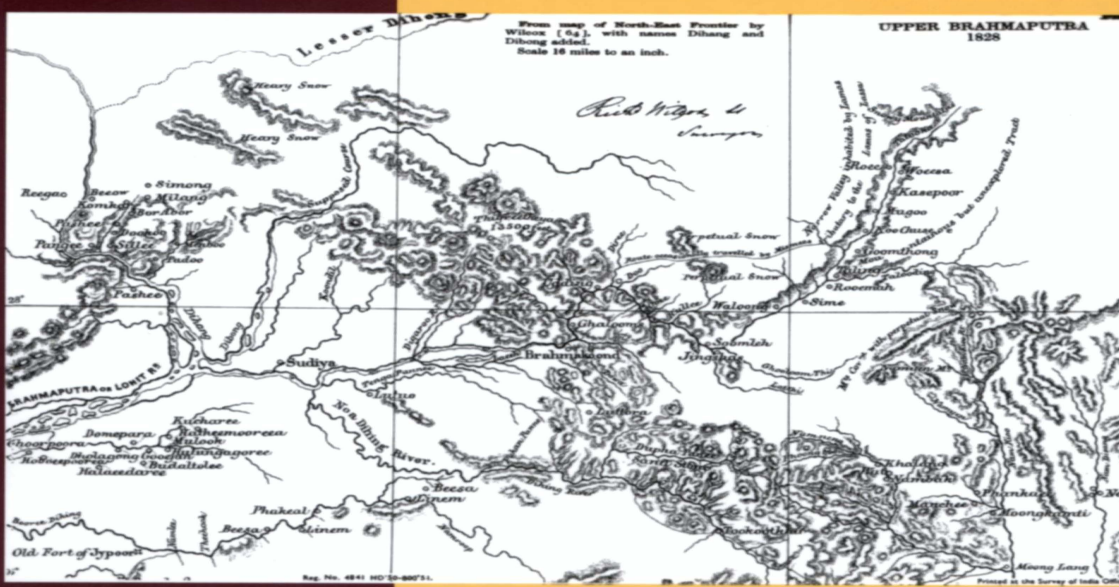
THE JOURNAL OF
ASIAN STUDIES

VOLUME 70

NUMBER 1

FEBRUARY 2011



PUBLISHED FOR
THE ASSOCIATION FOR
ASIAN STUDIES, INC.

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Taqiyya and Identity in a South Asian Community

SHAFIQUE N. VIRANI

The Guptīs of Bhavnagar, India, represent an unexplored case of taqiyya*, or precautionary dissimulation, and challenge traditional categories of religious identity in South Asia.* Taqiyya *is normally practiced by minority or otherwise disadvantaged groups of Muslims who fear negative repercussions should their real faith become known. Historically, the Shīʿa, whether Ithnā-ʿasharī or Ismaili, have commonly dissimulated as Sunnīs, who form the dominant community. However, the Guptīs, who are followers of the Ismaili imam, and whose name means "secret" or "hidden ones," dissimulate not as Sunnī Muslims, but as Hindus. The Guptī practice of* taqiyya *is exceptional for another reason: Hinduism is not simply a veil used to avoid harmful consequences, but forms an integral part of the Guptīs' belief system and identity, and the basis of their conviction in the Aga Khan, not only as the imam, but as the* avatāra *of the current age.*

In the celebrated Haji Bibi Case of 1905 at the Bombay High Court, His Highness Sir Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, the forty-eighth imam or spiritual leader of the world's Ismaili Muslims, was questioned about the provenance of his followers. While enumerating his disciples in Iran, Afghanistan, Russia, Central Asia, Chinese Turkestan, Syria, and so on, in his oral testimony, the Ismaili imam also remarked, "In Hindustan and Africa there are many Guptīs who believe in me." Asked to elucidate the identity of these "Guptī" followers, the imam replied, "I consider them Shīʿī Imāmī Ismailis; by caste they are Hindus."[1]

In his judgment in the case in 1908, Justice Coram Russel shed more light on the existence and identity of the Guptīs:

> Three witnesses were called before me who belong to what are known as Guptis. They are unquestionably Shia Imami Ismailis. But they certainly adhere to some of the Hindu practices, for instance they do not circumcize their males and they burn their dead, but they are true followers of the Aga Khan; and one could not help being struck with the dramatic

Shafique N. Virani (shafique.virani@utoronto.ca) is Associate Professor of Islamic Studies and Chair of the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Toronto.

[1]Quoted in *Nāmadār Āgākhān sāmeno Mukadamo: sane 1905 no mukadamo nambar 729*, Bombay High Court, 1905; and Valībhāī Nānjī Hudā, *Asatya Ārop yāne Khojā Jñātinuṃ Gaurav* (Dhorājī: En. Em. Budhawāṇī, 1927), 134.

> aspect of the situation when two of those Guptis said that they had made a Mehmani [offering] to the present Aga Khan in the Ritz Hotel in Paris.[2]

In Sanskrit, as in many of the new Indo-Aryan languages, including Gujarati, the word *gupta* means "secret" or "hidden." As their name as well as the foregoing evidence indicates, the Guptīs have a practice of concealing their belief in the Ismaili imam from their caste-fellows. They consider ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the first imam of the Shīʿī Muslims, and his successors in the line of Ismāʿīl, collectively, to be the tenth and final *avatāra*, representing the continuity of divine guidance to humankind. Portrayals in some of the Sanskrit epics as well as the Purāṇas of the final *avatāra*'s advent as Kalkī, riding a white horse and carrying a flashing sword, are considered to be predictions of the Imam ʿAlī's famous mount Duldul and his sword Dhū al-Faqār.[3] Their history and aspects of their belief system illustrate how the practice of dissimulation, common among minority Shīʿīs, was reworked in the Indic milieu in unprecedented ways. Meanwhile, a South Asian worldview allowed them to evolve a religious identity rooted in a particular understanding of salvation history.

The Guptī practice of dissimulating religious beliefs out of fear of maltreatment is not uncommon in Islam. In Arabic, this is generally known as *taqiyya* or *kitmān*, and Muslims of various persuasions generally acknowledge the legitimacy of its use in certain circumstances.[4] The Qur'an (3:28) advises that the company of believers should not be forsaken for that of doubters, unless this be as a precaution, out of fear.[5] Verse 16:106, which refers to the blamelessness

[2]*Before Mr. Justice Russel Haji Bibi v. H.H. Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah the Aga Khan*, suit no. 729 of 1905, *Bombay Law Reporter*, vol. 11 (1908): 431.

[3]See Dominique-Sila Khan, "The Coming of Nikalank Avatar: A Messianic Theme in Some Sectarian Traditions of North-Western India," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 25, no. 4 (1997): 401–26.

[4]For *taqiyya*, see, in particular, Lynda G. Clarke, "The Rise and Decline of *Taqiyya* in Twelver Shiʿism," in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought*, ed. Todd Lawson (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 46–63; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), index, s.v. *taqiyya*; Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien: Aspects Spirituels et Philosophiques*, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), index, s.vv. *ketmān, taqīyeh*; Etan Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī-Shīʿa Views on *Taqiyya*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95 (1975): 395–402; idem, "*Taqiyya* in Shīʿī Theology and Religion," in *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, ed. H. G. Kippenberg and G. G. Stroumsa (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 345–80; James Winston Morris, "Taqīyah," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 336–37; R. Strothmann and M. Djebli, "Takiyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–2004; CD-ROM v. 1.0), 135–36; and Aharon Layish, "*Taqiyya* among the Druzes," *Asian and African Studies* 19, no. 3 (1985): 245–81; see also H. Reckendorf, "ʿAmmār b. Yāsir," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–2004; CD-ROM v. 1.0), 448.

[5]This verse is cited in justification of the practice of *taqiyya* in Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad Ibn Bābawayh, *A Shīʿite Creed*, trans. Asaf Ali Asghar Fyzee (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1942), 111. Similar explanations are given in exegetical works; see, e.g., al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 3 (Beirut 1954–1957), 55–56.

of those who feign disbelief under compulsion, is explained by both Sunnī and Shīʿī commentators as referring to the case of the companion ʿAmmār b. Yāsir, who was compelled under torture to renounce his faith.[6] In the course of time, the majority Sunnī Muslims, who had gained political supremacy, only rarely had occasion to resort to precautionary dissimulation. We may cite, for example, the Sunnī scholars who resorted to *taqiyya* during the Inquisition (*miḥna*) at the time of the caliph al-Maʾmūn, affirming that the Qurʾan was created, though they believed otherwise.[7] By contrast, since the earliest days of Islam, the precarious existence of the minority Shīʿa forced them to practice *taqiyya* as an almost innate and instinctive method of self-preservation and protection.[8] The Shīʿa even have a specific legal term for regions where *taqiyya* is obligatory: *dār al-taqiyya*, the realm of dissimulation.[9]

Naturally, many Shīʿa who dissimulate may not even be aware of the scholarly minutiae of the practice, or its technical term. Nevertheless, two primary aspects of *taqiyya* rose to prominence in Shīʿa considerations of the subject: not disclosing their association with the imams when this may expose them to danger and, equally important, keeping the esoteric teachings of the imams hidden from those who are unprepared to receive them.[10] With regard to the latter, the Shīʿī imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq is reputed to have said, "Our teaching is the truth, the truth of the truth; it is the exoteric and the esoteric, and the esoteric of the esoteric; it is the secret and the secret of a secret, a protected secret, hidden by a secret."[11]

[6]See, e.g., Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 16 (Tehran: lithograph, 1305–15 HS/1926–36), 224; and Ignaz Goldziher, "Das Prinzip der taḳijja im Islam," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 60 (1906): 214.

[7]M. Hinds, "Miḥna," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–2004; CD-ROM v. 1.0); and John A. Nawas, *al-Maʾmūn: Miḥna and Caliphate* (Nijmegen: Katholieke Universiteit, 1992), 61; cf. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early ʿAbbāsids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunnī Elite*, ed. Ulrich Haarmann and Wadad Kadi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 106–14. Other instances of non-Shīʿī *taqiyya* are discussed in J. C. Wilkinson, "The Ibāḍī Imāma," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies* 39, no. 3 (1976): 537; Goldziher, "Das Prinzip der taḳijja," passim; and L. P. Harvey, "The Moriscos and the Ḥajj," *Bulletin of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* 14, no. 1 (1987): 12–13.

[8]The political implications of *taqiyya* in early Shīʿīsm are discussed in Denis McEoin, "Aspects of Militancy and Quietism in Imami Shiʿism," *Bulletin of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* 11, no. 1 (1984): 19–20, while the judicial implications are explored in Norman Calder, "Judicial Authority in Imāmī Shīʿī Jurisprudence," *Bulletin of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* 6, no. 2 (1979): 106–7. Shīʿī protective dissimulation in Afghanistan is examined in Louis Dupree, "Further Notes on *Taqiyya*: Afghanistan," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99, no. 4 (1979): 680–82.

[9]Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī-Shīʿa Views," n. 13; idem, "*Taqiyya* in Shīʿī Theology," passim.

[10]Diane Steigerwald, "La dissimulation (*taqiyya*) de la foi dans le Shiʿisme Ismaelien," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 27 (1988): 39–59; and Clarke, "Rise and Decline of *Taqiyya*."

[11]Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt fī Faḍāʾil Āl Muḥammad*, ed. Muḥsin Kūcha Bāghī (Tabrīz [?]: Shirkat-i Chāp-i Kitāb, 1960), section 1, chapter 12, no. 14, 28.

For the Ismaili Shīʿa, a minority within a minority, who emphasized the paramount importance of the *bāṭin*, or the esoteric dimension of the revelation, this need was even more pronounced.[12] However, even among their Ismaili coreligionists, the Guptī practice of *taqiyya* is unique. Historically, the Ismailis are known to have frequently maintained a veneer of Sunnī, Ṣūfī, or Ithnāʿasharī Islam.[13] This was particularly true after the thirteenth century, when the invading Mongols destroyed their political power and massacred the community, forcing those who survived to go undercover. The Guptī Ismailis, however, live as Hindus. So successful have they been in this endeavor that their very existence has eluded the notice of historians of Ismailism almost entirely. In the second edition of the encyclopedic 772-page tome of Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, weighty in both erudition and physical size, the name "Guptī" never occurs.[14] Only recently has this form of *taqiyya* been acknowledged.[15]

Fortunately, we do find allusions to the Guptī communities (*jamāʿats*), under this and other names, in some medieval Persian sources, in the various gazetteers and ethnographic publications produced in South Asia, in the edicts (*farmāns*) of the forty-eighth Ismaili imam, in some sectarian writings and popular accounts dating from the first half of the twentieth century onward, in the proceedings

[12]Shafique N. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, A Search for Salvation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), index, s.v. *taqiyya*; al-Qāḍī Abū Ḥanīfa b. Muḥammad al-Nuʿmān, *Taʾwīl al-Daʿāʾim*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Aʿẓamī, 3 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1967–72; repr., Beirut: Dār al-Thiqāfa), 1:127, cf. 201, 349; and Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), index, s.v. *taqiyya.*

[13]See Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, passim; Hafizullah Emadi, "The End of *Taqiyya*: Reaffirming the Religious Identity of Ismailis in Shughnan Badakshan—Political Implications for Afghanistan," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 3 (1998); and idem, "Praxis of *Taqiyya*: Perseverance of Pashaye Ismaili Enclave, Nangarhar, Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey* 19, no. 2 (2000): 253–64. In his 2000 article, Emadi "examines how sectarian policy orchestrated by the state had compelled the Ismailis of Nangarhar [in Afghanistan] to maintain a high level of secrecy concerning practice of their religious beliefs and assimilate themselves into the religious and cultural milieu of the dominant Pushtun [Sunni] community."

