operate (Fig. 2).

The official version states that Devraj shipped everything from Germany. Considering the weight of those boxes and the distance travelled, it is hard to find reasons why Devraj's Press was cheaper. It is also said that Devraj spent three months in Germany waiting

6 TAJDDIN S. A., MUMTAZ. "Laljibhai Devraj." *101 Ismaili Heroes,* 2003. pp. 281–287.

7 Personal communication from Zawahir Moir to Ali S. Asani. In asani (2002). p. 108.

8 TAJDDIN S. A., MUMTAZ. "Laljibhai Devraj." *101 Ismaili Heroes*, 2003. pp. 281–287.

9 IBID. pp. 281–287.

10 IBID. pp. 281–287.

11 ASANI, ALI S. *Ecstasy and enlightenment,* 2002. p. 108.

for the metal sorts to be ready, yet to prepare a whole case (for at least three optical sizes and styles) would take much more time; more that for Germans this was an exotic and a non-familiar script. Ali S. Asani, in his essay *From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim*, brings to light facts that support this contradiction; "to prevent the circulation of non-official versions of *ginān* texts, private publications were discouraged; the Ghulam-i Husain Chapakhanu, a private press which used to print lithographs of *gināns,* stopped doing so in the early 20th century."[12] Notwithstanding Asani's relevant conjecture regarding the interventions of the Aga Khans in these matters, he also mistakenly assumes that Ghulam-i Husain Chapakhanu press printed only with lithography, and we will have to blame the scarce available information of this erroneous supposition.

In spite the fact that a century earlier was possible to cast Gujarati metal types in Bombay, we will not continue to draw conclusions about the lack of necessity in preparing a press in Germany. However, through analysis of printed samples, we will be able to evidence that Ali Ghulamhusain (the owner of the press) also developed Khojki metal types characters and printed pieces of religious literature; and, at least, eight years earlier than the Khoja Sindhi Printing Press (Fig. 3).

12 ASANI, ALI S. *From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim*, 2010. p. 24.

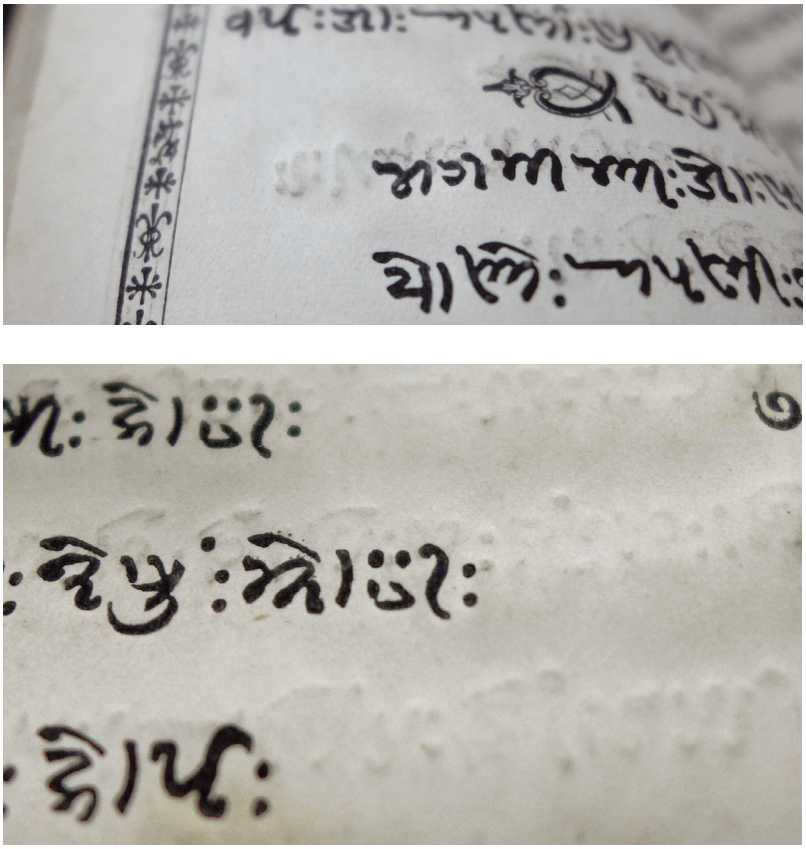


Figure 3 *Satavni vadi tathaa nindhi*. Printed by Ghulam-i Husain Chapakhanu Press, Bombay, 1896.

The art of arranging type to display written language is called typography. This discipline started with movable type, a method of printing in which individual characters made of metal are set in composing trays to create a matrix. By the 19th to the 20th century, the latest and most efficient technology was this metal type movable system. Despite most sources agreed that this particular press used lithography or wood type, due to the size of the printed letters seen in these samples, there is no doubt that they are metal sorts; they are too small to be wood or ceramic types, and lacked the flat texture of litho printing.

