Ginān Encyclopedia Article

Ginān

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Ginān

GINĀN. A popularization of the Sanskrit word *jñan* ("contemplative knowledge"), the term *ginān* is used by the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīyah of Indo-Pakistan to refer to any one of the approximately eight hundred poems believed to have been composed by the Ismāʿīlī *pirs* or *dāʿīs* ("missionaries") between the thirteenth and early twentieth centuries. Composed in several Indian dialects and employing popular folk meters and indigenous musical modes, the *gināns* vary considerably in length. The shortest ones consist of four to five verses, while longer ones, called *granths* and distinguished by specific titles, may have well more than a thousand verses. The *gināns* are still sung and recited today as an integral part of religious ceremonies. Usually all members of the community who are present at such ceremonies participate in the recitation of the *gināns.*

The *gināns*, which often have several themes, may be classified into five major types according to the theme of greatest importance:

1. "Conversion" *gināns* portraying Islam and specifically its Ismāʿīlī form as the completion of the Vaiṣṇava Hindu tradition, and also including accounts that give Ismāʿīlī dimensions to traditional figures of Hindu mythology as well as hagiographic accounts of the great Ismāʿīlī *pirs* (the *Das Avatar*, for example).
2. *Gināns* dealing with a wide variety of eschatological and cosmological themes (such as *Brahmā Gāyatrī*).
3. Didactic *gināns* imparting ethical and moral instruction for the conduct of worldly and religious life (such as *Moman Chetāmaṇī*).
4. *Gināns* connected with mysticism, including guides for an individual's spiritual progress, literary expressions of the composers' mystical experiences, and petitions for spiritual union or vision (*Anant Akhāḍo* and *Satveṇī*, for example).
5. *Gināns* for recitation at certain religious rituals or at specific festivals such as the birthday of the Prophet or the Ismāʿīlī imam, Nawrūz (New Year), and so forth (*Nawrūznā din sohāmaṇā*, for example).

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