[14]Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index. Recently, Dominique-Sila Khan and Zawahir Moir have mentioned the existence of the Guptīs in a number of their articles. I am grateful to Dr. Khan for graciously providing me with copies of her writings. See especially Khan, "Diverting the Ganges: The Nizari Ismaili Model of Conversion in South Asia," in *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*, ed. Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 32, 45; idem, "The Graves of History or the Metaphor of the Hidden Pir," in *Culture, Communities and Change*, ed. Varsha Joshi (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), 167–68; idem, "Liminality and Legality: A Contemporary Debate among the Imamshahis of Gujarat," in *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation and Conflict*, ed. Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld (Delhi: Social Science Press, 2004), 215, 229–30; idem, "The Mahdi of Panna: A Short History of the Pranamis (Part II)," *Indian Journal of Secularism* 7, no. 1 (2003): 60–61; and Moir and Khan, "New Light on the Satpanthi Imamshahis of Pirana," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 33, no. 2 (2010): 210–34.

[15]Daftary, Ismāʿīlīs, 404, does mention *taqiyya* in its Hindu form, without going into details.

of a few court cases, such as the one cited earlier, and even in certain of the polemical works of the Āryā Samāj in the early 1900s. This study focuses primarily on the experience of the Guptī community of Bhavnagar, Gujarat, one of many Guptī Ismaili communities spread primarily in Gujarat, Sindh, and Punjab.

Bhavnagar, on the western shore of the Gulf of Cambay, was founded in the eighteenth century. The surrounding region once constituted a princely state of the same name. Originally a trading post for cotton goods, Bhavnagar city is now a sprawling industrial metropolis that is home to nearly a million people. The Guptīs of Bhavnagar trace the independent existence of their community to the early twentieth century. Thus, they claim a history distinct from the other Guptī communities of South Asia, many of which have been in continuous contact with the Ismaili imams for hundreds of years. Nevertheless, they share with other Guptīs a common allegiance to the imam and a common practice of dissimulation as Hindus. Recently, they have discarded much of their earlier reticence and have publicly acknowledged their fealty to the Aga Khan.

In addition to the sources already mentioned, this paper utilizes the oral tradition of the Bhavnagar Guptīs as it was narrated to me during interviews conducted in Gujarati and Hindi in 1998 in India, and in written correspondence after that year. My primary informants, their ages at the time of the interviews, and the designators that will be used to reference their input are as follows: seventy-four-year-old Bachchubhāī (B), whose mother and maternal uncle were motivating forces in the nascent community; fifty-seven-year-old Kapīlābahen Andhārīya (KB), a dynamic and popular Guptī *wā'iẓa* (preacher); thirty-seven-year-old Rāju Andhārīyā (R), also a *wā'iẓ*, who served two terms as the chairman of the Bhavnagar Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board, and whose father's grandfather, Raṇchhoḍ Bhagat, was a motivating force in the nascent community; and finally, eighty-one-year-old Kālīdās Bhagat (KD), the community's most respected elder at that time, who served for twenty-five years as the *kāmaḍīā* (an Ismaili official, second to a *mukhī*) of the *jamā'at* during its formative period and whose *mukhī*, the late Paramāṇanddās Khoḍīdās, was the Guptī *jamā'at*'s most charismatic leader, whose reputation spread through the Ismaili community far beyond the confines of Bhavnagar, Gujarat, and even India. My conversations with these four individuals took place separately, often in their homes, over tea or a meal.

Frequently, large numbers of family members and friends joined in these discussions, avidly relating their own experiences and recollections, jogging the memories of those being interviewed, and asking questions of their own. The contributions of the others who were present have been incorporated into the narrative with the designator (O), for other, as their names were not always known to me. Because this study draws frequently on the reminiscences and memories of individuals and on eye-witness accounts of events, it does not disdain the use of anecdotes or anecdotal style as narrated by the informants. This captures something of the vividness of the community's own perceptions

of its history and effectively conveys emotional, doctrinal, and devotional undercurrents that would otherwise be lost.

The modern history of the Bhavnagar Guptīs can legitimately be divided into three main periods. From the turn of the century until approximately 1930, the Guptīs became increasingly aware of their historical and doctrinal relationship to Ismailism, and reestablished contact with the Ismaili imam and community, while at the same time practicing intense *taqiyya* or precautionary dissimulation among their own caste. The need for such caution was further accentuated by the open declarations of allegiance to the imam by other South Asian Guptī communities, which provoked virulent attacks by the Āryā Samāj. The period from about 1930 to 1946 followed the excommunication of the Bhavnagar Guptīs from their caste and resulted in immense uncertainty. Nevertheless, it also ushered in a period of greater boldness, proselytization, and cohesiveness as a unit. Ultimately, reconciliation with the caste was effected and permission to follow their personal religious inclinations within the caste structure was granted. The third period commenced in 1946 with the founding of the first official Guptī community center (*jamāʿat-khāna*) in Bhavnagar. The ensuing increase in confidence and solidarity as a community culminated in the establishment of a separate housing society, which was recently completed and which, perhaps, represents the commencement of the next stage of the community's development. The evolution of Bhavnagar's Guptīs, and their self-identification as both Hindus and Muslims, also demonstrates that there is a need, in a number of instances, to reevaluate the terms "Hindu" and "Muslim" as either/or categories.

Historical Background

Members of the Kāchhīyā caste of vegetable sellers, the Guptī Ismailis of Bhavnagar consider themselves Pāṭīdārs, a designation that became increasingly more common in the 1930s, and is gradually replacing the traditional caste-name of Kaṇbī.[16] They join their caste-fellows in their historic and age-old devotion to the memory of Sayyid Imām al-Dīn. Imām al-Dīn, or Imāmshāh, as he is better known, was stationed at Pīrāṇā, near Ahmedabad in Gujarat. He was the son of

[16]K. S. Singh, ed., *India's Communities: H-M*, vol. 5 of *People of India* (Delhi: Anthropological Survey of India and Oxford University Press, 1998), 1430; A. M. Shah and R. G. Shroff, "The Vahivancha Barots of Gujarat: A Caste of Genealogists and Mythographers," *Journal of American Folklore* 71 (1958): 268–69; H. S. Morris, *The Indians in Uganda: Caste and Sect in a Plural Society* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), 93; Harald Tambs-Lyche, *London Patidars: A Case Study in Urban Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1980), 32, 278–80; idem, "Kolī, Rajput, Kanbī, Paṭṭidār," in *Tribus et Basses Castes: Résistance et autonomie dans la société Indienne*, ed. M. Carrin and C. Jaffrelot (Paris: Éditions de l'école des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2002); Vinayak Chaturvedi, *Peasant Pasts: History and Memory in Western India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 34; and A. M. Shah, "Division and Hierarchy: An Overview of Caste in Gujarat," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, n.s., 16, no. 1 (1982): 1–33.

the fifteenth-century Ismaili dignitary Ḥasan Kabīr al-Dīn, and a descendant of the Imam Ismāʿīl.[17]

A common version of the foundational communal narrative describes a pilgrimage of their Levā Kaṇbī ancestors to the sacred city of Kāshī, where they would bathe in the Ganges and have their sins forgiven. On the way, they chanced upon Imāmshāh in the village of Girmatha, not far from Ahmedabad. He explained to them the futility of the journey and told them that they could bathe in the Ganges at that very place. As the learned teacher explained to them the mysteries of the Satpanth, the path of the truth, lo and behold, the Ganges flowed before them. They bathed in the sacred river, their sins were forgiven, and they joined the path of their newfound spiritual guide (B, K, KD, O).[18]

In his *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* and *Khātima-yi Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī*, compiled in the mid-1700s, the well-informed ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān Bahādur writes in some detail about the Kaṇbīs and their sister communities. Those who lived around Ahmedabad were called Momnās or Momans (from the Arabic word *muʾmin*, meaning "believer"), while their coreligionists in Saurashtra were called Khwājas (i.e., the Nizārī Ismaili Khojās).[19] Kaṇbī devotion "reaches the extent that they submit the tenth part of their income as a pious offering at the

[17]Historical information about these figures is available in Azim Nanji, *The Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (Delmar, N.Y.: Caravan Books, 1978); and Shafique N. Virani, "The Voice of Truth: Life and Works of Sayyid Nūr Muḥammad Shāh, a 15th/16th Century Ismāʿīlī Mystic" (Master's thesis, McGill University, 1995). Tazim Kassam, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance: Hymns of the Satpanth Ismaili Muslim Saint, Pir Shams* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) examines the earliest historical period and translates the shorter Gināns of Pīr Shams. In this regard, see also Françoise Mallison, "Les Chants *Garabi* de Pir Shams," *in Littératures Médievales de l'Inde du Nord*, ed. Françoise Mallison (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1991), translated into English as Françoise Mallison, "Pir Shams and his Garabi Songs," in *On Becoming an Indian Muslim: French Essays on Aspects of Syncretism*, ed. M. Waseem (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 180–207. Wladimir Ivanow, "The Sect of Imam Shah in Gujrat," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 12 (1936): 19–70, remains valuable, as it refers to sources that may no longer be extant. Dominique-Sila Khan and Zawahir Moir, "Coexistence and Communalism: The Shrine of Pirana in Gujarat," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 22 (1999): 133–54, offer insights into the modern history of the Imāmshāhīs. In 1998, Bhavnagar could boast of four Imāmshāhī *mandirs*.

[18]Karīm Mahamad Māstar, *Mahāgujarātanā Musalamāno* (Vaḍodarā: Mahārājā Sayājīrāv Vishvavidhyālay, 2025 VS/1969), 211–12, 314; M. S. Commissariat, *Studies in the History of Gujarat* (Mumbai: Longmans, Green, 1935), 147; Khan, "Diverting," 37–38; M. R. Majmudar, *Cultural History of Gujarat* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1965), 254; Bhagavānalāl La. Māṅkaḍ, *Kāṭhiyāvāḍanā Mumanā* (Ahmedabad: Gujarāt Vidhyāsabhā, 2004 VS/1948), 4–5; James M. Campbell, ed., *Muslim and Parsi Castes and Tribes of Gujarat*, vol. 9, part 2 (Hariyana: Vipin Jain for Vintage Books, 1990), 66–68, 76–77; and Momīn Mīyāṃjī Nuramahamad, *Isamāilī Momīn Komano Itīhās* (Mumbai: Rāmachandra Vāman Mahājan, 1936), 130.

[19]ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān Bahādur, *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī*, ed. Sayyid Nawāb ʿAlī, vol. 1 (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1928), 320; and idem, *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī*, trans. M. F. Lokhandwala (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1965), 286. The Khojās are a group of Ismailis primarily of Sindhi and Gujarati origin who are traditionally believed to be descendants of families that were influenced by the preaching of Pīr Sadr al-Dīn and Pīr Ḥasan Kabīr al-Dīn (the grandfather and father of Imāmshāh, respectively) around the fourteenth century.

dargāh of [their pīr's] descendants … and would happily give up their lives in service."[20] The author notes their practice of dissimulation as "they observe many of the rituals of the non-Muslims in order to foster friendship and placate the hearts of the non-believers"[21] and that their creed "differs from that of the majority [of Muslims]."[22] Outwardly (*dar ẓāhir*), he informs us, many of them conduct themselves as Hindus among their families and caste-fellows, while inwardly (*dar bāṭin*), they are followers of the sayyid.[23] He narrates at length a story that illustrates how the Ismaili Muslims of Gujarat, including the Nizārī followers of Imāmshāh, hid their adherence to Islam in milieus where the non-Muslim political authorities may have been hostile.[24]

The most dramatic series of events that changed the course of the community's history occurred under the reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (d. 1707). ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān, whose father had accompanied this sovereign during his Deccan campaigns and was the official chronicler at Ahmedabad, was well placed to describe the events:[25]

> During the reign of the late emperor, tremendous emphasis was placed on matters of the *sharīʿa* and on refuting various [non-Sunnī] schools of thought. No efforts were spared in this regard. Many people thus emerged who maintained that, for God's sake, their very salvation lay in this. Because of religious bigotry, which is the bane of humankind, they placed a group under suspicion of Shīʿism (*rafḍ*), thus destroying the very ramparts of the castle of their existence [i.e., having them killed], while others were thrown into prison.[26]

[20]ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān Bahādur, *Khātima-yi Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī*, ed. Sayyid Nawāb ʿAlī (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1930), 123; cf. idem, *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (ed.), 103.

[21]ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān Bahādur, *Khātima-yi Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (ed.), 123; cf. idem, *Khātima-yi Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī*, trans. Syed Nawab Ali and Charles Norman Seddon (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1928), 103–4, in which the translation is confused. M. F. Lokhandwala described the translation of this work as rather "free." See the preface to Bahādur, *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (trans.).

[22]Bahādur, *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (ed.), 320; cf. idem, Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī (trans.), 286.

[23]Bahādur, *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (ed.), 320; and idem, *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (trans.), 286.

[24]Bahādur, *Khātima-yi Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (ed.), 129–32; cf. Bahādur, *Khātima-yi Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (trans.), 108–10. Interestingly, the author describes all of the Gujarātī Ismailis as "Bohrās," which in modern times is the name more commonly associated with the Mustʿalīan branch of the community. However, he makes it clear that he also refers to the followers of Imāmshāh, whom he explicitly identifies as Nizārīs, under this rubric. The term *bohrā* has, of course, been widely used by a variety of communities. The fabulously wealthy merchant prince of Gujarat in the 1600s, Virji Vorah, for example, was not a Mustʿalīan or any other type of Ismaili, but a Jain; see M. N. Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 26–27. Campbell, *Muslim and Parsi*, 24, 76, also indicates the wider usage of the term and provides specific instances of Momnās being called "Bohoras." Even in modern times, the name Bohrā or Vahorā is shared widely by a number of communities. See Māstar, *Mahāgujarātanā Musalamāno*, 127–28.

[25]Hameed ud-Din, "'Alī-Moḥammad Khan [*sic*, Khān] Bahādor, Mīrzā Moḥammad-Ḥasan," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: Routledge, 1996–).

[26]Bahādur, *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (ed.), 321; cf. Bahādur, *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (trans.), 286–87.