For instance, in these pictures, it is possible to see reliefs on the paper made by the pressure of the metal types on a softer surface. This is enough proof to the author that we are in front of metal type printing, as no other material gives that strong and sharp relief on paper.
[Pyarali jiwa's personal collection.
Photo taken by Juan Bruce]

Analysis on printed samples

With the literature available one cannot make solid conclusions, because the history of printing of the Khoja Ismailis is quite insufficient. However, these facts highlight the thesis that Devraj's story was deliberately enhanced to propagate the texts that the Aga Khan wanted to distribute in the community. "Since Devraj had the backing of the Aga Khan, Ismaili Khojas considered his editions to be a *bona fide* and authoritative text of *ginānic* literature."[13] Significantly, it was not the price of manufacture, but the intention to standardize the literature which provoked the cessation in distribution of independent *Satpanthi* texts.

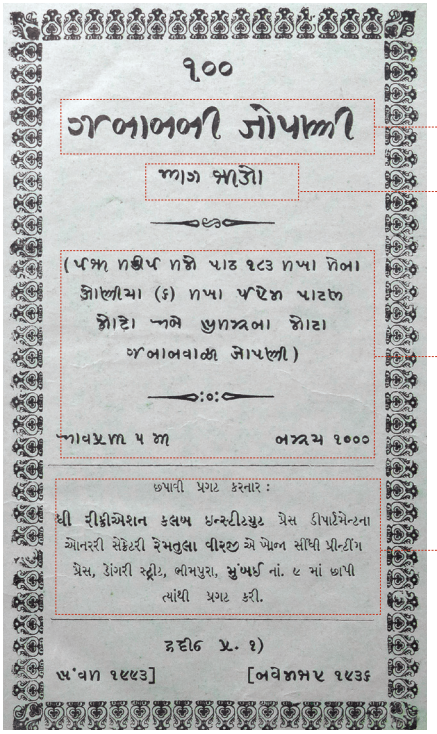
From where did Aladin Ghulamhusain get these types? We still do not know. Primary analysis shows little differences in the design of the typeface from one press to another. For this reason, the evidence suggests that Devraj, either based his design on Ghulamhusain types, or utilised the same ones after Ghulamhusain closed his business. Trading used metal types was a very common business in Europe, as they where the most valuable item in a printing press; they take too much effort to produce and it seems there is no reason to throw them away after the closure of a business, specially when a better option is to sell them. These are only assumptions, but they make the official version of a typeface designed in Germany difficult to believe.

In the next examples we will see a comparison of printed samples and typefaces from both Ghulamhusain and Devraj's presses.

13 ASANI, ALI S. *From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim*, 2010. p. 24.

Text hierarchy:
Khoja Sindhi Printing Press.

At least three diferent optical sizes, or styles, were used in the Khoja Sindhi Printing Press. This is quite an extrordinary achivement for a script that is considered death in current times.



Hierarchical Size 1:
Title Display typeface.
High contrast design.

Hierarchical Size 2:
Subtitle typeface.

Hierarchical Size 3:
Text typeface.
Also found inside the book.

Hierarchy 4:
Text typeface. Gujarati.

Comparison Title Display typefaces in both presses:

The design of both presses resemble largely. Proportions show some differences, as well the stress of some counters. (More samples for comparison in Fig.7, p.9)

Figure 5
Khoja Sindhi Printing Press

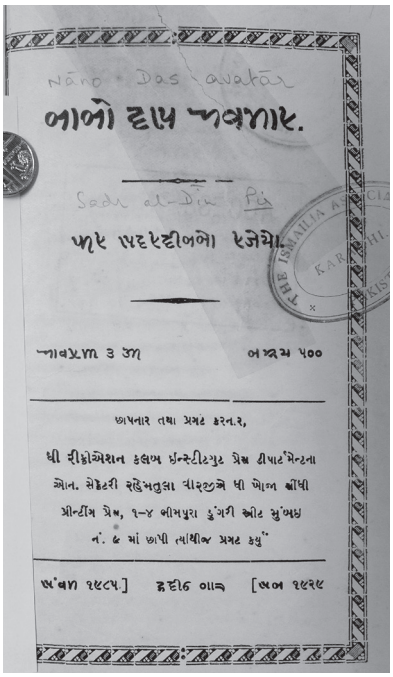
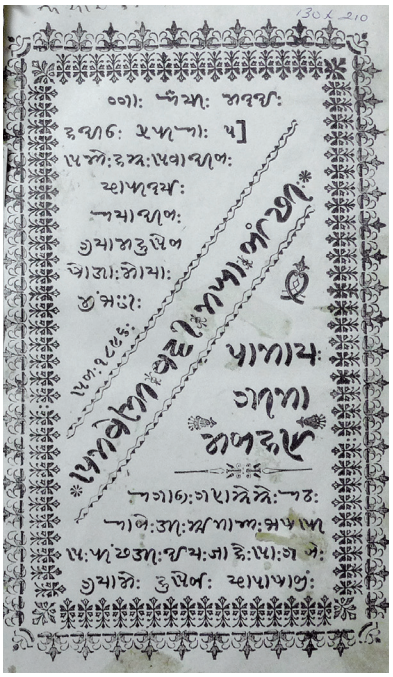


