

Charting the Future of the Ginans: Needs and Expectations of the Ismaili Youth in the Western Diaspora

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Résumé de l'article

Objective – The heritage of ginans of the Nizari Ismaili community comprises hymn-like poems in various Indic dialects that were transmitted orally. Despite originating in the Indian subcontinent, the ginans continue to be cherished by the community in the Western diaspora. As part of a study at the University of Saskatchewan, an online survey of the Ismaili community was conducted in 2020 to gather sentiments toward the ginans in the Western diaspora. This article presents the results of the survey to explore the future of the ginans from the perspective of the English-speaking Ismaili community members.

Methods – An online survey was developed to solicit the needs of the global Ismaili community using convenience sampling. The survey attracted 515 participants from over 20 countries around the world. The English-speaking members of the Ismaili community between 18 to 44 years of age living in Western countries were designated as the target group for this study. The survey responses of the target group (n = 71) were then benchmarked against all other respondents categorized as the general group (n = 444).

Results – Overall, 85% of the respondents of the survey were from the diaspora and 15% were from the countries of South Asia including India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The survey found that 97% of the target group respondents preferred English materials for learning and understanding the ginans compared to 91% in the general group. Having access to online ginan materials was expressed as a dire need by respondents in the two groups. The survey also revealed that over 90% of the respondents preferred to access private and external ginan websites rather than the official community institutional websites. In addition, the survey validated the unified expectations of the community to see ginans become an educational and scholarly priority of its institutions.

Conclusion – Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that the respondents in the target group are educated citizens of English-speaking countries and regard the heritage of ginans to be an important part of their lives. They value the emotive and performative aspects of the tradition that help them express their devotion and solidarity to the Ismaili faith and community. They remain highly concerned about the future of the ginans and fear that the teachings of the ginans may be lost due to lack of attention and action by the community institutions. The development and dissemination of curriculum-based educational programs and resources for the ginans emerged as the most urgent and unmet expectation among the survey respondents. The article also identifies actions that the community institutions can take to ensure continued transmission and preservation of the ginans in the Western diaspora.

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Research Article

Charting the Future of the Ginans: Needs and Expectations of the Ismaili Youth in the Western Diaspora

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Abstract

Objective – The heritage of *ginans* of the Nizari Ismaili community comprises hymn-like poems in various Indic dialects that were transmitted orally. Despite originating in the Indian subcontinent, the *ginans* continue to be cherished by the community in the Western diaspora. As part of a study at the University of Saskatchewan, an online survey of the Ismaili community was conducted in 2020 to gather sentiments toward the *ginans* in the Western diaspora. This article presents the results of the survey to explore the future of the *ginans* from the perspective of the English-speaking Ismaili community members.

Methods – An online survey was developed to solicit the needs of the global Ismaili community using convenience sampling. The survey attracted 515 participants from over 20 countries around the world. The English-speaking members of the Ismaili community between 18 to 44 years of age living in Western countries were designated as the *target group* for this study. The survey responses of the target group (n = 71) were then benchmarked against all other respondents categorized as the *general group* (n = 444).

Results – Overall, 85% of the respondents of the survey were from the diaspora and 15% were from the countries of South Asia including India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The survey found that 97% of the target group respondents preferred English materials for learning and understanding the ginans compared to 91% in the general group. Having access to online ginan materials was expressed as a dire need by respondents in the two groups. The survey also revealed that over 90% of the respondents preferred to access private and external ginan websites rather than the official community institutional websites. In addition, the survey validated the unified expectations of the community to see ginans become an educational and scholarly priority of its institutions.

Conclusion – Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that the respondents in the target group are educated citizens of English-speaking countries and regard the heritage of ginans to be an important part of their lives. They value the emotive and performative aspects of the tradition that help them express their devotion and solidarity to the Ismaili faith and community. They remain highly concerned about the future of the ginans and fear that the teachings of the ginans may be lost due to lack of attention and action by the community institutions. The development and dissemination of curriculum-based educational programs and resources for the ginans emerged as the most urgent and unmet expectation among the survey respondents. The article also identifies actions that the community institutions can take to ensure continued transmission and preservation of the ginans in the Western diaspora.