The aged successor of Imāmshāh, Sayyid Shāhjī, was thus accused of Shīʿism and summoned to appear before Aurangzeb. His death en route enraged his followers. ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān describes at great length how, when word of the death of their spiritual preceptor spread, this community of simple trades people—men, women, and even children—gathered from far and wide and took up arms against the military. Overwhelmed by the force and unexpected nature of the onslaught, Aurangzeb's forces lost control, and the community, bolstered by their large numbers, succeeded in capturing the fortress of Broach. However, it was not long before reinforcements arrived and the resurrection was put down, resulting in a massacre of the Kaṇbīs.[27] Similar unsettling events, spurred by Aurangzeb's policies, were occurring elsewhere among sister communities.

For example, Ḥasan Pīr b. Fāḍil Shāh led a group of approximately 18,500 families of both Khojā and Momnā Ismailis. His brother, Pīr Mashāʾikh (d. 1697), however, became associated with Aurangzeb, and joined the ruler in his battles against the Shīʿī kingdoms of the Deccan. He had Ḥasan Pīr imprisoned and embarked on a campaign to convert his brother's followers to Sunnism. The vast majority, 18,000, joined him. Today, the Momnās who remain Ismailis are called *junā dharma nā moman*, "the Momnās of the old faith," while those who were converted by Pīr Mashāʾikh to Sunnism are called *navā dharma nā moman*, "the Momnās of the new faith."[28] These difficult circumstances would have necessitated extreme measures of *taqiyya* for those Imāmshāhīs who remained attached to their original practices.

A host of ethnographic works written from the late 1800s to modern times testify to the continuity of this tendency, explaining that the Kaṇbī agricultural community, also called Kurmīs,[29] draw on both "Islamic" as well as "Hindu" antecedents in their cultural and religious life.[30] According to traditional accounts of

[27]Bahādur, *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (ed.), 320–22; and idem, *Mirʾāt-i Aḥmadī* (trans.), 286–89. See also Commissariat, *Studies in the History of Gujarat*, 144.

[28]Details of these events are narrated in Pīrazādā Sayyad Sadaruddīn Daragāhavālā, *Tavārīkhe Pīr*, vol. 2 (Navasārī: Muslim Gujarat Press, 1935), 147–50, 204–5; Satish C. Misra, *Muslim Communities in Gujarat* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1964), 62–64; Hudā, *Asatya*, 111–12; Edaljī Dhanjī Kābā, *Khojā Kom nī Tavārīkh* [The history of the Khojas] (Amarelī: Dhī Gujarāt enḍ Kāṭhīyāvāḍ Prīnṭīñg Varkas enḍ Ṭāip Phāuṇḍarī, 1330 AH/1912), 283–84; Sachedīnā Nānajīāṇī, *Khojā Vṛttānt* (Ahmadabad: Samasher Bāhādur Press, 1892), 229–32; Nuramahamad, *Isamāilī Momīn*, 132–35; and Nanji, *Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Tradition*, 92–93. Misra's account is based primarily on Pir Muhammad Ibrahim, *Masha'ikh Chishti-nu-Jiwan-Charitra* (Author, 348, Bapat Road, Bombay-8, 1372/1953) and a manuscript entitled *Sara-u'l-Atkiya*, written in 1752, that was in the possession of the *sajjādnashīn* of the *dargāh* of Shāh ʿĀlam in Batwa. The transliteration of the names of both these works, neither of which was available to me, is Misra's.

[29]Māstar, *Mahāgujarātanā Musalamāno*, 313.

[30]Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, *Hindu Castes and Sects* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1896), 218; K. S. Singh, ed., *Gujarat*, vol. 22, part 2 of *People of India* (Delhi: Anthropological Survey of Indian and Ramdas Bhatkal for Popular Prakashan, 2003), 553, 557; R. E. Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, vol. 2 (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1922), 121, 124;

their history, Imāmshāh's Guptī followers, while pledging allegiance to the Ismaili imam in Persia, maintained an outward identity indistinguishable from that of their caste-fellows, while the Momnās became publicly identifiable as Muslims. In this article, the followers of the Aga Khan are intended in referring to the Guptīs, though it is possible that some other Imāmshāhīs who are not followers of the imam also refer to themselves by this name. The Imāmshāhīs remained in contact with the Ismaili imams in Persia from the time of Imāmshāh until at least the early eighteenth century. Their prayers, in a manner similar to that of their Persian, Badakhshani, and Khojā coreligionists in South Asia, invoke the names of the line of imams. However, many of the Imāmshāhī lists abruptly end with the name of the fortieth imam in the series, Nizār b. Khalīl Allāh (r. 1680–1722) who, notably, was the Ismaili imam contemporary with Aurangzeb's rule in India. Meanwhile, the lists of non-Imāmshāhī Ismailis include the names of the imams who came after the reign of Aurangzeb.[31]

Evidence adduced here demonstrates that some of the Imāmshāhī leadership, the sayyids descended from Imāmshāh, secretly continued their contact with the Ismaili imams, but did not share this information with the rank-and-file of the community. The bulk of the Kāchhīyā followers appear to have looked only to these sayyids (along with officials at the shrine known as *kākās*) as their leaders, submitting their religious dues to them. For these believers, contact with the imams in remote Persia seems to have been severed in the early eighteenth century. While the details have yet to be fully examined, circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that this may be attributed to the aforementioned policies of Aurangzeb. The Kāchhīyās thus evolved a religious and social identity largely independent of their Ismaili coreligionists. Notable for this study, though, is evidence of a common adherence to the Gināns, or religious compositions of a number of Ismaili dignitaries, and the performance of certain rituals and prayers that reflect a shared history.[32]

"Kanbis," in *Encyclopaedia of Indian Tribes and Castes*, ed. B. K. Roy Burman et al. (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2004), 2839; and Māstar, *Mahāgujarātanā Musalamāno*, 107.

[31]See Paṭel Nārāyaṇjī Rāmjībhāī Koṇṭrākṭar, *Pīrāṇā-"Satpanth" nī Pol ane Satya no Prakāsh*, vol. 1 (Ahmadābād: n.p., 1926), 386. The list in this source is corrupt in a number of instances. The late Gulshan Khakee had also come across similar manuscript lists of imams (personal communication); see also Gulshan Khakee, "The Dasa Avatara of the Satpanthi Ismailis and the Imam Shahis of Indo-Pakistan" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1972), 12–13; Virani, "Voice of Truth," 30–33.

[32]In addition to the aforementioned studies, Aziz Esmail, *A Scent of Sandalwood: Indo-Ismaili Religious Lyrics* (Richmond: Curzon, 2002); and Ali Sultaan Ali Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002) are two more recent contributions to the field that contain up-to-date bibliographies. Christopher Shackle and Zawahir Moir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1992) includes an excellent linguistic analysis of the Gināns. For the import and significance of the word "Ginān" itself, see Shafique N. Virani, "Symphony of Gnosis: A Self-Definition of the Ismaili Ginān Literature," in *Reason and Inspiration in*

Establishment

The genesis of the Guptī community at Bhavnagar, independent of the leadership of the sayyids and *kākās* of Pīrāṇā, is associated with a certain Khoḍīdās Manordās Vanmāḷī, a learned and well-read Kāchhīyā with a profound interest in religious matters. Versed in the community's Gināns, of which he was an avid reciter, Khoḍīdās was also fully conversant with the most important religious epics of the Sanskrit tradition, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* (K, KD). His frequent pilgrimages to the shrine of Sayyid Imāmshāh in Pīrāṇā alerted him to some very disturbing innovations being introduced into the community's sacred literature by the authorities at the shrine complex (*dargāh*).[33] The interpolations were significant enough to alarm him (K, KD).

Moreover, a number of religious rituals that had once been practiced were now discontinued. Significant among these was the custom of uttering *hai zindā* upon entering the shrine precincts, to which those in attendance would reply *kāyam pāyā* (B, K, KD). Both formulae consist of an Arabic word followed by its Persian translation and reflect a Gujarati pronunciation. The first, from *ḥayy zinda*, means "living," and is traditionally regarded by the Ismailis as a declaration of the belief in a living imam. The second, from *qā'im pāyinda*, meaning "eternal" or "abiding," asserts the eternal nature of divine guidance. Indeed, one of the most common titles of the imam in Arabic is *qā'im*, which conveys the sense that the imam is the one who ushers in the resurrection, or *qiyāma.*[34] Notably, the change in rituals was within memory of a schism from the Kaṇbī community, and may have been adopted as a protective measure to avoid similar secessions.[35] Later, in 1899, two prominent Kaṇbī brothers, Kalyanji Mehta (1870–1973) and Kunvarji Mehta (1886–1982) from Vanz village near Surat, joined the Āryā Samāj. They became active in proselytizing among the Matīyā Kaṇbī followers of Imāmshāh, urging them to renounce their Islamic traditions.[36]

Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought, ed. Todd Lawson (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005).

[33]A modern history of this shrine, particularly its legal status, can be found in Khan, "Liminality."

[34]Another common understanding posits that the initial word of the first formula and the latter word of the second formula are the Hindi verbs *hai* and the past tense *pāyā*, which would give the translations "He is alive" and "The Qa'im has been found" or "We have found him eternally." See, for example, 'Alī Muḥammad Kamāl al-Dīn and Zarīna Kamāl al-Dīn, *Manāsik Majālis wa-Tasbīḥāt* (Karachi: self-published, 2004), 42–44; see also Nānajīāṇī, *Khojā Vṛttānt*, 212; and Campbell, *Muslim and Parsi*, 49. When I visited the *dargāh* in 1998, the sayyids present told me that this ritual had indeed been practiced in the past, and despite some strenuous efforts to revive it, some of which had been successful, pressures finally became too great and that the two formulae are now only heard when the occasional elder, who still happens to practice the tradition, visits the shrine.

[35]Māstar, *Mahāgujarātanā Musalamāno*, 218, 315; Majmudar, *Cultural History of Gujarat*, 254; and "Kanbis."

[36]David Hardiman, "Purifying the Nation: The Arya Samaj in Gujarat 1895–1930," *Indian Economic Social History Review* 44, no. 1 (2007): 50.

Khoḍīdās's distress at the changes being introduced into religious practices prompted him to seek answers upon his return to Pīrāṇā in about 1900. He approached the sayyids and *kākās* in charge of the shrine and requested to see the old manuscript copies of the Gināns. He was aware of the existence of these documents because they were regularly displayed on the occasion of festivals, such as the death anniversary (*'urs*) of Imāmshāh (K, KD).[37] He was, however, refused. The authorities there simply offered him more of the altered versions, in which certain words, such as *shāh*, *imām* and so on, which had specific Ismaili connotations, had been replaced by Sanskritized expressions (K, KD).[38]

Continuous pressure and the payment of some money to one of the sayyids finally enabled him to procure an old manuscript copy of the book *Caution for the Faithful* (*Moman Chetāmaṇī*) by Imāmshāh (K, KD). Khoḍīdās was roused by the vividness of the admonitions to recognize the current *avatāra* contained in this work, such as the following (K, KD):

> The descendants of 'Alī and the Prophet continued
> Generation upon generation
> He who forsakes his veneration to them
> Approaches the gates of Hell
> Know that he will be considered the worst of the damned
> The vision of whose face will be a heinous sin
> A soul who shall destroy his own mother and father
> A soul that does not recognize the present garb of the *avatāra.*[39]

Upon his return to Bhavnagar, Khoḍīdās began to pore over his religious scriptures. The oral tradition of the Guptīs is unanimous in describing Khoḍīdās's captivation by one particular passage in the *Bhagavat Gīta* (IV:7–8) in which the *avatāra* Kṛṣṇa addresses his disciple, Arjuṇa, in the following words:

> यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।
> अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥
> परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।
> धर्म संस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे ॥

[37]*Urs*, literally "wedding," is commonly observed as the death anniversary of saints on the Subcontinent. I was able to see copies of some of the Ginān manuscripts at the shrine. However, partly because of the litigation that plagues the community, many of the possessors of such documents do not want them shown.

[38]A similar tendency to reject words of Sanskrit origin in preference for Perso-Arabic expressions is also prevalent among some sections of the Ismailis and other Muslims, particularly in Pakistan.

[39]The Moman Chetāmaṇī is common in a number of manuscripts and printed works. See the indices in Ali Sultaan Ali Asani, *The Harvard Collection of Ismaili Literature in Indic Languages: A Descriptive Catalog and Finding Aid* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1992); Zawahir Moir, *A Catalogue of the Khojki MSS in the Library of the Ismaili Institute* (London: unpublished typescript, 1985); and Zawahir Nooraly, *Catalogue of Khojki Manuscripts in the Collection of the Ismailia Association for Pakistan (Draft Copy)* (Karachi: Ismailia Association for Pakistan, unpublished typescript, 1971).

> O Arjuṇa, whenever virtue declines
> And vice spreads, then do I appear.
> For the deliverance of the good and the destruction of the wicked
> For establishing virtue, I am born from age to age.

Not only did nearly every Guptī whom I interviewed make reference to the importance of this passage in Khoḍīdās's belief system, but they also recited the passage to me in its original Sanskrit (B, K, R, KD). The oral tradition maintains that Khoḍīdās was convinced that the testimony of the religious scriptures made the existence of an *avatāra* in the present age incumbent. This belief was further strengthened when he met other Hindus in various cities who were also adherents of ʿAlī as the tenth *avatāra* (KD).

Because of his ancestral profession as a vegetable seller, Khoḍīdās was in frequent contact with the Khojā Ismailis of Bhavnagar, who were involved in the same hereditary occupation. With these acquaintances, he would avidly discuss matters of religion, and was startled to learn of the Ismaili adherence to the Gināns (K). He had been unaware of the historical connections between the two communities, and was under the impression that these compositions were the exclusive inheritance of his caste. Not being able to respond to some of his queries, his Ismaili acquaintances eventually introduced him to a learned member of their community by the name of Vāras ʿĪsā, who discussed matters further with Khoḍīdās and gave him a copy of an Ismaili prayer known as *aṣl duʿā.*[40] This prayer contained numerous passages parallel to the Imāmshāhī prayers. He studied this book deeply and soon began to recite the *duʿā* daily (B, R).