Figure 6
Ghulam-i Husain Chapakhanu Press



Khoja Sindhi Printing Press

Figure 5
Nano Das Avatar by Pir Sadruddin. Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, Bombay, 1926. [Collection of the Institute of Ismaili Studies. Photo by Juan Bruce]

Five pence coin. Scale 100



1,8 cm

Size 1: Title Display

Size 2: Subtitle

Size 3: Text typeface

Ghulam-i Husain Chapakhanu Press

Figure 6
Satavni vadi tathaa nindhi. Printed by Ghulam-i Husain Chapakhanu Press, Bombay, 1896. Title reordered to compare the design of the Display type. [Pyarali Jiwa's personal collection. Photo taken by Juan Bruce]
Scale of title text: 100%

Comparison of certain characters from manuscripts to metal type:

Manuscript OR 1238, folio 81. *1852*	Datt Prasādh Press Lithography *1896*	Ghulam-i Husain Chapakhanu Press *1896*	Khoja Sindhi Printing Press *1905*	Khoja Sindhi Printing Press *1911*	Khoja Sindhi Printing Press *1930*	
					—	dda
				—		sa
						ka
						a
	—				—	ca
						ja
	—		—		—	ny
						nna
—				—		bha
						ba
	—					da
—						ha

Figure 7 The metal type design has a very good calligraphic approach. This is especially important to Indian scripts. Not all the character were found in the different samples, nonetheless, some of them seem to have taken different forms throughout the years.



Figure 8 Portrait of Lalji Devraj. [TAJDDIN S. A., MUMTAZ. "Laljibhai Devraj." *101 Ismaili Heroes*, 2003.]

Authenticity of *Satpanthi* texts

Lalji Devraj's press

We know that after the case of 1866 the identity of the resulting communities of the Khoja caste needed to be reinforced in order to differentiate from the rest. It was very difficult to judge the authenticity of each *ginān* due to the age of these samples, for this reason, during the process of printing some manuscripts were specially inspected in order to accurately classify the tradition to which they referred.

Lalji Devraj's press was also very busy propagandizing the new constitutions and *farmans*** introduced by the Aga Khan III since 1905. *Farmans* were compiled into books to be widely accessible to Ismaili Khojas (Fig. 9). "In the eyes of their followers, the *farmans* embodied the ongoing and infallible guidance of the Imams, hence obedience to them was obligatory. Not surprisingly, *farmans* became the most significant means through which the Aga Khans mandated reform in all aspects of the Ismaili community".[14] Same as the *pirs* six centuries ago, the reforms needed to be introduced in vernacular languages and scripts. *Farmans* were printed in Khojki script and Kacchī language. Hindustani, Gujarati and Sindhi languages were also employed. These constitutions affected the life of the Khojas significantly, as they involved a variety of areas such as governance, society, welfare, health, and education.[15]

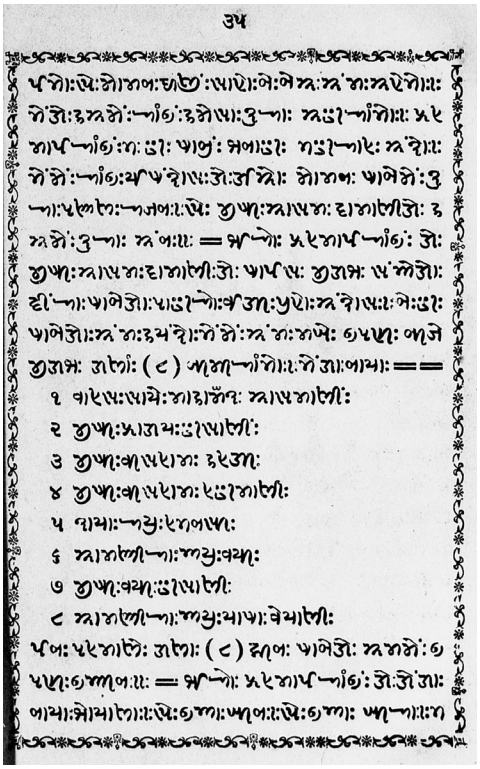


Figure 9
Aga Khan. Farmān: *jañgbārnā: bījī: mûsāfarinā: tathā: faramān: nāîrobī:*

[MS Indic 2534. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge.Printed by Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, Bombay, 1905.]

** Directives

14 ASANI, ALI S. *From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim*, 2010. p. 19.

15 IBID. p. 19.

Nevertheless, the first publication of the Khoja Sindhi Printing Press was the book with the *ginān* 'Satveni'.[16] This book was controversial within the Ismailis, as after its publication its Ismaili roots were questioned.

It is believed, that the *Satpanthi* Literature, or *gināns,* were composed by nine Ismaili *pirs* and twenty two Sunni *sayyids* during their mission in the Indian subcontinent.[17] This evidences that the blend of Muslim and Hindu cultures resulting in the *Satpanth,* was not only between Ismailis and Hindus; Sufi *sayyids* were deeply involved. It is certain, therefore, that the Khoja inherited a much more complex creed from their ancestors.