Introduction

The word “ginan” is a derivative of the Sanskrit term *jnan*, which means knowledge or gnosis. In the context of the Nizari Ismaili community, the term is used for the community’s collection of gnostic hymn-like poems. The religious corpus of the ginans comprises some 1,000 individual works composed primarily using Indo-Aryan dialects with loanwords from Perso-Arabic languages. While the ginans originated in the Indian subcontinent, the Ismaili community is now a global and culturally diverse community living in over 25 countries around the world (The Ismaili, 2022).

The emotive tunes of the ginans continue to be cherished by the community members in the Western diaspora, particularly those who come from the Indian subcontinent lineage commonly known as *Khojas*. Due to the language barrier, however, the teachings of the ginans remain inaccessible to the English-speaking community members born and raised in the Western diaspora. This issue is further compounded by the inaction of the community institutions to develop and disseminate educational resources for the motivated community youth interested in learning about the teachings of the ginans. Failing to attend to the needs and expectations of the youth – who are ultimately responsible for carrying these traditions forward – may result in the loss of the tradition altogether.

To address this lacuna and explore the future of the ginans in the digital age, an online survey was conducted in 2020 to gather and analyze the needs and expectations of the Ismaili community members interested in the ginans from across the globe. The survey was administered independently at the University of Saskatchewan, which currently hosts the searchable online ginan portal called Ginan Central. Following a brief review of the history of the community and the corpus of ginans, this article presents the results of the survey. The insights from the survey results inform the discussion on the future of the ginans in the Western diaspora.

Literature Review

Today's digital age presents unprecedented opportunities for ethnocultural communities to teach and transmit their knowledge in ways that were not possible in the print era. With information technology becoming an essential enabler for learners in Western countries, this study is based on the premise that the successive generations of the Ismaili community expect to engage with the ginans online and on-demand. Thus, the use of information technology in conjunction with traditional teaching can enhance motivation and engagement of the community youth, which in turn can ensure the long-term viability of the ginans in the Western diaspora.

This research utilizes the e-learning theoretical framework which identifies three theoretical dimensions of an effective e-learning system (Aparicio et al., 2016). These dimensions include people, technology, and services. The *people* dimension defines various roles that stakeholders may have in an e-learning system, such as learners, content providers, educators, etc. The *technology* dimension of an e-learning system serves as an interface to communicate and connect users with the content curated for learning activities. The *services* dimension of an e-learning system encapsulates the pedagogical models and instructional strategies that guide the design and development of the e-learning system.

In the context of this study of the Ismaili community and its tradition of the ginans, the e-learning system framework is applied by identifying community learners (representing the people dimension) whose needs and expectations to engage with the ginans online (i.e., the technology dimension) must be gathered and analyzed to develop effective curriculum and instruction (manifesting the services dimension). This study assumes that understanding the needs and expectations of the community and its youth remains crucial for ensuring that the tradition and its teachings continue to be passed on from generation to generation in the West. Thus, the initial focus of the study was to gather and analyze the needs of the Ismaili community as depicted in the figure below (Figure 1).