In 1903, Khoḍīdās was granted an audience with the Ismaili imam, Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh. Before long, his brothers Ramjībhāī, Maganlāl, and Jeṭhālāl joined him in his devotions (R).[41] As religious modifications from Pīrāṇā continued, Khoḍīdās was moved to appear at the chief Ismaili community center

[40]*Dhuā vakhat trejī tathā āratī (2) sāñjījā choghadīā (5) dhuā (7) tathā chhelo nīṇdho (10) mo avatār*, 12th ed. (Mumbai: n.p., 1942 VS/1998); and *Pīr Sadaradīn Sāhebe rachelī asal duā*, 12th ed. (Mumbai: Mī. V.N. Hudā for Ismailia Association, 1948). It is possible that this was either Essabhoy Dawood or Issabhai Nanji, who were witnesses numbers one and two, respectively, on the Bhownagar Commission for the Aga Khan Case. See *The Hon'ble Mr. Justice Russell in the Aga Khan Case heard in the High Court of Bombay from 3rd February to 7th August 1908 (Judgement delivered September 1, 1908)* (Bombay: Times Press, 1908), 38.

[41]In their gatherings, they regularly recited the *duʿā* and Gināns together. As time progressed, they modified their traditional Imāmshāhī practice of an important ceremony known as *ghaṭ-pāṭ* to correspond with the Ismaili practice and added the performance of other Ismaili ceremonies. Azim Nanji, "Ritual and Symbolic Aspects of Islam in African Contexts," in *Islam in Local Contexts*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 102–9, is a cursory article on the *ghaṭ-pāṭ* ceremony. More details may be found in Parin Aziz Dossa, "Ritual and Daily Life: Transmission and Interpretation of the Ismaili Tradition in Vancouver" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1985); Hasan Nazarali, *A Brief Outline of Ismaili Rites, Rituals, Ceremonies and Festivals* (Edmonton: n.d.); and Kamāl al-Dīn and Kamāl al-Dīn, *Manāsik Majālis wa-Tasbīḥāt*, 101–3.

(*jamā'at-khāna*) of Bhavnagar, where he requested admission (K). He was then taken to the Re-Creation Club Institute, the primary Ismaili organization for religious matters, and formal arrangements were made. In 1913, he officially performed the *bai'a* or oath of allegiance to the Ismaili imam, formally acknowledging him as his spiritual leader. The opposition of some members of his family to this move failed to dissuade him. Instead, he entered into private deliberations with other members of his caste and induced them to join him. Prominent among them were Raṇchhoḍdās Kuberdās, Dhuḍā Oghā, Maganlāl, Vanārasīdās Maganlāl, Mukhī Budhardās, Khīmālāl, and Narmadāshaṅkar (KD).

The small group began to have frequent meetings with a number of Ismailis in addition to Vāras 'Īsā. These included Missionary Sharīfbhāī, Mukhī Jamālbhāī, and Missionary Jamālbhāī Vīrjī of Mumbai and 'Īsā Dā'ūd Khānmuḥammad of Bhavnagar.[42] Fear of discovery prevented the Guptīs from practicing openly, and they were allowed to enter the *jamā'at-khāna* by the back door. The elders of the community vividly recall doing this as children (R, KD, O). Kālīdās Vanārasīdās recollects how Ḥasan 'Alī Bāpu, one of the pioneers of the nascent movement, would encourage the Kāchhīyā children in the prayer hall by pointing to the picture of the imam and proclaiming in Gujarati, *ā kharo sāheb chhe*, "This is the true lord." Chuckling, he says, "What a revolution that was. As Hindus, we would not even have a cup of tea with Muslims, and here we were praying with them!" (KD)

The experience of some people joining the community at this time and the family dynamics involved are noteworthy. One young Jīvābhāī Motīrām supported the group, but was opposed by his father. Unable to openly participate in early morning meditations that were commonly practiced among the Ismailis, he is said to have tied a string to his foot every night, which he would leave hanging from the window. At the required time, one of the other Guptīs would pull the string, thus awakening him and allowing him to participate in the prayers unnoticed (K). Jīvābhāī passed away while young, and his father experienced tremendous feelings of guilt. In 1923, Khoḍīdās encouraged him to accompany them to Limdi, where they were going for the *dīdār* (beatific vision) of the imam. Half-heartedly, Motīrām joined the group. In Limdi, he was astounded to see one of the female sayyids from Pīrāṇā, supposedly a Sunnī, in attendance. He approached her in bewilderment, asking her why she

[42]The last is perhaps the same as the aforementioned Vāras 'Īsā. The English word "missionary" was commonly used for learned Ismā'īlīs who performed preaching activities, both within and outside the community. In this sense, it was similar to another term of Sanskrit origin that was once common, *bhagat* (from the Sanskrit *bhakta*). Both of these terms have now fallen largely into disuse in favor of the Arabic word *wā'iẓ*. The group of Guptīs would also meet regularly with Missionary Alībhāī Bābavāṇī, who was originally part of the Moman (as distinct from Khojā) *jamā'at* of Junāgaḍh (Gīr). As a Moman, he shared the Guptīs' historical attachment to Sayyid Imāmshāh of Pīrāṇā. He had moved to Bhavnagar for employment. This missionary was well known for his piety and the authorship of the book *Allāh nā Rasulo, The Prophets of God* (R).

was present for the *dīdār.* She told him, "The Aga Khan is our spiritual leader (*pīr*). It is incumbent for us to come." This so moved Motīrām that he became an Ismaili forthwith and even performed a symbolic ceremony (known as *sir-bandī*) of dedicating his life, heart, and all of his worldly possessions (*tan*, *man* and *dhan*) to the Ismaili imam (KD).[43]

The continued allegiance of at least some of the *sayyids* of Pīrāṇā to the imam, which seems to have existed without the knowledge of their followers, is noteworthy. A few of the sayyids whom I interviewed in Pīrāṇā intimated that a portion of the religious dues collected at the shrine used to be forwarded to the imams in Persia. Documentary evidence indicates that this practice continued right until the time of the arrival of the first Aga Khan in India in the nineteenth century.[44] Kapīlābahen Andhāriyā also relates that at one point, the authorities in Pīrāṇā caught wind of the regular treks of a group of Guptīs to Mumbai for the *dīdār* of the Ismaili imam. Interestingly, they did not oppose this, but instead insisted that these pilgrimages not be revealed to other members of their caste. This was readily agreeable to the party, as its members had no desire to draw attention to themselves (K).

About this time, a number of countervailing forces—Christian, Hindu, and Muslim—were at play, particularly among communities perceived as having a composite heritage. The Āryā Samāj was becoming more active in Gujarat, often in reaction to Christian and Muslim activities among "untouchables" and disadvantaged groups such as orphans. Hindus who were "lost" could be "reclaimed" by undergoing the Āryā Samājī purification ritual known as *shuddhi.* During the famine of 1899–1900, a number of Christian orphanages were established to look after children who had lost their parents, such as the one established in Nadiad by Reverend G. W. Park of the Methodist Episcopalian Church. This provoked the Āryā Samājīs to launch a campaign in 1908 to reconvert and "rescue" the orphans. It also led to the establishment of a "Hindū Anāth Āshram" for the children.[45] In 1911, a collection of *bhajans* entitled *Anāth*

[43]The *sirbandī* ceremony is described by *The Hon'ble Mr. Justice Russell in The Aga Khan Case heard in the High Court of Bombay from 3rd February to 7th August 1908 (Judgement delivered 1st September 1908)*, 41, in the following words: "There is another ceremony called 'Sir Bundi,' literally the offering of the head. In this ceremony the follower puts the whole of his property at the disposal of the Imam through the committee of elders in the Jamatkhana. But they magnanimously relieve him from such an excessive sacrifice. They fix the price at which he is to buy back the whole of his property and the price so fixed is paid to the Imam. I myself went with the Counsel of some of the parties to the Jamatkhana and saw the Thalsufra and Sir Bundi. We sat on chairs in front of a raised seat or throne on which the Aga Khan sits when he attends the Jamatkhana. The whole large room was full of Khojas seated and at times kneeling on the ground, in another room the women of the community were collected in large numbers and going through similar ceremonies. It was a most impressive sight owing to the reverence with which the whole proceedings were conducted."

[44]See Dominique-Sila Khan, *Crossing the Threshold: Understanding Religious Identities in South Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 148; cf. Nānajīāṇī, *Khojā Vṛttānt*, 231; Nuramahamad, *Isamāilī Momīn*, 135.

[45]Full details of this incident are provided in Hardiman, "Purifying the Nation," 47.

Bhajanāvalī was prepared for the Nadiad orphans to sing in processions around the town. In one of them, they would sing that in the evil times of famine, as their parents were no more, they were left at the mercy of Christians and Muslims: "To eat us alive the Qur'an and the Bible are hissing [like snakes]; to drink our blood, famine and plague are gnashing their teeth."[46]

Among communities targeted for *shuddhi*, there were sometimes strong reactions. In March 1926, for example, the Molesalams held an anti-*shuddhi* conference in Charotar, presided over by one of their prominent leaders and a member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly, Sardar Naharsinhji Ishvarsinhji.[47] The Ismailis, whose various communities, and particularly the Guptīs, had also been targeted,[48] reacted strongly as well. They endeavored to solidify their position and even to gain adherents. This movement reached its greatest momentum in the 1920s and was spearheaded primarily by four Ismaili missionaries: Khudābakhsh Ṭālib,[49] Hājī Muḥammad Fāḍil,[50] Muḥammad Murād ʻAlī Jumaʻ,[51] and ʻAlī Muḥammad Ḍāyā. The successful proselytization activities of these four and others like them precipitated intense jealousy and rivalry. An attempt was made on the life of Khudābakhsh Ṭālib by adding potassium cyanide to his tea. In the ensuing court case, the personal intervention of the Aga Khan resulted in the charges being dropped, thus assuaging lingering tensions.[52]

Parallel to these developments were the abandonment of *taqiyya* and public declarations of allegiance to the Ismaili imam that were being made by centuries-old Guptī communities, particularly in the Punjab, Surat, and Mumbai.[53] The combination of proselytizing activities and these public

[46]Cited in ibid., 47.

[47]"Secret Bombay Presidency Police Abstracts of Intelligence," C.I.D. Office, Mumbai, 1926, 112, 199, as cited in ibid., 57–58.

[48]In addition to the Āryā Samājī statements cited later, further indication of this among both the Khojās and the followers of Imāmshāh is provided in "Secret Bombay Presidency Police Abstracts of Intelligence," C.I.D. Office, Mumbai, 1926, 128, 250, as cited in ibid., 57–58.

[49]Khudābakhsh Ṭālib (1890–1925) was born into a Sindhi family in Gwadar. His mother, Khairībāī, was a well-known missionary. In addition to his native Sindhi, he also learned Arabic, Persian, and Gujarati. Some details of his life are preserved in two popular accounts, Jāpharalī Abajī Bhalavāṇī, *Shahīd Mīshanarī Khudābaksh Tālibanī Jīvan Jharamar* (Mumbai: 1983); and Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali, *101 Ismaili Heroes: Late 19th Century to Present Age*, vol. 1 (Karachi: Islamic Book Publisher, 2003), 265–72.

[50]His name is mentioned briefly, without details, in Sayarāb Abū Turābī, *Dharmanā Dhvajadhārī* (Mumbai: Divyajñān Prakāshan Mandir, 1981), 150.

[51]Muḥammad Murād ʻAlī Jumaʻ (1878–1966) of Mumbai was later to become the principal of the Ismaili Mission Center in that city; see Sadik Ali, *101 Ismaili Heroes*, 318–19.

[52]Like the Christians, the Ismailis were also active in social work among the poor, which sometimes attracted hostility. In about 1921, an orphanage called Nakalaṅk Āshram, with which Khudābakhsh Ṭālib was associated, was opened in the village of Anand. The orphans there were brought up as Ismailis. However, as a result of this murder attempt, the activities of the orphanage were severely curtailed; see ibid., 265–72.

[53]See, in this connection, the most detailed account of the Guptīs of Surat, Sultanali Mohamed, "Heroes of Surat," *Jāgṛti* (1956). Similarly, the testimony of Vāres Amīchand Mukhī Pīṇḍīdās, a

declarations aroused the ire of the Āryā Samāj. Sometime before 1919, Paṇḍit Rādhākṛṣṇa of Peshawar wrote in his polemical Urdu work, *Āghākhānī khudā'ī awr uske karishme*,

> For several days, I have been hearing rumors of the misfortune and short-sightedness of my Hindu brethren and have been reading in the newspapers that in some areas the unfortunate Aga Khanis have abandoned the Hindu fold, becoming Shī'ī Imāmī Ismailis …, and are adopting Islamic practices. This horrible news is tearing my heart to shreds. My blood curdles from worrying day and night. I can't eat, and largely because of worry and anxiety I even become feverish.[54]

Echoing these sentiments, Paṇḍit Ānandaprīyajī, Gujarat Hindu Sabha's founding secretary, decried the Christians and the Ismaili Muslims who "worked day and night to transform the great devotees of Ram and Krishna into Johns and Alis."[55] Paṇḍit Rādhākṛṣṇa charged in a tract entitled *My Sound Advice* that the Guptī Hindus would never be accepted by Muslims and that Ismailis would refuse to give their daughters in marriage to Islamized Hindus. Ibrāhīm Vartejī responded by pointing out the recent case of a Guptī by the name of Nānālāl Hardevashrām, a Brahmin by birth, who secretly held to a belief in the Ismaili imam as the *avatāra* of the current age. When he openly declared this, his parents-in-law forced their daughter, Chandravidyā, to leave him. However, following the divorce, not only did this Brahmin (whose Arabic name was Nūrmuḥammad 'Alīmuḥammad) find an Ismaili Muslim bride, but their wedding was happily attended by about five hundred Ismailis, including prominent members of the community, among whom was the president of the Mumbai Ismaili Council.[56] Extremely interesting to note is the fact that the oral tradition of the Guptīs of Punjab maintains that Paṇḍit Rādhākṛṣṇa was himself born to Guptī parents and only later turned against his ancestral belief in the tenth *avatāra*.[57]

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large landholder and Guptī from the Punjab, at the Aga Khan Case on July 28, 1908, is noteworthy in this regard. He explained that there were thirty-five Guptī prayer houses in the Punjab and that the Gināns were recited in all of them. He also detailed his meeting with the imam in Amritsar in 1897, at which time the imam examined the accounts he had prepared, which detailed the affairs of the community. In cross-examination, he also explained that it was not possible for the community to adopt certain Muslim practices because they would be excommunicated if they did so; see *Nāmadār Āgākhān sāmeno Mukadamo: sane 1905 no mukadamo nambar 729*, 277–82.