Texts that were found irrelevant or doubtful would never be reprinted. In fact, a few of them were found to be of questionable provenance, such as the 'Chhatris Krodi', 'Dashtari Gayatri', 'Chetamani of Pir Imam Shah', and thus were never published.[18] The 'Satveni' book was however published by the Khoja Sindhi Printing Press without prior testing of its Ismaili roots. The authenticity of the 'Satveni' was challenged with evidence, which were minutely examined and resulted in the decision not to re-publish the text. The presence nature of this evidence is unknown, except that 'Satveni' contained non-Ismaili elements and suffered with interpolation.[19]

The 'Satveni' *ginān* was compiled by the Imam-Shahis sect around 1520.[20] This sect was very much attached to the Hindu part of the *Satpanth* creed, as they are known for concealing and denying any connections to Ismailism, and accentuating their Hindu beliefs and use of Hindu symbology. 'Satveni' originally contained 100 verses, however, according to Ismaili scholars, the manuscript was in a private collection of the Imam-Shahis in Pirana, and when it was brought by Devraj himself for printing, it contained 150 verses. This may indicate that at some point an interpolation occurred. This is the reason why 'Satveni' never became a standard text in Ismaili literature, and is hardly recited in the *jamatkhana*.

Devraj appealed to Ismailis through his monthly magazine, *Ismaili Satpanth Prakash,* to draw his attention to the errors, discrepancies or doubtfulness in the *gināns* that he had published from his Khoja Sindhi Printing Press.[21] The name of the magazine also testifies to the deep implantation of the *Satpanth* creed inside the community.

Notwithstanding Lalji Devraj's crucial role in the shaping of the modern *ginān* literature, there are disconcerting aspects of his work. "Lalji Devraj editions excluded perhaps as many as 300 *ginān* texts from the 'official' corpus since their contents were

16 TAJDDIN S. A., MUMTAZ. "Laljibhai Devraj." *101 Ismaili Heroes*, 2003. pp. 281–287.

17 "Fictitious Narratives in the Satveni'ji Vel." In *Amir Pir Mela in Sindh and its Origin. www.ismaili.net.* Web. (retrieved 23 August 2015)

18 IBID.

19 IBID.

20 IBID.

21 IBID.

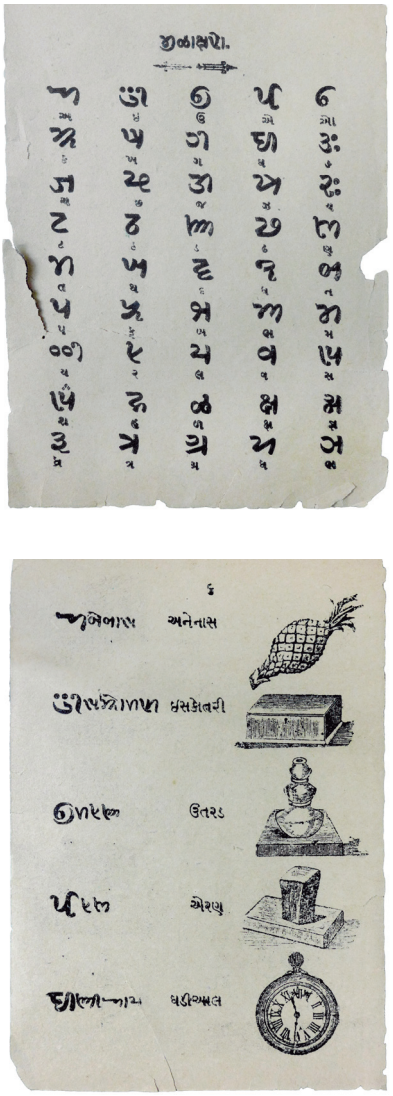


Figure 10
Type specimen of Khojki with Gujarati translation. *Sindhi baal chitra bodh*. 22nd Edition published by B. R. Mohamed Rangoonwala, Ismailia Association for India (former Recreation Club Institute) and Printed by Ismaili Printing Press (former Khoja Sindhi Printing Press), Bombay, 1942.
[Pyarali Jiwa's personal collection. Photo: Juan Bruce]

deemed to be inappropriate for the direction in which the Ismaili Khoja identity was evolving."[22] The Russian scholar Wladimir Ivanov, who lived in India during that time, and Azim Nanji, mention that for some strange reason most of the manuscripts used to prepare the printed editions were destroyed.[23] In fact, his team is said to have buried nearly 3500 manuscripts which they had used as bases for their editions. "The magnitude of this destruction brings serious questions regarding the methodology he employed to edit *ginān* texts."[24]

For instance, "an examination of the *Būjh Niranjan* texts edited by Lalji Devraj reveals that he introduced verses into the printed texts that are not found in the Khojki manuscripts of the poem."[25] Though it may be argued that perhaps Lalji Devraj was not directly responsible for these changes, his unreliability of his editing is beyond doubt when we consider the fate of a single line in his editions.[26]

In a Gujarati edition of *Būjh Niranjan* published in 1921, a line reads *sunī grehyā yuñ karteñ bāt*. Two new changes have been incorporated into the text to change the meaning of the line to, 'the sunī [i.e., *sunnī*] group talks like this'. *Sunī*, the past participle of the Hindustani verb *sunnā* (to hear), has conveniently been mistaken for the term *Sunnī*, a popular way of referring to the majority of Muslims who uphold orthopraxy.[27]

Stories regarding these controversies are not central to this paper, nevertheless, it seems important to highlight the fact that, before the resolution of the 'Aga Khan Case', the communities were united by similar cosmologies.