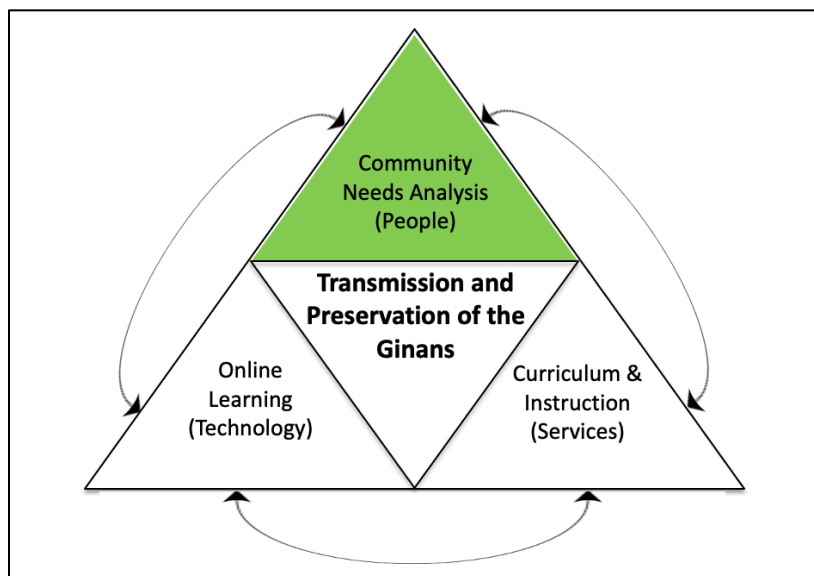


Figure 1
E-learning system framework and the ginans.

The Ismaili Community of the Indian Subcontinent

As mentioned earlier, the present-day Nizari Ismaili community members were historically referred to as the *Khojas* in the pre-colonial Indian subcontinent. The religious path of the Khojas was known as *Satpanth* (True Path) which subscribed to the single spiritual reality of humans irrespective of specific religion, race, or practice. The ginans were venerated as spiritual teachings by the followers of Satpanth, the authorship of which is attributed to several preacher-saints who are known as *pirs* and *sayyids* in the community. The ginans were composed using a mixed language that borrowed vocabulary primarily from Indo-Aryan languages, including Gujarati, Hindi, Sanskrit, among others (Shackle & Moir, 2000). The use of a mixed language enabled the composers to draw from the “bewildering thicket of Indian religions, mythologies and intellectual traditions... The ginans thus became and remained, until the contemporary project to reconceptualize and reformulate the Ismaili Tariqah (Tradition), the *de facto* supreme scripture for Satpanth Ismailis.” (Alibhai, 2020, n.p.). The historical practice of composing ginans came to an end in the mid-nineteenth century and no new ginans have been composed since then (Asani, 2011).

The subsequent colonization of India forced the Satpanth followers to choose between the two dominant religious persuasions – Hinduism and Islam. As a result, the community’s identity evolved from Satpanthi Khojas to Ismaili Muslims. The end of the colonial rule in 1947 resulted in the partition of the Indian subcontinent into two independent countries, India and Pakistan. While the tradition of ginans is the heritage of the Satpanthi Ismailis, it continues to be cherished around the world, albeit as one of many of the community’s diverse devotional religio-cultural traditions, including *qasida*, *munqabat*, *munajat*, and *geet*. In the context of this study, the term *community* is used to refer to those members of the Nizari Ismaili community in the diaspora who continue to recognize and revere ginans as part of their religio-cultural heritage.

The Origin and Evolution of the Corpus of Ginans

The initial efforts to formalize and preserve the gnan corpus can be traced back to various Ismaili individuals and entrepreneurs in the late 19th century. For instance, Lalji Devraj (1842-1930) of India is credited to have published the initial canon of authorized texts of ginans in Khojki (Asani, 2011). A few specimens of these historic publications from India have been catalogued and preserved at Harvard Library (Asani, 1992). In the first quarter of the twentieth century, the responsibility to publish ginans was taken over by community institutions – starting in 1922 with the Recreation Club Institute in India and followed by the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board (ITREB) – a network of community-led national and regional committees across the globe. The ITREB remained responsible for publishing religious materials available to the community members, including the ginans.

In 1977, the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) was established for the community by the Aga Khan to promote historical and contemporary study of Muslim cultures and their relationship with other societies and faiths. Over time, the mandate of developing curriculum and instruction for religious education was gradually assumed by the IIS. As Karim (2022) points out, an unfortunate consequence of this transition has been the lack of gnan publications:

[The IIS] has produced over a hundred books, including five volumes on the primary materials in its collection relating to the Arab and Persian aspects of the movement. The institute has received hundreds of Satpanth-related manuscripts from communal and family collections since the late 1970s; however, these sources have suffered from neglect and their cataloguing was still awaiting

completion in 2021. Harvard University published its catalogue in 1992. Even though the endowment of the IIS has been funded mainly by Khojas, it has produced only three monographs on their tradition.