[54]Quoted in Ibrāhīm Jūsab Vartejī, *Āgākhānī Khudāīno Jhaḷkāṭ yāne (Shamshī) Ismāilīyā Phirakāno Bhed* (Mumbai: Mukhtār Nānjī for the Isamāilī Sāhitya Uttejak Maṇḍaḷ, 1919), 112.

[55]Paṇḍit Ānandapriyājī, "Gujarātamāṃ Hindū Sabhā," *Yugadharma* 4, no. 5 (1980 VS/1924): 351–52, as cited in Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat: Plurality, Hindutva and Beyond* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005), 214.

[56]Vartejī, *Āgākhānī Khudāī*, 274–75.

[57]I am grateful to the late *al-wā'iẓ* Abuali A. Aziz of Vancouver, Canada, himself originally from a Guptī family of Punjab, for this information.

The Āryā Samāj's repeated attacks against both the Ismailis and Guptī Hindus continued, coupled with allegations of cannibalism and infanticide. The astonishing accusations led to physical violence against these communities in southern Gujarat, and the government was forced to intervene (B, R). The thirty-fifth resolution of the 1922 Kathiawad political assembly held in Vaḍhvāṇ aimed at dispelling the fears that had been aroused in the population and ensuring the security of those who had been wrongly impugned:

> This assembly rejects any accusations of the type that the Khojās [Ismailis] of Kathiawad are kidnapping young children, murdering them and so on. Because of such accusations, atrocities are being committed against this community. We urge citizens to forsake such actions.[58]

The harassment by the Āryā Samāj provoked opposite reactions among different groups of Guptīs. In July 1914 in Surat, for example, abandoning their dissimulation, 150 Hindu families jointly made a public declaration, accompanied by announcements in prominent newspapers, of their allegiance to the Aga Khan; while in Bhavnagar, the threat of disclosure led to even greater adherence to *taqiyya.* Attendance at the Khojā *jamā'at-khāna*, even through the back door, now became exceedingly difficult. Rather, daily gatherings were held at individual homes (KD). Kālīdās Vanārasīdās recalls how early morning prayer meetings were held at his own house, the house of Khoḍīdās and the house of Raṇchhoḍ Bhagat from at least the mid-1920s.

Despite attacks by the Āryā Samāj, there was continued growth of Guptī numbers (KD). This provoked increased suspicion and disapproval by the rest of the Kāchhīyā caste, which accused the Guptīs of adhering to Islamic customs. These accusations are rather startling considering the fact that all members of this Hindu caste, whether Guptī or not, began prayers and mantras with the formula *om farmānjī bi'smi'l-lāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*, "OM, by the command, in the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful" (R).[59] But interestingly, the inclusion of the first verse of the Qur'an in religious practices was somehow considered neither objectionable nor Islamic.

[58]Quoted in Hudā, *Asatya*, 172; see also N. M. Budhavāṇī, *Ismāīlī Khojā Jñāti upar Bhayaṅkar Ārop* (Dhorājī: Kāṭhiyāvāḍ Sāhitya Prachārak Maṇḍaḷ, 1922); Valīmahamad Nānajī Hudā, *Lokono Khoṭo Vahem ane Khojā Komanī Nirdoshatā* (Dhorājī: Kāṭhīyāvāḍ Sāhitya Prachārak Maṇḍaḷ, 1922). The original minutes are not available through WorldCat or other major library search engines or union catalogs. My colleague Samira Sheikh kindly checked through the holdings at the British Library for me, but records for the 1922 assembly were not available.

[59]This phrasing is recorded in several works, including Konṭrākṭar, *Pīrāṇā-"Satpanth"nī Pol*, 374–462; *Pūjāvidhi tathā Jñān* (Ahmedabad: Ācharya Shrī Kākā Saheb Savajī Rāmajī, 2038 VS/1982); *Satpanthi Yagña Vidhi*, ed., Saiyad Shamsaddīn Bāvā Sāheb, 4th ed. (Ahmedabad: Pīrāṇā Gurukuḷ Ajyukeshan Ṭrasṭ, 2048 VS/1992). The more recent *Atharvavedīy Satapanth Yajñavidhi*, 3rd ed. (Pīrāṇā: Satapanth Sevā Prakāshan Samiti, 2053 VS/1996) has eliminated all Qur'anic references from the text, while Saiyad Kāsim-alī Durvesh-alī Erāki Alahusenī, *Satpanth Shāstra yane*

Excommunication and Reconciliation

Matters finally came to a head in the early 1930s, when the caste took drastic action and excommunicated the Guptīs collectively (K, KD). Such a move was exceptional, as the Kaṇbīs are well known, even today, for the latitude of beliefs and practices within the community. The proverb *Kaṇbī nyāt bahār nahīṃ*, meaning "a Kaṇbī is never out casted," clearly did not apply in this circumstance.[60] An order was circulated to each and every house requiring complete dissociation from all Kāchhīyā partisans of the Aga Khan (KD). This order had dramatic consequences. For the first time, the Guptī adherents of the Ismaili imam in Bhavnagar were defined as a distinct and identifiable group. Many who had never before considered themselves to be any different from other members of their caste except in their private religious convictions were forced to reevaluate their position (KD). It must be remembered that religion is but one aspect, and in fact sometimes a rather minor one, of caste identity. In his 1922 work *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, for example, R. E. Enthoven notes that although they are a single caste, the Kāchhīyās "belong to different religious sects."[61] Adherents included Bījpanthīs, Shaivas, Vallabhāchāryas, Swāmīnārāyaṇs, Kabīrpanthīs, and, of course, Muslims. The Andhārīā and Khatrī Kāchhīyās, like the Matīyā Kaṇbīs, however, are distinguished by their adherence to the path of their saint, Imāmshāh.[62]

The out casting provoked heated arguments. Kālīdās Vanārasīdās recounts how, as a teenager, he contended with his friends that if he were an Ismaili, then so were all of them, whether they realized it or not. He pointed out the fact that the Gināns recorded that Imāmshāh himself, along with all of the other recognized saints (*pīrs*) of the community, had traveled to Persia for audiences with the Aga Khan's ancestors (KD).[63]

The role of women in this movement is remarkable. Seventy-four-year-old Bachchubhāī vividly recalls that his father was not a believer. However, soon after his father passed away, his mother revealed to him her own belief in the Aga Khan as the *avatāra* of the current era (*yuga*). She told him that at the age of twelve, he would have to decide which group to join and firmly told him, "be here or there, but not in between." At the age of twelve, Bachchubhāī

Mokshagatīno Sācho Mārg (Pīrāṇā: Paṭel Lālajībhāi Nānajībhāī, 2010 VS/1954), 194–270, omits *om.* See also "Kanbis," 2849; cf. Māstar, *Mahāgujarātanā Musalamāno*, 325.

[60]Jayprakash M. Trivedi, *The Social Structure of Patidar Caste in India* (Delhi: Kanishka Publishing House, 1992), 22.

[61]Enthoven, *Tribes and Castes*, 123.

[62]Ibid., 124.

[63]See, e.g., Sayyid Imāmshāh, *Janatpurī*, 2nd ed. (Mumbai: Mukhi Laljibhai Devraj, Dhī Khojā Siñdhī chhāpakhānuṃ, 1976 VS/1-8-20), in which the community's patron saint records his own journey.

chose to swear allegiance to the Aga Khan.[64] Bachchubhāī's mother then proceeded to convince her brother, Motīlāl, to support the group of Khoḍīdās. Motīlāl did so and became one of the most ardent benefactors of the emerging community (B).[65]

A handful of the most daring Guptīs abandoned all pretences of dissimulation, challenging community leaders by saying that as they had been expelled, the caste no longer had jurisdiction over their actions (K). Immediately, three heads of families boldly joined the mainstream Ismaili community, changed their names, and began attending the Khojā *jamāʿat-khāna* once again. These were Maganlāl, the brother of Khoḍīdās, who now became known as Murād ʿAlī; Hemālāl, who became Qurbān ʿAlī and Prabhudās,[66] who not only changed his name to Ḥasan ʿAlī, but also adopted "Muslim" dress and became well known for sporting a red cap in the Muslim style. This type of reaction was completely unexpected by the caste authorities (KD).

In 1936, the leaders of the Bhavnagar Guptī community sent representatives to participate in the imam's golden jubilee celebrations being held in Mumbai (R). More Kāchhīyās started to attend the Khojā *jamāʿat-khāna*, though still through the back door, and a number even began sending their children to be taught at Ismaili religious schools (KD).

But, as time went on, members of the Kāchhīyā caste relented and began to flout the orders of excommunication, openly intermingling with expelled family members. This was particularly true at times of weddings and other such occasions when families refused to exclude members censured for their allegiance to the Aga Khan (K). Numerous caste members privately held to the same religious convictions, and so naturally felt sympathetic to the plight of those who had been ostracized (KD). The discomfort caused by a general disregard toward the injunctions occasioned a postponement of the excommunication until such time as instructions were received from Pīrāṇā (K).

The year 1939 was a landmark for the Guptī community, as a delegation of their leaders went to Limdi, where the imam was to grant audience (*dīdār*) on February 3. Upon arrival, they requested the relevant authorities for a special *mehmānī*, a meeting at which they could express their devotion and homage. However, they were told that they could participate in the *mehmānī* of the general Bhavnagar Ismaili *jamāʿat.* Budhar Mukhī pressed the matter,[67] suggesting that they were prepared to telegram the imam if need be. In the

[64]Bachchubhāī explained that henceforth his family's *dasond*, or tithe, which had previously been sent to the shrine of Imāmshāh in Pīrāṇā via Poshāṇ, was now sent to the Ismaili imam (B).
[65]This Motīlāl is apparently different from the one referred to earlier.
[66]The maternal uncle (*māmā*) of Vanārasīdās.
[67]As the title *mukhī* indicates, Budhar Mukhī was a senior functionary in the Imāmshāhī community. He was the father-in-law of Kālīdās, one of my informants.

end, the *jamāʿatī* authorities relented and honored the request. When the imam approached the group, he inquired as to which *jamāʿat's mehmānī* it was, to which Budhar Mukhī replied that it was the *mehmānī* of the Guptī *jamāʿat* of Bhavnagar (KD). The significance of this incident should not be underestimated, for it marks the first instance in which the Ismaili institutional structure recognized the Guptīs of Bhavnagar as a distinct Ismaili *jamāʿat.*

Fortunately, the communication made by the imam to the Guptīs on this occasion has been recorded in the Khojkī book *The Jewel of Mercy.*[68] The imam accepted the offering of the group and gave his blessings to the "Imāmshāhī brethren" who were assembled. He further said that Imāmshāh had correctly shown them the recognition of the imam of the time, in the manner that the sage himself had believed. They should therefore believe in the "living imam" of the Imāmshāhīs. He urged them to perform meditation or esoteric worship (*bāṭinī ʿibādat*), never to do this for reasons of ostentation, and never to cause pain to anyone.[69]

In attendance on this occasion was Paramāṇanddās, the son of Khoḍīdās. He was so moved by the episode that henceforth he became the motivating force behind the Bhavnagar Guptī community and its most charismatic leader (KD). With captivating speaking skills and a gifted singing voice for recitation of the Ginān̄s, Paramāṇanddās was able to win over even larger numbers. Thus commenced an era of open and public proselytization (B, K, R, KD).

The Guptīs of Bhavnagar came into contact with Guptī communities in other areas that, despite having a variety of histories and backgrounds, faced many of the same challenges posed by their dissimulation as Hindus. Khoḍīdās and Paramāṇanddās traveled widely to speak to both Guptī and non-Guptī communities, often accompanied by Kālīdās, Raṇchhoḍ, Shaṅkar, and others (KD).[70]

Paramāṇanddās became extremely popular and was in demand to deliver sermons (*waʿẓ*) in Mumbai and other centers. Even today, the Ismailis of Mumbai affectionately refer to him as *dhotī-wālā mishnarī*, "the preacher in the Indian loin cloth." Recordings of both his sermons and his Ginān̄s proliferated far beyond the confines of Bhavnagar, Gujarat, and even India. His favorite subject appears to have been *rūḥāniyyat* or "spirituality."

[68]The secret Khojkī script, another of the instruments of *taqiyya*, is discussed in Ali Sultaan Ali Asani, "The Khojki Script: A Legacy of Ismaili Islam in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, no. 3 (1987): 439–49.

[69]*Gavahare Rahemat yāne Rahematanā Motī: Maolānā Hājar Imāmanā Mubārak Pharamāno 1933 thī 1940* (Mumbai: n.p., ca. 1940), 172.

[70]Thus, when the Ismaili missionary ʿAlībhāī Ḍāyā approached the Guptīs of Bhavnagar, he was assured that they were in no need of "conversion" and, in fact, were themselves in the process of proselytizing others (KD). During the imam's visit (*padhrāmaṇī*) in Dhaka, ʿAlībhāī Ḍāyā delivered a report on the status of India's Guptī *jamāʿats.* Based on this report's findings, the imam ordered several modifications to the practices of Guptī *jamāʿats* in Bharuch and Ahmedabad, including the changing of a number of personal names. The *jamāʿat* of Bhavnagar, however, was allowed to continue as before (KD).