In the 1920s and 1930s, although the printing was still done by the Khoja Sindhi Printing Press (later known as the Ismaili Printing Press, reflecting the shift in identity from Khoja to Ismaili), the publication of Khojki material was taken over by the Recreation Club Institute (Fig. 10), which later evolved into the community institution responsible for research and publication of religious material (Ismailia Association for India).[28]

22 ASANI, ALI S. *From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim*, 2010. p. 24.
23 IVANOV, WLADIMIR. "Satpanth". *Collectanea*, 1948. In ASANI (1991).
24 ASANI, ALI S. *The Bujh Nirañjan*, 1991. p. 88.
25 IBID. p. 88.
26 IBID. p. 88.
27 IBID. p. 89.
28 ASANI, ALI S. *Ecstasy and enlightenment*, 2002. p. 109.

DEATH OF THE SCRIPT

The schism of the Khoja after the outcome of the 'Aga Khan Case' resulted in many fractured Khoja communities that claimed exacerbated identity. Those who did not stay under the Aga Khan leadership, Ithna Ashari Khoja and Sunni Khoja mostly, played a primary role as well.

Therefore, the decline of the Khojki script has a direct relationship with the changes that the Khoja community experienced from the mid-19th century onwards. More precisely, the transition from Indic traditions to Muslim *umma*.* A so-called 'Islamization' shifted the understanding of key doctrines from local Indic frameworks to ones considered authentically Islamic, which may have influenced the decline of the Indic Khojki script.

According to Iqbal Akhtar, "this process of transmuting religious identity from the Indic to Near Eastern Islamic was relatively rapid and sometimes provoked fierce resistance from within"[1] adding that the evolution became a "systematic abolition of popular expressions of Khoja religion."[2] Ironically, the *Satpanthi* book from Pir Sadruddin *Das Avatar*, who served to clarify the origins of the community and their Shia roots in the 1866 case, used to be considered a primary text for the followers of the Aga Khan, however, is no longer part of their religious education. The dismissal of Hindu teachings in the modern Khoja communities can be explained after an overview of its modernization into an Islamic nationhood.

This process was concluded in the second half of the 20th century: in first place, with the partition of India, and later, with the introduction of the Arabic script in the 1970s in the region of Sindh, the place where Khojki was born, and where the last vestiges of the script remained.

The Khoja schism

Tension within the Khoja caste

By the end of the 19th century, the Khoja had became a formidable trading community, creating elaborate trading networks throughout the Western Indian Ocean region to Karachi and Bombay; to Muscat, Mogadishu, and Zanzibar.[3] The rapid economic and geographic transition in the 19th century to the Bombay cosmopolis meant exposure to a variety of different traditions in the religious economy of the city and a new form of religious identity for the Khoja as urban transnational merchants.[4]

Concerning the caste rituals, in the mid 19th century the Khojas where distributed into multiple Indic religious traditions,[5] including *Satpanth, brahma samaj* and *prarthana samaj.*[6]

* Community.

1 AKHTAR, IQBAL. *The Oriental African*, 2012. p. 51

2 IBID. p. 51

3 IBID. p. 43.

4 GREEN, NILE. *Bombay Islam*, 2001. pp. 155–178. In AKHTAR (2012). p. 43

These traditions mark a conflict in which the Khoja community underwent a split. The competition between these religious customs, increasing communal mercantile wealth, and new ideas resulted in internal conflicts over caste authority, education, democracy, religious observances, and ownership of communal resources.[7] In the mid 19th century, after the arrival of the Aga Khan, authority among the Khoja began to be contested which subsequently escalated leading to the judgement of 1866 in the Bombay High court, by which Khoja ethnic and religious identity began to be defined by the British colonial administration. This resulted in the fracture of the Khoja caste into multiple religious communities, including the Ismaili Khoja, Ithna Ashari Khoja, and Sunni Khoja.[8]

For the 'Aga Khani', or Ismaili Khoja, linking their medieval Indic heritage to earlier Arabic and Persian religious authorities, was one of the aspects of the enterprise undertaken after the 1866 trial. However, the growing uniformity in their new Muslim status made the followers of the Aga Khan gradually leave behind their Indian heritage.[9]