Asani (2021) also observes that while the Satpanth Ismailis continue to revere ginans, the “Hinduistic” elements of the ginans remain problematic for the institutions. This divergence of perspectives on the ginans between Satpanth Ismailis and certain Ismaili institutional circles remains a barrier in making any significant headway in preserving the ginans through formalized teaching and transmission (Asani, 2021):

Anxieties about perceptions that other Muslims may have of the ginans, in particular their vernacular Indic character, have been the primary concerns to Ismaili institutions. These concerns have led to a marked de-emphasis of the semantic dimension of the *gināns* in the contemporary articulation of official Ismaili doctrine in favor of a Quranic one. Instead, there is an increased focus on the performative aspects of the *gināns*, and their ritualization as a form of Ismaili “devotional literature,” thus reframing them within the context of Ismaili literary traditions in Arabic and Persian (p. 50).

This methodical reformulation of the ginans from “Satpanthi scripture” to “devotional literature” by the community institutions led to grave concern and anxiety about the future of ginans, particularly among the Khoja Ismailis. Consequently, local community preachers and missionaries (referred to as *Al-waez* in the community) took it upon themselves to preserve and propagate the scriptural status of the ginans. The efforts of Kamaluddin Ali Muhammad and his wife Zarina Kamaluddin, notes Virani (2015), have made ginans more accessible and comprehensible to those not familiar with Gujarati and Khojki scripts:

Al-Wa‘iz Kamaluddin Ali Muhammad and al-Wa‘iza Zarina Kamaluddin have made Herculean efforts to study and translate this literature. Their work has added tremendously to our knowledge of not only the Ginans, but of medieval South Asian verse in general, for the Ginanic symbols and vocabulary draw on the rich universe of mystical meaning that had become the common inheritance of Sufis, yogis, sadhus, bhaktas and saints. All students of this field and lovers of the Ginans are indebted to their endeavours (p. viii).

In 2020, the IIS established the South Asian Studies (SAS) unit with the mandate to “contribute to current academic debates as they relate to Islam and Muslims in South Asia and to further scholarly understanding of Satpanth history, literature, heritage and identity to promote critical thinking in the field of South Asian Ismaili Studies” (The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2018). While this broad mandate falls short of mentioning the ginans, it is hoped that a primary responsibility of this unit will be the development and dissemination of ginan materials to meet the needs of community members, in particular the English-speaking community members now living in the Western diaspora.

Aims

The purpose of the online survey was to gather and analyze the needs and expectations of the community members who wish to learn and understand the ginans, and to pass on the tradition and its teachings from generation to generation. This survey was guided by the following research question: What are the needs and expectations of motivated English-speaking Ismaili community learners to engage with the ginans in the Western diaspora? The use of information technology in learning and engaging with the ginans was assumed to be an important consideration for the English-speaking learners born and raised in the West.

Methods

An online survey was developed as part of this study to solicit the needs of the global Ismaili community. The survey questionnaire contained a total of 20 questions, none of which were mandatory and allowed participants to skip over any of the questions. The survey questionnaire is available as an appendix (Appendix A). The online survey was administered independently of any Ismaili community institutions. This independence also necessitated recruiting community participants for the survey directly using a variety of communications channels popular in the community, including Ginan Central at the University of Saskatchewan, Ismaili.Net Heritage, JollyGul, and GinanGuru.

Results

The online survey was administered between July 9, 2020, and September 10, 2020. It attracted 515 participants from over 20 countries around the world. Given that the global population of the Ismaili community is estimated to be approximately 12 to 15 million, the results of this survey are not generalizable to the entire global Ismaili community (The Ismaili, 2022). As noted in the table below (Table 1), most of the respondents living in the West were from Canada (46%), the United States of America (23%), and the United Kingdom (4%). Respondents from Pakistan (8%) and India (5%) were the leading participants from South Asia. Overall, around 85% of the survey participants were from the diaspora and 15% were from the South Asian countries.