Paramāṇanddās was not the only Guptī speaker (*wā'iẓ*) to gain renown. Rājū Andhārīyā recounts how his father-in-law, Bābubhāī Manjī, would travel to other centers of Guptī strength, particularly Khambhāt, to deliver sermons. Most significantly, every year at the grand celebration of Sayyid Imāmshāh's *'urs* in Pīrāṇā, Bābubhāī Manjī would give public lectures to thousands of Hindus gathered there, informing them of the arrival of the long-awaited *avatāra* (R).

The powerful hierarchy at Pīrāṇa was not prepared for this public opposition to their authority. However, having tried and failed in their attempt at excommunication, they decided to try other tactics. In 1945, a public debate was announced in Andhārīyā Kāchhīyā Jñātinī Vāḍī between the party of Sayyid Aḥmad'alī Bāwā Khākī and the party of Khoḍīdās (K, R, KD).[71] The irony of the Pīrāṇā party's being led by a Muslim, a sayyid (descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad) no less, in accusing the Hindu party of Khoḍīdās of adhering to forbidden Islamic practices should not be lost. Khoḍīdās was called upon to prove that he and his party had not stepped out of the bounds of their caste. The loser of the debate was to take the shoe of the winning party in his mouth, a most demeaning condition (K, R, KD). Drawing on a number of sources, notable among them the *Caution for the Faithful* (*Moman Chetāmaṇī*) of Sayyid Imāmshāh, the universally acknowledged saint of both parties, Khoḍīdās sought to show that not only was his party's allegiance to the Aga Khan in conformity with the religious beliefs of their caste, but that such an allegiance was the logical outcome of adherence to their religious scriptures (K, R, KD). Further evidence was drawn from the daily prayers of the party from Pīrāṇā, which included a recitation of the genealogy of Ismaili imams until the time of Nizār b. Khalīl Allāh (d. 1722) and the practice of uttering the formulae *hai zindā* and *kāyam pāyā* at the entrance to the *dargāh* (K, R).

In the end, the sayyid conceded defeat and admitted the acceptability of Khoḍīdās's arguments. However, as the Guptīs are proud to explain, Khoḍīdās was magnanimous in victory and would not allow the sayyid to be humiliated by the punishment that had been decided. Instead, he showed utmost reverence, saying "you are our most respected elder, we shall follow what you recommend" (K, KD). The sayyid then conceded the right of the Guptīs to remain within the caste, but requested that they no longer attend the *jamā'at-khāna* of the Khojās and instead establish their own prayer house, a condition that was found acceptable to the Guptīs (K, KD). The debate, a turning point in the history of the community, ended with great jubilation and applause. Considering the Ismaili allegiance of some of the sayyids themselves and their laissez-faire attitude toward the Guptī pilgrimages to Mumbai to see the imam, so long as these were kept private, one suspects it was not the Bhavnagar Guptīs' "Islamic"

[71]A certain Sayyid Satakbhāī was also said to have been present on this occasion.

leanings that the Pīrāṇā party found disturbing, but the potential repercussions of their public manifestation.

Formation of Community

The establishment of the first Guptī *jamāʿat-khāna* in Āmbā Chok above the store of Khoḍīdās on June 15, 1946, ushered in a new era for the community (B, R, KD). Caste acceptance encouraged a number of previously reticent families to join, most notably that of a certain Jñānchandbhāī, whose brother, Chāndubhāī Mukhī, was already publicly part of the group. Jñānchandbhāī brought with him about forty members of his own family, which was a major boost to the morale of the Guptīs (R). Two of Khoḍīdās's sons, Budharbhāī Khoḍīdās and Maṇīlāl Khoḍīdās, were appointed as religious functionaries (*mukhī* and *kāmaḍīā*) for the newly established congregation (KD). During the same year, a delegation was also sent on behalf of the Guptī *jamāʿat* to participate in the Aga Khan's diamond jubilee (R).[72]

One of the most distinctive features of the Bhavnagar Guptī *jamāʿat* was the passion for religious sermons, known as *waʿẓ* (K, R). Until 1980, there were daily *waʿẓ* in the Guptī *jamāʿat-khāna.* A minimum of three sermons were delivered on important religious festivals, known as *majlis.* On the occasions of the imam's birthday (*sālgirah*), the anniversary of his accession to his position, and the festival of spring (*nawrūz*, the Persian New Year), there would be as many as seven to eight sermons (R).[73]

An interesting passage in a Gujarati travelogue entitled *The Enchanting Lands I've Seen* (*Joyā Raḷīyāmaṇā Desh*), written by the late Shamsudīn Bandālī Hājī, narrates a trip to Bhavnagar in the mid-1970s, the day after the spring festival (*nawrūz*). The *mukhī* at the time, Paramāṇanddās Khoḍīdās, lamented the fact that the traveler had missed the religious celebrations, which had continued late into the night. The traveler wished another *majlis* to be held that day, a request that was readily agreed to by the *mukhī.* To draw a comparison, it was as though Christmas mass were to be celebrated again the following day at the request of an itinerant traveler. This *majlis* was attended by six hundred people, and sermons were delivered until one o'clock in the

[72]It is interesting to note that from the establishment of the *jamāʿat-khāna* until 1972, all *mehmānīs* and correspondence with the imam were direct and not through the institutional structure of the main *jamāʿat.*

[73]Kālīdās Bhagat recalls the visit of the popular *wāʿiz*, ʿAlībhāī Nānjī (d. 1978), when he was *kāmaḍīā* of the Guptī *jamāʿat.* The Mumbai institutions had permitted the *wāʿiz* only a two-day stay in Bhavnagar, one day for the main *jamāʿat* and one day for the Guptī *jamāʿat.* But Kālīdās' *mukhī*, Paramāṇanddās, asked the *kāmaḍīā* to send a telegram to Mumbai to request an extension. The request was granted and ʿAlībhāī Nānjī was able to stay with the Guptī *jamāʿat* for eight days.

morning.[74] Equally telling about the Guptī *jamāʿat*'s passion for religious sermons is a note in the platinum jubilee souvenir issue of *Jāgṛti* magazine, which records the fact that the Guptī *jamāʿat* in Bhavnagar could boast an overwhelming twenty-seven preachers.[75]

The year 1947 saw the partition of India and Pakistan. Surprisingly, the Guptīs were little affected by this. The *jamāʿat-khāna* was not closed and, despite the curfew in Bhavnagar, members were permitted to leave their houses and attend early morning ceremonies (KD).

In 1950, a number of Guptīs attended the audience (*dīdār*) given by the imam in Hasanabad, Mumbai. By this time, Khoḍīdās, the founding father of the community, was extremely aged. He was granted a meeting with the imam in which he said that he had not much longer to live and desired to spend his last days at Hasanabad, site of the mausoleum of the first Aga Khan, and to be buried there (K). The imam advised him against this drastic action, suggesting instead that he return to Bhavnagar and have his caste perform his last rites. This startled Khoḍīdās, who ventured, "But we burn our dead;" to which the imam is purported to have replied, "So burn them, but what you wish is not appropriate at the present time" (K). It is likely that the situation was still too volatile for such a bold statement, which may have been viewed as provocative. Kapīlābahen Andhārīyā recalls the hair-raising case of Savjī Kākā, a leading Hindu religious figure at the shrine of Imāmshāh in Pīrāṇā.[76] Savjī Kākā had been an open advocate of the concept of the imamate, and published a book to this affect. The book hinted at his allegiance to the Aga Khan. Soon after its release, however, Sawjī Kākā was murdered (K).[77]

Following the instructions received from the imam, Khoḍīdās returned to Bhavnagar, where he passed away within a short time. All rites were performed according to the tradition of his caste except that as his body was being taken in its funeral procession (*shmashāṇ yātrā*), rather than chanting *Rām bolo Rām*, "say Rām say Rām," in the traditional manner, the gathered mourners called out *Jai Nakalaṅk*, "long live Nakalaṅk." This bold slogan recalls the belief in the imam as Nakalaṅk, the Immaculate One, the name used by Ismaili *pīrs* from perhaps the eleventh century onward for the last and final *avatāra*, ʿAlī, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad. Furthermore, the title of Nakalaṅk is a direct parallel to the Shīʿī belief of the imam as *maʿṣūm*, which also means "immaculate." Henceforth, all funeral ceremonies performed by the Guptīs were to include this slogan.

[74]Shamsudīn Bandālī Hājī, *Joyā Raḷiyāmaṇā Desh* (Mumbai: Divyajñān Prakāshan Mandir, 1981), 138–39.
[75]Mohamed, "Heroes of Surat."
[76]On the institution of the *kākā* in Pīrāṇā, refer to Khan and Moir, "Coexistence," passim.
[77]My informant did not have a copy of this book and could not remember the exact year of the incident, but assured me that she "remembered it distinctly," as the whole episode had transpired during her lifetime. The death date is recorded as 1986 in Moir and Khan, "New Light," 231.

Already dynamically involved in the field of delivering sermons both within their own community and among the general Ismaili population, the Bhavnagar Guptīs now actively immersed themselves in all respects with the general *jamāʿat* or what they refer to as the *mūḷ jamāʿat*, roughly translatable as "the parent community." Thus, they can be found at every level of the *jamāʿat*'s institutional structure and have even provided the chairman of the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board (R).

In 1964, twenty-five Bhavnagar Guptīs attended the World Ismaili Socio-Economic Conference in Karachi, Pakistan. They were overwhelmed at meeting other followers of the imam from across the globe, including places as dispersed as Hunza, Gilgit, Afghanistan, and Africa (R, KD). They narrate how the *mukhī* of the Multan *jamāʿat* noticed their appearance and approached them, inquiring as to whether they were Hindus. They replied in the affirmative, stating that they were members of the Guptī *jamāʿat* of Bhavnagar. Hearing this, the Multan *mukhī* was overjoyed. At one time, virtually all Ismailis of the Punjab had been Guptīs themselves. He embraced Paramāṇanddās and Kālīdās, the Guptī *mukhī* and *kāmaḍīā*, and insisted that they come to Multan, where he would show them the shrine (*dargāh*) of Pīr Shams and the nearby shrines of Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn and Pīr Ḥasan Kabīr al-Dīn, Imāmshāh's great-ancestor, grandfather, and father, respectively. At first, Paramaṇanddās hesitated, saying, "But there are twenty-five of us." To which the *mukhī* of the Multan *jamāʿat* replied, "So for twenty-five of our brothers we will provide twenty-five rooms." This warm-hearted welcome moved them deeply and further solidified their attachment to the *mūḷ jamāʿat* (KD).

What was left to do, in the eyes of Paramaṇanddās, who by now had been granted the title of "Vazīr" for his dedicated services, was to establish a housing society for his community, at the center of which would be a purpose-built *jamāʿat-khāna.* This would finally sever their dependence on their caste, and provide an environment for their autonomous development (B, R, KD). Mukhī Maskatvālā of the Darkhāna *jamāʿat-khāna* in Mumbai, who was also chairman of the Ismaili Housing Board, strongly encouraged him in this project. But Paramāṇanddās lamented the impossibility of the idea, noting that there was probably not even one Guptī who was financially capable of saving enough to provide for a week of his family's sustenance, let alone dream of establishing a housing society (R, KD). Nevertheless, gradually funds were collected as the Guptī *jamāʿat* made economic progress. With moral, technical, and financial support from the *muḷ jamāʿat*, land for a Guptī Ismaili colony was finally purchased at the cost of Rs. 850,000 in 1990–91. The generous Rs. 200,000 donation of Ṣadr al-Dīn Nāṇāvatī enabled the total to be met, and houses began to be built on the land (R, KD). In 1995, however, the dynamic force behind all of this, Mukhī Paramāṇanddās Khoḍīdās, passed away, having seen his vision realized (R, KD). In his honor, the colony was officially named the Vazīr Paramāṇanddās Khoḍīdās Housing Society. By December 1995, people began inhabiting the

colony (R), and soon enough, a purpose-built *jamāʿat-khāna* was constructed at its center, perhaps ushering in a new phase in the history of this community, and the end of an era of *taqiyya.*

Analysis: A Paradigm Shift in our Understanding of *Taqiyya* and Religious Identity

For several reasons, the Guptī case is clearly an example of *taqiyya* and South Asian religious identity that forces a paradigm shift in academic studies of these concepts: it goes against the norm of Muslim minorities dissimulating in the garb of Muslim majorities. It challenges ideas of Islam and Hinduism as mutually exclusive, unchanging categories. It demonstrates that the need for dissimulation was felt just as much because of caste considerations as because of matters that would more broadly be considered religious. It highlights the assimilative capacities of Islam. And, finally, it reveals that *taqiyya* and its practice can adapt to changing times and circumstances, a facet that was facilitated by the centrality of the concept of imamate in Ismailism.

Challenging the Established Understanding of *Taqiyya*

The Guptī situation of preserving the cloak of Hinduism is not the typical case of Muslim minorities dissimulating in the garb of Muslim majorities. However, it should be recalled that the narratives found in the Qur'an and prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) to validate the practice of *taqiyya* always refer to the case of Muslims dissimulating as non-Muslims, not to minority groups of Muslims dissimulating to appear like the majoritarian Muslim community or those in political power. Only after the death of the Prophet, when the Muslim community fractured, did this become the case, particularly for those Shīʿīs who lived in hostile Sunnī milieus. In certain senses, then, the situation of the Guptīs is much closer to the paradigm at the time of the Prophet, or even that of the so-called Moriscos of Spain, Sunnī Muslims who often dissimulated as Christians after Granada's fall to the Catholic sovereigns Ferdinand and Isabella, and the reduction of the Naṣrid dynasty.[78]

Nor are the Guptīs the only community in South Asian history to have practiced *taqiyya* as Hindus. The fourteenth-century *Morals for the Heart* (*Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*) reveals that members of Hindu castes were being initiated into the Chishtiyya Ṣūfī order in medieval Delhi without any formal conversion.[79] An

[78]Harvey, "The Moriscos and the Ḥajj," 12–13; see also G. A. Wiegers, "Moriscos," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–2004; CD-ROM v. 1.0).