Rejection of Satpanth

Like most sacred literature, the *Gināni*c heritage cannot be considered as an immutable literary tradition that has been created and transmitted without any change.[10] The importance of the *Satpanthis Gināni*c heritage, is essential to understanding the evolution of the script. For instance, as Tazim R. Kassam points out, "for a long time, the *gināns* were known only to the initiates of the *Satpanth* Khoja community. Some members called *Gupti* maintained their Hindu affiliations but inwardly observed *Satpanth* teachings and thus kept their Ismaili identity hidden. Their form, style and content resembles that of medieval and pre-modern *Bhakti* poetry; conversely, their unique characteristic find sympathy among several contemporary Hindu communities in Gujarat and Rajasthan. From this, one might infer a much wider affiliation to *Satpanth* Ismailism in medieval times than is indicated by the boundaries of the present Khoja community."[11]

While under the first Aga Khan rule, the *Gināni*c literature was pressured to prove its Muslimness, under Sultan Muhammad Shah, the Aga Khan III, this pressure was considerably less. In fact, from 1912 to 1923 there was growing Hindu-Muslim unity in India. Sultan Mohammad Shah, was a great supporter of this ensemble and always advocated for this cause, even when he was president of the All India Muslim Conference in 1928, when relations between the groups had hardened.[12] However,

5 NANJIANI, SACEDINA. *Khoja Vrttant*. 1892. p. 262. In AKHTAR (2012). p. 43

6 SAHIB, M. Q. H. *Memoirs of Mulla Qadir Husain Sahib*, 1972. p. 14–15. In AKHTAR (2012). p. 43

7 GOOLAMALI, KARIM. *A voice from India,* 1864.

8 PUROHIT, TEENA. *Formations and Genealogies,* 2005. In AKHTAR (2012). p. 43.

9 BOIVIN, MICHEL. *L'écriture de l'historie chez les Khojas,* 2008. p. 75–102.

10 KHAN, DOMINIQUE-SILA. "Rewriting the *Ginān*s" *Essays on Ismaili Hymns of South Asia,* 2010. p. 103.

11 KASSAM, TAZIM R. "Preface". *Essays on Ismaili Hymns of South Asia.* 2010. p. 10.

this position was not without controversy. Karim Goolamali, published several pamphlets in which he accused the third Aga Khan of claiming divinity for himself and of having invented a new religion based on money,[13] and also, he was the first Aga Khan to introduce the *farmans*. After his death in 1957, however, his programme of reforms was considerably intensified and accelerated by his grandson, Prince Karim the Aga Khan IV.[14]

We mentioned that some manuscripts were destroyed during the period when distinctions were being made between approved and non-approved *gināns* by Devraj. These editions had a significant impact as it altered the ways in which the communities of believers interpreted the teachings. For example, *gināns* came to be increasingly seen as commentaries on the inner meanings of the Koran.[15]

An Ismaili Sindhi Khoja who played a leading role in these debates was Hāsīm Lālū (1880-1961). He postulated that Ismailism was a form of Sufism and he tried to show that Hinduism and Sufism had similar practises and concepts.[16] After the partition of India, authors like Ghulam Ali Allana would re-employed the theory of the Sufi origins of Ismailism while downplaying the Hindu connections of the Khoja religion.[17]

In spite of these efforts, Hindu religious identities inevitably assumed an ideological orientation of a modern Islamic nation. These changes can be seen in the Khojas Ismailis especially in the "elimination of their Hindu philosophies, which were carried out by the respective religious leadership of the various Khoja religious communities. Gujarati and Kacchī prayers were replaced by Arabic, hierarchical forms of religious authority were created and institutionalized, and orthodox belief replaced vernacular expressions of faith."[18]

Islamization

Modernity and dismissal

The Khoja Ismailis approached modernity by sympathising with westernization and appealing to British colonial authority, whereas the Ithna Ashari Khoja preferred to be immersed in the Islamic authority of the Near East.[19] The Ithna Ashari made important decisions that would reorient Khoja identity. First they abandoned the Khojki script for Gujarati, breaking the connection with their traditional past. This meant that the Ithna Ashari Khoja were unable to recognize the Khojki script nor capable of reading their own religious literature prior to the 20th century. The Khojki script had already begun to experiment with including Arabic characters, like the three dots over some letters. However, when

12 SHODHAN, AMRITA. "The Entaglement of the *Ginān*s in the Khoja Governance." *Essays on Ismaili Hymns of South Asia*, 2010. p. 176.
13 GOOLAMALI, KARIM. *An Appeal,* 1932. In BOIVIN (2010). p. 29.
14 ASANI, ALI S. *From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim*, 2010. p. 18.
15 Ibid. p. 25.
16 BOIVIN, MICHEL. "*Ginān*s and the management". *Essays on Ismaili hymns from South Asia,* 2010. p. 29.
17 Ibid. p.29.
18 AKHTAR, IQBAL. *The Oriental African,* 2012. p. 50.
19 Ibid. p. 92.