Table 1
Survey Respondents by Country

Country	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Canada	237	46%
United States of America	116	23%
Pakistan	43	8%
India	26	5%
United Kingdom	21	4%
Other	72	14 %
Total	515	100%

Demographic Statistics

The age distribution of the respondents was grouped into seven intervals between 18 years and those over 75 years of age. With a 98% of response rate for the question on age, the highest number of respondents of the survey (24%) were in the age group of 55 to 64 years old (see Figure 2).

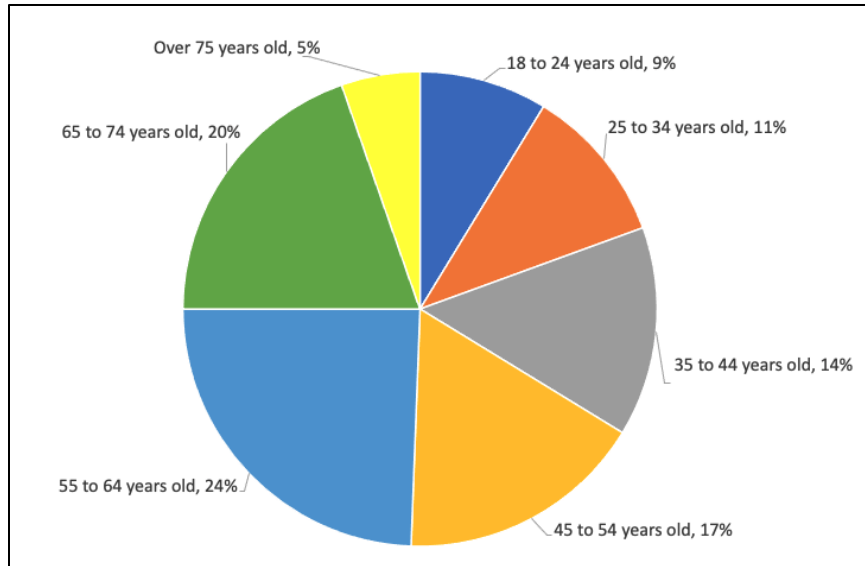


Figure 2
Survey respondents by age groups.

The question on gender was answered by 505 respondents, of whom 290 identified as female (57%), 213 as male (42%), and two as neither male nor female (0.4%). The lead by female respondents was consistent across all age groups except in the group aged 75 years and over, which was predominantly male at 70% (see Table 2).

Table 2
Survey Respondents by Gender

Age Groups	Female	Male	Other	Total
18 to 24 years old	52%	45%	2%	100%
25 to 34 years old	52%	48%	0%	100%
35 to 44 years old	58%	42%	0%	100%
45 to 54 years old	64%	35%	1%	100%
55 to 64 years old	65%	35%	0%	100%
65 to 74 years old	56%	44%	0%	100%
Over 75 years old	30%	70%	0%	100%

In terms of educational attainment, over 75% of the respondents claimed to have at least one degree and only 3% of the respondents had not completed a high school degree (see Figure 3). Further analysis of this data revealed that 89% of the respondents from South Asia had at least one degree as opposed to 75% of respondents in the diaspora with at least one degree.