[79]Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' and Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī Dihlawī, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, ed. Muḥammad Laṭīf Malik (Lahore: Malik Sirāj al-Dīn, 1966), 82–83, 153. This text has been translated as Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā', *Morals for the Heart: Conversations of Shaykh Nizam ad-Din Awliya recorded by Amir Hasan Sijzi*, trans. Bruce B. Lawrence (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

even more telling passage in the *Correspondence of Kalīm* (*Maktūbāt-i Kalīmī*) explicitly states that those Hindus who did not wish to have their conversion disclosed to their family and caste were readily catered to.[80] Even now, the *Washington Times* reports the widespread practice of "dissimulation" as Hindus by West Bengal's Muslim minority, a population of well over 20 million people. According to a federally mandated study by former Judge Rajendra Sachar, although the Islamic community makes up 27 percent of the population, its employment in the government sector is less than 3 percent. In the face of such widespread discrimination, Muslims have been taking to a form of *taqiyya en masse*, adopting both dress and personal names commonly associated with Hindus.[81] Thus, *taqiyya* has been and continues to be practiced by Muslims of a variety of persuasions, in a variety of degrees of intensity, under the cloak of Hinduism. As the tradition recorded in Ibn Bābawayhi's *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, states, "practicing *taqiyya* in the realm of *taqiyya* is incumbent."[82]

Challenging Reified Categories of Hinduism and Islam

While the situation of the Guptīs provides new tools to explore the situations of Muslims practicing *taqiyya* as non-Muslims, such as the aforementioned case of the Spanish Moriscos, it must be noted that even here, the experience is qualitatively quite different. Many of the Guptīs have few qualms about self-identifying as both Hindus and Muslims (though they may not admit to the latter in public), because to them, these are not either/or categories. In fact, in the Guptī case, either/or becomes both/and. In other words, they see no reason why they cannot be both Hindu and Muslim. When Gujarati researcher Bhagavānalāl Māṅkaḍ asked the Momnās (the sister community of the Guptīs and also followers of Imāmshāh) whether they were originally Hindus or Muslims, his interviewees refused to answer the question when it was framed in this manner. Instead, they replied that they were Kaṇbīs who had become Momnās.[83]

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy features of the Guptī religious vocabulary is precisely that in the context of South Asia, it is *not* unique, regardless of how much that may surprise us. Its survival in an age no longer accustomed to the type of fecund cross-fertilization that had spawned a Sanskrito-Perso-Arabic culture is striking, but the fact remains that the Guptī religious literature is, in many senses, perfectly representative of medieval Islamic literatures written in the vernaculars. Compare, for example, the famous Muslim mystical romance

[80]Kalīm Allāh Jahānābādī, *Maktūbāt-i Kalīmī*, ed. Muḥammad Qāsim Ṣāḥib Kalīmī Kalīmī (Dehli: Maṭbaʿ-i Yūsufī, 1883), 25, 74.
[81]Shaikh Azizur Rahman, "India's Muslims Adopt Hindu Names," *Washington Times*, August 21, 2007.
[82]Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad Ibn Bābawayh, *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2 (Najaf: Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥaydariyya, 1970), 122–23.
[83]Bhagavānalāl La. Māṅkaḍ, *Kāṭhiyāvāḍanā Mumanā*, 3.

The Night-Flowering Jasmine (*Madhumālatī*), composed in Awadhi in 1545 by Mīr Sayyid Manjhan Rājgirī, a Ṣūfī of the Shaṭṭārī order. The poem, typical of its genre, begins,

> God, giver of love, the treasure-house of joy
> Creator of the two worlds in the one sound Om.[84]

This Sunnī Muslim work seamlessly blends Qur'anic descriptions of the Prophet Muḥammad and praise of the first four caliphs with references to the monkey god Hanumān and the cosmos of Brahma. The reigning Afghan sultan, Islām-shāh, the son and successor of Shershāh Sūrī and Manjhan's patron, is praised with reference to not only Ḥātim al-Ṭaiy, the epitome of hospitality in Arab lore, but also King Harīshchandra, Indian archetype of the unflinching lover of truth. The story is set in the Dvāpara *yuga*, while dates are provided in the *hijrī* calendar.[85] Medieval Muslim authors writing in the vernacular were not in the least self-conscious of composing in this idiom, nor were their non-Muslim fellows at all embarrassed by Arabo-Persian vocabulary or concepts.

However, in some quarters of academia, there has been a fixation on the belief in certain "pure types." Not only the Guptīs, but also South Asian Muslims in general, could hardly, in the eyes of some, be accounted "pure Muslims" by simple virtue of the fact that they were not Arabs. As Gottschalk has trenchantly pointed out, "The British Orientalists of South Asia paid far more attention to Hinduism, opting to rely on their Middle Eastern-assigned colleagues to describe Islam from the supposed heartland."[86] Thus, individuals, communities and phenomena in South Asia that did not fit with predefined ideas of what Islam and Hinduism "should be" were given short shrift.[87]

The individuals whom I interviewed were quite adamant that they were Hindus. They were equally adamant that they were Muslims. To them, there was no contradiction between the two. As one of them explained to me, "In a sense, Muslims are also Christians." When I asked her what she meant by this, she said, "Muslims believe in Christ, don't they? So they can also consider themselves to be Christians if they want to." I asked her to elaborate further. She said,

[84]Mīr Sayyid Manjhan Shaṭṭārī Rājgīrī, *Madhumālatī*, trans. Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.
[85]Ibid., 6–7, 17, 19, 79.
[86]Peter Gottschalk, *Beyond Hindu and Muslim: Multiple Identities in Narratives from British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28. Khan, *Crossing*, 14, notes that "Surprising as it may appear at first, by 'Muslims' the British meant only those who claimed descent from the Arabian countries, Iran or Central Asia. The converted population was not taken into account although its numeric strength was obviously much greater."
[87]This is trenchantly argued in Tony K. Stewart, "Alternate Structures of Authority: Satya Pir on the Frontiers of Bengal," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 22.

"If there is no contradiction in a Muslim believing in Christ and yet being a Muslim, there is no contradiction in our believing in the *avatāras* and being Muslim. The Qur'an states that messengers were sent to every land and spoke in the language of its people.[88] Certainly India was not forgotten. For those Hindus who believe in the *avatāras*, many are waiting for the tenth one to arrive. For us, he is already here and his name is 'Alī, the Nakalaṅkī *avatāra.* That, she concluded happily, "is the reason why we are Hindu Muslims." Her friend, standing nearby, then chimed in, "In fact, those Muslims who do not accept the *avatāras* are forgetting God's guidance that we must make no distinction between God's messengers." She was clearly referring to Qur'an 2:285, which contains this exact sentiment. The Guptīs whom I met were often bemused, if not incredulous, at what they considered the simplistic notions of some of their fellow Muslims who denied India the divine guidance that the Qur'an so explicitly guaranteed to all of humankind.

If we were to read even further into the statements of these two women, perhaps we could extrapolate that they would consider themselves "more complete Muslims" than their fellows, because they recognize "God's earlier messengers who came to India," and "more complete Hindus" (or at least Vaishnava Hindus) than their caste-fellows, because they recognize the final *avatāra.*[89]

Clearly then, given such statements, it appears that we often rely too heavily on "Hindu" and "Muslim" as descriptive adjectives and analytic categories, as terms that are so self-apparent that they can be brandished to represent exclusive areas of religious activity. Of course, this is not to suggest that such distinctions are without use, merely that they should not be overprivileged and must themselves be analyzed for applicability in a variety of circumstances.[90] To the Guptīs, Kṛṣṇa's insistence in the *Bhagavat Gīta* that there is an *avatāra* in every age and the statements in the Purāṇas regarding the coming, after Rām and Kṛṣṇa, of the tenth *avatāra* on a white horse were the very reasons for their attachment to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, whom they consider the fulfillment of this prophecy.[91] In other words, they find the rationale for their conviction in Islam within the Sanskrit tradition.

[88]A reference to Qur'an 14:4, "We sent not an apostle except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people, in order to make (matters) clear to them."

[89]See Françoise Mallison, "La secte ismaélienne des nizari ou satpanthi en Inde: Hétérodoxie hindoue ou musulmane?" in *Ascèse et renoncement en Inde ou la solitude bien ordonnée* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1992); idem, "Hinduism as Seen by the Nizari Ismaili Missionaries of Western India: The Evidence of the Ginan," in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 93–103.

[90]Gottschalk, in *Beyond Hindu and Muslim*, has examined this issue in great detail.

[91]It should be noted that none of the Guptīs with whom I spoke explicitly mentioned the Purāṇas as the source of this belief. It is not necessary for them to have actually referred to these texts, though, as the concept of the ten *avatāras* abounds in the vernacular Gujarati literature.

Indeed, in this, their methodology mirrors the Qur'an's claim that Jesus foretold the advent of a prophet known as "Aḥmad."[92] Early Arab Muslims therefore sought legitimacy for their new faith in existing traditions. Jesus, to the Arab Muslims, thus played a role analogous to Kṛṣṇa to this group of "Hindu Muslims." It should be recalled at this juncture that the word "Hindu," today used almost exclusively as a religious moniker, is originally a geographic designation, not a religious one, and so the parallelism of "Arab Muslims" and "Hindu Muslims" is quite natural.[93] Such facts on the ground fly in the face of opinions such as those expressed by M. R. Majmudar in his influential book *Cultural History of Gujarat*, that "Islam is in every respect the antithesis of Hinduism."[94]

Cartesian categorizations of Hinduism and Islam are not at all amenable to such complexity. Religion, presumed to be exclusionary, was used as a principal criterion by the British in their censuses. Such assumptions were helpful in governing, and thus we see the creation, for example, of Hindu and Muslim personal law in India. While this is often valid, it is not always so; and unfortunately, as Gilmartin and Lawrence have noted, "Even when the categories palpably do not fit the evidence, scholars are often reluctant to jettison them, opting instead to suggest the existence of hybrid or syncretic forms, defined by the mixing of 'irreconcilable' religions, or by the lack of those attributes that are thought to be essential to a given world religion."[95] Simplistic, and perhaps even insulting, labels such as "syncretic" do no justice to such phenomena. In fact, such labels do little more than explain away the belief systems of such communities by simply pigeonholing them, rather than seeking to understand them.

Problematizing Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which enshrines the freedom to change one's religion, Arvind

[92]Qur'an 61:6: "And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: 'O Children of Israel! I am God's messenger to you, confirming the law (which came) before me, and giving glad tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Aḥmad.'"

[93]The British census takers in the early 1900s were forced to use the phrase "Hindu-Mohammadans" to account for this fact. The difficulties inherent in using the terms "Hindu" and "Hinduism" have been extensively debated in scholarship, and it would take us too far afield to consider them in detail. In brief, Heinrich von Stietencron, "Hinduism: On the Proper Use of a Deceptive Term," in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Günther D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 11–28, argues that, historically, what we today designate as "Hinduism" has been so fragmented that entities such as Vaishnavism and Shaivism are much more legitimate categories for analysis, as they more closely correspond to Christian or Muslim concepts of "religion." John Stratton Hawley, "Naming Hinduism," *Wilson Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1991): 20–34, even goes so far as to suggest that because "Hinduism," as a name, goes back no further than the nineteenth century, the entity that we designate by this term is similarly recent. Hawley's arguments are countered in Wendy Doniger, "Hinduism by Any Other Name," *Wilson Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1991): 35–41; see also Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, "Rethinking Indian Communalism: Culture and Counter-Culture," *Asian Survey* 33, no. 7 (1993): 722–37.

[94]Majmudar, *Cultural History of Gujarat*, 249.

[95]David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 3.

Sharma argues that this makes little sense to many in the South Asian context. He explains that the right of changing religions "only arises if they are exclusive, for change means that a border has to be crossed."[96] He therefore suggests, "(1) my right to *retain* my religion rather than to change it and (2) my right to *accept* any other religion without having to change to it, in the sense of my having to sever links with any other culture or faith. Thus I should be able to claim that I am a Christian *without* having to say I am not a Hindu."[97] Similar tendencies hold true in other parts of the world. In Japan, for example, the 1985 statistics for religious affiliation show 76 percent professing Buddhism, while 95 percent claimed to be followers of Shintoism. Clearly, a huge majority of Japanese had no problem belonging to more than one "religion."[98] In the first census of Gujarat in 1911, the census superintendent recorded 35,000 "Hindu-Mohammadans." Referring to these statistics, E. A. Gait, census commissioner, could write that the category of Hindu-Mohammadans "has perhaps served a very useful purpose in drawing prominent attention to the extremely indefinite character of the boundary line between different religions in India."[99]

It is particularly in modern times, with the tectonic shifts that have taken place in the religious landscape of South Asia, that expressing such worldviews has become difficult, adding an additional layer of dissimulation for those who hold them. What was, in many contexts, considered quite commonplace has now become a source of discomfort. Thus, we see examples, such as the one cited earlier, of the religious works of those on the Hindu side of the fault line being purged of Perso-Arabic vocabulary and concepts, with an entirely parallel process taking place on the Muslim side with terms and ideas originating in the Sanskrit tradition.

Often, well-meaning calls for communal harmony take for granted the conceptions of fixed and separate communities. At the time of this writing, the solar and lunar calendars had aligned in such a way that the festivals of Diwali and Ramzan Eid (i.e., ʿĪd al-Fiṭr) happened to be celebrated at almost the same time. A poster published by ActionAid India was one of the most commonly circulated digital greeting cards sent at this time (see figure 1).

The clever pun on the names of the seventh and final *avatāras*, Rām and ʿAlī, respectively, would no doubt have delighted the Guptīs, as would the question, "Who are we to draw the line?" But the card also unconsciously draws attention to the fact that, for most people, unlike for the Guptīs, the relationship between Rām and ʿAlī can no longer be taken as organic.