the Ithna Ashari moved from the Khojki script to the Gujarati script, "they created the first systematic transliteration system to represent the Arabic script in Gujarati, as it was heavily laden with Persian and Arabic terminology."[20] This demonstrates the transition into a more coherent orientation towards their Muslim identity; yet they kept a vernacular script. Conversely, the Ismaili Khoja also abandoned the script, but gradually. From 1910 onwards, the Gujarati script began to be an alternative for printing in the Ismaili community as well. However, while the Gujarati script was used among the Khoja communities, particularly by Kathiawari merchants for accounting and inventory purposes, it was not the script predominantly used by Khoja communities for communicating religious knowledge in the 19th century.[21] However, it appears that all the Khojki material was transcribed and printed in Gujarati characters. "On the basis of scant information it appears that Lalji Devraj may have played an important role in facilitating the switch from Khojki to Gujarati within the Ismaili community. This, however, would have to be adequately researched"[22] According to an experienced teacher of Khojki, Hashim Moledina, in the next decades the printing of books in Khojki script gradually decreased in all areas of the subcontinent where the Ismaili community lived except in the region of Sindh, the home of the script.[23] The Sindhi Ismailis Khojas may have been unwilling to abandon a script so closely associated with their language, for Khojki still represents one of the oldest forms of writing Sindhi.[24]

According to Asani, the introduction of printing may have also had an impact in terms of the death of the script. Considerable expenses were apparently involved in the manufacture of the metal types for Khojki. Moreover, Khojki carried some fundamental imperfections from its mercantile ancestors. "A more significant factor leading to the script's demise was the lack of uniformity in different geographical areas. For example the character 𑈡 represented the letter *dy* in Sindh but *z* or *j* in Gujarat; or in one region the vowel *o* would be represented by the character 𑈢𑈿, while in another area the character 𑈣𑈿 served the same purpose."[25] These regional variations were a serious problem considering that literature was spreading and printing becoming standardized.

Considering the influence that the Aga Khan had in identity issues, it seems plausible that political reasons caused the production of Khojki types to cease.

20 AKHTAR, IQBAL. *The Oriental African*, 2012. p. 90.
21 Ibid. p. 90.
22 ASANI, ALI S. *Ecstasy and enlightenment*, 2002. p. 121.
23 Interview of Ali S. Asani with Hashim Moledina in Karachi, January 1982. In ASANI (2002). p. 109.
24 ASANI, ALI S. *Ecstasy and enlightenment*, 2002. p. 110.
25 ASANI, ALI S. *Ecstasy and enlightenment*, 2002. p. 109.

The Partition of India and later events

In the time of the colonial rule, British conceptions of distinct ideologies needed to be understood as fixed entities, "with their respective adherents separated from each other by well-defined boundaries".[26] The Aga Khan, as the potential new leader, used this new context to enhanced the Muslim part of the Khoja and reorientate their identity. The British also established Christian schools and colleges to promote western models of education, which were perceived as a potential threat by some Muslims groups. In response Muslims called for a fresh interpretation of Islam and sought to differentiate from non-Muslim groups using the Koran for guidence.[27]

Eventually, in an atmosphere infused with nationalist ideologies in colonial India, Hindu-Muslim tension was unsustainable. "Some Muslim and Hindu leaders began to see religious communities as constituting distinct nations. It is this conception that led to demands for the partition of the subcontinent on the basis of the two-nation theory".[28] While Hindu Indians dominated the central and eastern part of the Indian subcontinent, Muslim Indians dominated the western part of the region (in what is now Pakistan). Although there are still Khoja Ismailis in Gujarat and Cutch, the majority of them went to Pakistan after the partition in 1947. According to Asani the script may also have been resilient to the partition, as later events increased the number of Gujarati and Urdu speakers in the region. Since these languages do not share a common script, there was still a need to have a single script in which different languages could be written, with Khojki as a capable candidate.[29]

Soon after the foundation of Pakistan there were attempts to transform Pakistan into an 'Islamic State' rather than a simple Muslim homeland, the latter being the original idea of its founder, the Khoja Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The push came from Sunni religious scholars, who indeed end up terming Ali Jinnah 'the great infidel'. "In an atmosphere of growing sectarian intolerance, the identity of Ismailis also came under increased scrutiny and their position became precarious".[30] Consequently, the plurality so characteristic of the Khoja Ismaili was "progressively eroded until they came to define themselves in narrow sectarian terms deemed more appropriate to colonial and post-colonial tastes and sensibilities."[31] This was a clear sign of adaptation to the modern Muslim world. However, it seems they were more comfortable dealing with their conflicts with Hindu traditions rather than with their new status within Islam.

26 ASANI, ALI S. *From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim*, 2010. p. 9.
27 Ibid. p. 10.
28 Ibid. p. 10.
29 ASANI, ALI S. *Ecstasy and enlightenment*, 2002. p. 110.
30 ASANI, ALI S. *From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim*, 2010. p. 17.
31 Ibid. p. 18.

Nonetheless, the script was only surviving, not living. Even in Sindh the script did not lived beyond the 1970s when it gave way to the Perso-Arabic written system in which both Sindhi and Urdu are now written.[32] For a moment, Devanagari script was at the core of the discussion to be the official script of Sindh, as it was more in "resonance with their religious and national identity"[33] than Arabic script. Yet, it did not succeed. For all practical purposes, Khojki no longer survived as a living script among the Khojas.

Another significant example of how 'Islamization' left no room for Indic traditions was witnessed in 1975 during a conference that was held in Paris and chaired by the prince Karim Aga Khan IV. A resolution was passed regarding the classification of the *gināns* in three categories: the first one presented no problems as the texts did not contain Hindu elements and were to continued to be recited in the *jamatkhana*. The second category comprised the hymns that included a few Hindu terms and it was decided to replace these words by their Islamic equivalent; in this way 'Hari' became 'Ali', 'Gur' became "Pir', and so on. The third category, in which manuscripts had 'excessive Hindu elements', such as he famous *Das Avatar*, were simple banned.[34] Not surprisingly, the Khojki script is no longer of interest for the Ismaili authorities. And as the scholar Diamond Rattansi says so well, there was no need to suppress these elements. Arguing that such changes could be harmful and, in fact, could limit the authority of the Imam and devaluing the *ginānic* spiritual tradition.[35]

32 ASANI, ALI S. *Ecstasy and enlightenment,* 2002. p. 129.

33 POLLOCK, SHELDON. "Sindhi Literary Culture." *Literary cultures in history,* 2003. pp. 622–625.

34 RATTANSI, DIAMOND. *Islamization and the Khoja Ismaili*, 1987. p. 157. In KHAN (2010). p. 106.

35 IBID. pp. 160–161.

CONCLUSION

The story of the Khojki script was told through the story of Muslims and Hindus who coexisted in Sindh and Gujarat within a fragile system that eventually broke. It is vital area of study because Khojki was at the core of religious disputes; used for political purposes; sometimes to enhance identity among communities; to hide secret literature; and to be dismissed when no longer needed.

Like that of the Khoja community, the resilience of the script was remarkable. For example, the Khojas Ismailis were able to respond to cultural diversity by being tolerant. They were particularly skilled in adapting to different contexts, adjusting through a series of responses to the ever-changing political and social environment. Nevertheless, one must question some definitions. Did they change their understanding of identity by denying it in favour of a broader framework of Islamism? Or were they adapting in the same way they have been always done?

The typographic development of Khojki obeyed to a cultural requirement. It could only be achieved by the demand of a social context. While British understanding of complex creeds was narrow while they were ruling in India, the identity of the Khojas was suffering significant changes and the dissemination of printed texts was of great importance. Due to this need of reading literature in vernacular languages and scripts, these are autamatically reinforced in the community. This action, in theory, is supposed to make a script more solid and ingrained in their people, and not the other way around. But the time chosen for this great typographic flourishment preceded a very unstable political time and a war in the region. Radicalization was present in the entire region and it was provoked mainly by the encounter of these pluralist creeds with the European establishment imposed in the Indian subcontinent. For all these reasons, with the occupation of India, the British were largely responsible for the 'Islamization' and also 'Sanskritization' that later lead to the Independence of India from them and the partition of the subcontinent. Events of this nature, unfortunately, have such influence on people that can even change their way of wrinting and make a script dissapear.

Also, interventions in the process of recoding literature affected the original texts in dramatic ways. To what extend there was interpolation on texts to align the content because they suffer from interpolation once? *Das Avatar* content, written by a *pir* that is considered a legend, clarified the whole 'Aga Khan Case'. This

trial had great implicance over the caste's trading networks and financial resources. Thus the case is rather a political resolution than a spiritual clarification.

Manuscripts in India rarely survive due to wether conditions, for this reason, they had to be transcribe many time during their history. Printed texts with metal type, make difficult this practice as text survive longer and more copies are reproduced. However, we mentioned how Devraj made sure to make first typographic printed samples to be aligned towards Ismaili beliefs; although, not even this effort seem to have been enough to represent Ismailis in their new identity later on, as during this period it was in constant change.

Soon the 'Aga Khani' Khojas realized that Islam is in inherent conflict with anything else that is not Islam, and eventually the community gradually stopped using the Khojki script as it belongs to the Indian part of their roots. What came later with the schism of the community is only a reinforcement of identity towards a specific direction; with the result that a group of *Satpanthis*, called the Khojas, originally members of a mercantile caste in western India, gradually transformed over a period of time into Muslims.

Communities are reinforced when they are represented by a common script; and identity, enhanced. When the Khoja Ismailis were diluted into a broader narrative of Islam, they were stripped from an element that was an essential part of their identity. They absorbed, instead, the Arabic script for liturgy and adopted English and French as the global languages of the community. As a result of this institutional encouragement, it is now common to hear Ismaili Khojas reciting Persian or Arabic *qasidas* in their *jamatkhana*. The *gināns* are still recited but they are mostly transliterated into the Latin script. Unfortunately, vernacular scripts in India are becoming obsoletes in favour of more dominants scripts, such as Gujarati or Devanagari, which in turn are giving up to English language and the Latin script.

Scripts are cultural products that depend on social context and comunal usage; for Khojki, its native origins ended up being incompatible with the people who used it.

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