[96]Arvind Sharma, "An Indic Contribution Towards an Understanding of the Word "Religion" and the Concept of Religious Freedom," Infinity Foundation, http://www.infinityfoundation.com/indic_colloq/papers/paper_sharma2.pdf.
[97]Ibid., 16.
[98]Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 6, cited in ibid., 25.
[99]E.A. Gait, *Census of India, 1911*, vol. 1, *India, Parts 1 and 2*, (New Delhi: Usha Publications, 1987), 118, cited in Yagnik and Sheth, *Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, 198.

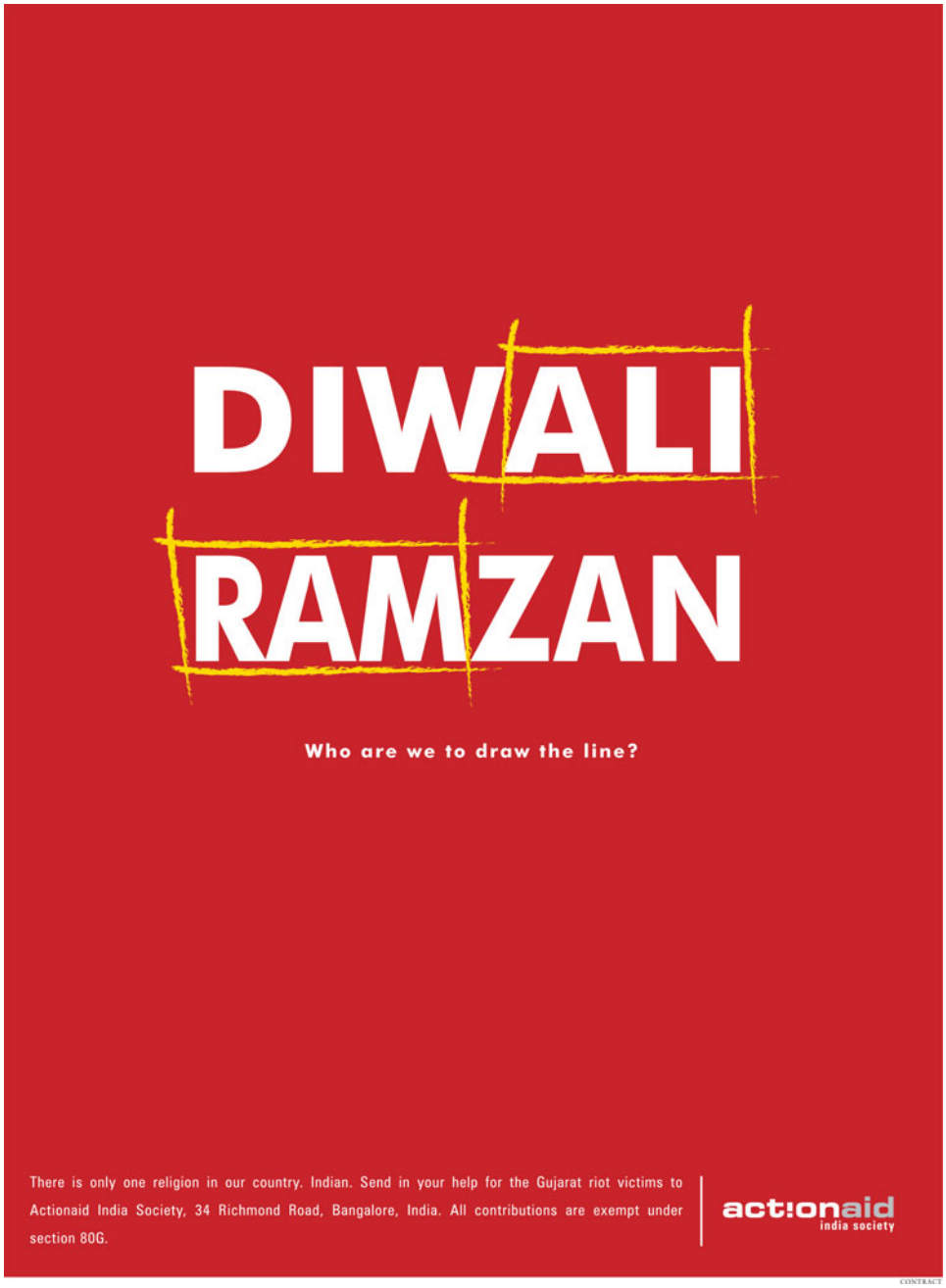

Figure 1. "Who are we to draw the line?" ActionAid Poster. Reproduced with permission.

The Importance of Caste Considerations

Oftentimes, more important than the bipolar "Hindu-Muslim" distinction is that of caste identity, whether this is understood as *jāti*, *varaṇa*, *gotra*, *jñāti*,

qawm, or otherwise.[100] A shared religious vocabulary does not presume the elision of caste boundaries. Indeed, the danger of appearing to break with caste solidarity is a factor in the Guptī practice of *taqiyya* that is at least as important as that of "religious" identity. Naturally, caste boundaries themselves have been fluid throughout history, but change is always gradual. To appear to be stepping out of the bounds of one's caste could become a matter of great discomfort, and thus secret adherence to a doctrine considered beyond the pale is not unique to the Guptīs, as witnessed by testimony in the Chishtiyya Ṣūfī sources mentioned earlier. Khan and Moir, citing the litigation and land squabbles at the shrine of Pīrāṇā and the role that defining religion played in the British courts' settlements of such disputes, write, "It is clear that, from the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards, defining or redefining one's identity as a group within the Indian society had become a crucial issue, where economic and political factors played a much more important role than religious considerations."[101] The Guptīs of Bhavnagar are, in a sense, atypical of the South Asian Guptīs in general because, as a caste, they have now openly declared their allegiance to the Ismaili imam. It is because of this fact that an article such as this could be written. Many other Guptī communities across South Asia hold to a much stricter practice of *taqiyya.* Their prayer houses are called *mandirs* or *dharmashāḷās* rather than *jamā'at-khānas*, they are extremely reticent to discuss their devotion to the imam, and, in rare instances, even family members may not be aware of their Ismaili inclinations. The anti-Muslim pogroms of 2002 in Gujarat can only serve to exacerbate the need for caution, and hence, at the request of my Guptī informants from outside Bhavnagar, I have only alluded to them elliptically, without providing any details that could place them or their caste members in danger.

Assimilative Capacity of Islam

The ability of Hinduism to incorporate knowledge from a plethora of sources is too well known to require elaboration. Islam's capacity for a similar ecumenical worldview is much less recognized, but is also impressive. Manjhan's mystical romance *The Night-Flowering Jasmine* (*Madhumālatī*), cited earlier, is but one example. Within the Arabic cultural sphere, no less a figure than the redoubtable Ibn Rushd, chief judge of Cordoba, royal physician, and Sunnī Muslim philosopher of genius, eloquently explained the necessity for the adoption of Greek thought into Islamdom: "For if before us someone has inquired into [wisdom], it behooves us to seek help from what he has said. It is irrelevant whether he

[100]The Persian chroniclers, too, tended to classify the various peoples of India based on racial, ancestral, or territorial origin, much more so than on the basis of religion; see Z. U. Malik, "The Core and the Periphery: A Contribution to the Debate on the Eighteenth Century," *Social Scientist 18*, no. 11–12 (1990): 22.

[101]Khan and Moir, "Coexistence," 141, "economical" corrected to "economic."

belongs to our community or to another."[102] Within Islam, Ismailism laid particular emphasis on incorporating the wisdom of others into its own system. As the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (*Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*) would declare, "It befits our brothers that they should not show hostility to any kind of knowledge or reject any book. Nor should they be fanatical in any doctrine, for our opinion and our doctrine embrace all doctrines, and resume all knowledge."[103] This spirit is clearly articulated in the *Rules of the Shia Imami Ismaili Missions of Bombay 1922*, which advises that the Ismaili "Missionary Training Schools" should "teach the student Missionaries the knowledge and science of the world's diverse philosophies and religions, cults and creeds penned in the different languages such as Persian, Arabic, English, French, Burmese, Sanskrit, and such other important languages."[104] The dynamism of Ismaili thought was made possible by the acceptance of a living imam as custodian of the faith. Authority was thus vested in the present, not only in the past, thereby allowing the faith to be contextualized according to time and place.

The Adaptability of *Taqiyya*

Like their Ismaili coreligionists in South Asia and beyond, the Guptīs hold a minority belief in the continuity of divine guidance to mankind, as manifested in the imam, whom they consider to be an *avatāra.* For centuries, as an act of self-preservation, Ismailis scattered throughout the world held to the strictest *taqiyya*, blending in with the majority communities among whom they lived. *Taqiyya* thus became deeply ingrained, an almost instinctive defense mechanism. It could, if one wished, be adopted only in moments of danger, or it could be a lifelong commitment.

In a landmark Pakistani decision in the case of *Nur Ali vs. Malka Sultana*, held by a Division Bench of the Lahore High Court (Shabbir Ahmad and Sajjad Ahmad JJ.), which Fyzee suggests "may well become the leading case on the subject," it was held "that the followers of His Highness the Aga Khan, the *imam-i hadir* [present imam] of the Ismaili Khojās, come from all sects

[102]Quoted from the *faṣl al-maqāl* in Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī, *Ibn Rushd: Sīra wa-Fikr* (Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-widadat al-marbiya, 1998), 271.

[103]Cited in Bernard Lewis, *The Origins of Ismailism: A Study of the Historical Background of the Fatimid Caliphate* (New York: AMS Press, 1975), 94. There is still some debate in scholarship about the Ismaili origins of the *Rasā'il*, but for our purposes, this is of lesser importance, for if it originated outside of the community, its wholehearted adoption into Ismaili milieus only further serves to prove the point.

[104]*Rules of the Shia Imami Ismailia Missions of Bombay 1922/Shīā Imāmī Isamāilīā Mīshans oph Bombe nā Kāyadāo 1922* (Bombay: Ismailbhai Virji Madhani, 1922), 41 (English), 32–33 (Gujarati), "philsophies" corrected to read "philosophies." Notably, in this document, charge of activities in Gujarat was assigned to a Guptī Ismaili, Kālīdās Sākalchand, who was also known as Qāsim-ʿalī Ṣāliḥ-muḥammad, ibid., 26 (English), 20 (Gujarati).

including Hindus. A Hindu, although he had not embraced Islam, was a follower."[105] In the context of Pakistan, "all sects" naturally refers to both the Sunnī majority and the Ithnāʿasharī minority, along with, as indicated here, the Pakistani Hindus. Fearing possible repercussions, certain Pakistanis clearly dissemble their attachment to the imam of the Ismailis. In the case of Ismailis who dissimulate as Sunnīs, this is done despite the incompatibility of Sunnī and Shīʿī concepts of religious leadership, or imamate. In the case of the Ismailis who dissimulate as Ithnāʿasharīs, this is done despite the incompatibility of beliefs regarding the number and identity of the imams, the Ithnāʿasharīs believing in twelve imams, the last of whom is said to be in hiding, and the Ismailis believing in the continuity of divine guidance until the judgment day, the current Aga Khan being the forty-ninth imam. In the case of the Ismailis who dissimulate as Hindus, however, belief in the imam is not seen to be contrary to their outwardly professed faith, but is rather its fulfillment and culmination. In this way, their *taqiyya* is qualitatively different from the *taqiyya* practiced by many other communities, Ismaili or otherwise.

As communal identities have reformulated themselves in South Asia, so has the Guptī understanding and practice of *taqiyya.* The Guptīs of Bhavnagar have evolved in a fashion quite different from their more cautious Guptī fellows elsewhere. As Aharon Layish has argued, "Taqiyya is a dynamic, not a static, doctrine; adaptation and assimilation to the environment are not one-time acts but continuous processes determined by changing circumstances of place and time."[106]

Given this dynamic nature of *taqiyya*, a strong intrinsic nucleus was necessary to preserve a hidden identity. In the case of the Ismailis, this nucleus was faith in the imam of the time. As Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī explain in their *Paradise of Submission* (*Rawḍa-yi Taslīm*), for the sake of *taqiyya*, the followers of the path of truth safeguard a reality (*ḥaqīqat*) in their hearts, the "reality" being the imamate.[107] So long as this reality was not forgotten, the external manifestations of practice—whether Sunnī, Ithnāʿasharī, Ṣūfī, or Hindu—were unable to overwhelm the believer. The loss of this nucleus, however, would mean the loss of the core belief, and hence it was essential that devotion to the imam be nurtured in order to preserve an Ismaili identity. The Ismaili imam al-Ḥākim best expressed this particular facet of Ismaili *taqiyya* when he confided to his followers, "if any religion is stronger than you, follow it (*ittabiʿūhā*), but keep me in your hearts."[108]

[105]Asaf Ali Asghar Fyzee, *Outlines of Muhammadan Law*, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 69.
[106]Layish, "*Taqiyya*," 261.
[107]Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ṭūsī and Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd, *Rawḍa-yi Taslīm*, ed. and trans S. J. Badakhchani (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), ed. 146, trans. 119. In this passage, Badakhchani's translation differs somewhat from the reading in the edited text.
[108]From the catechism *Teachings of the Druze Faith* (*Taʿlīm Dīn al-Durūz*), as cited in Layish, "*Taqiyya*," 251.

Acknowledgments

This article is dedicated to the memories of the late Mukhī Paramāṇanddās Khoḍīdās and Kāmaḍīā Kālīdās Bhagat. Certain sections of the paper, in a variety of earlier incarnations, have been presented at the Perspectives in Islamic Studies Conference, Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, England, August 23, 1998; Inde médievale et moderne: textes et contextes, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sorbonne University, Paris, France, February 8, 2000; Myerson South Asia Lectures, University of Texas at Austin, Center for Asian Studies, March 24, 2000; and Association for Asian Studies Conference, Washington, D.C., April 5, 2002. I am extremely grateful to the participants at those fora, as well as to the journal's anonymous reviewers, for their valuable feedback and suggestions, which improved the quality of the final product. Thanks are also due to Deborah A. Ring for her excellent copyediting, and to ActionAid India for granting permission for the reproduction of the poster used in this article.

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