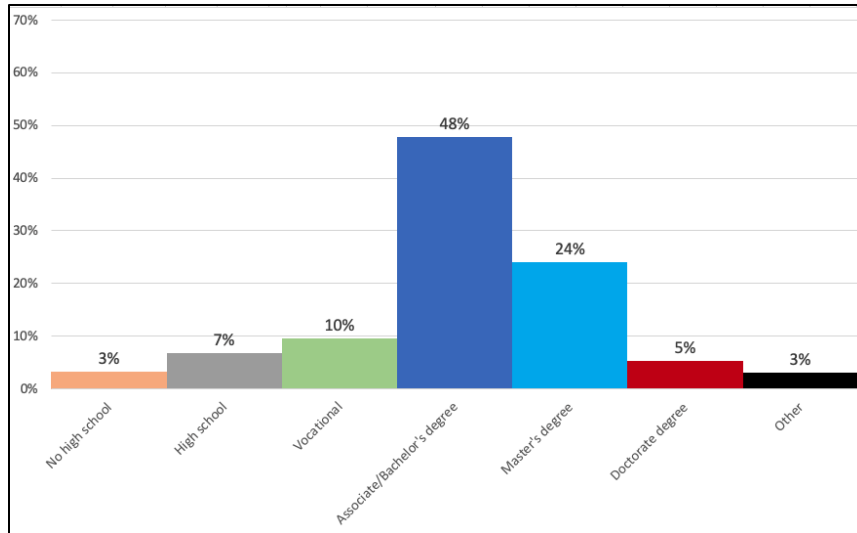


Figure 3
Survey respondents by highest level of education.

Around 37% of the survey respondents identified themselves as employed professionals. In addition, 20% of the respondents identified as either business owners or self-employed. Over one-quarter of the respondents (27%) identified as either retired or homemakers. A visual summary of the primary occupation of the survey respondents is presented in the chart below (see Figure 4).

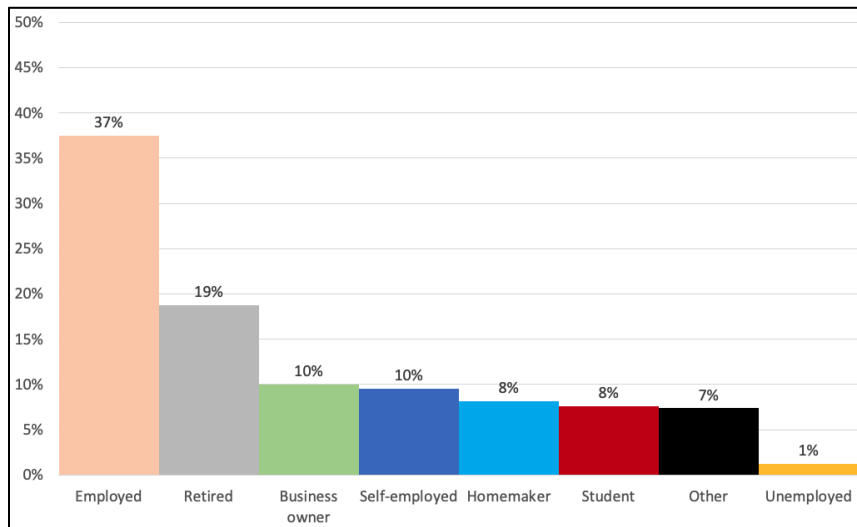


Figure 4
Survey respondents by primary occupation.

Target Population Profile

As evident from the demography analysis, there was a wide range of diversity in terms of geography, age, gender, education, and occupation among the respondents. Owing to this geographic and demographic spread of the survey participants, the survey respondents were divided into two groups. The survey *target group* consisted of respondents who belonged to the target population defined for this study – English-speaking Ismaili community members aged between 18 and 44 years who currently reside in Euro-American countries. In contrast, the *general group* comprised the respondents who fell outside the target population. The target group respondents were identified by combining the responses of four specific questions in the survey (Q1 – Country of residence, Q2 – Age group, Q6 – Community membership, and Q10 – Primary language).

As depicted in the chart below (Figure 5), of the 515 total survey respondents, 496 respondents identified themselves as members of the Ismaili community. A total of 376 of these respondents lived in Euro-American countries, and 238 of them designated English as their primary language. Finally, the pool of respondents in the target group was reduced to 71 when the age requirement was considered. Thus, the final size of the survey target was determined to be 71 or around 14% of the total number of respondents (n = 515).

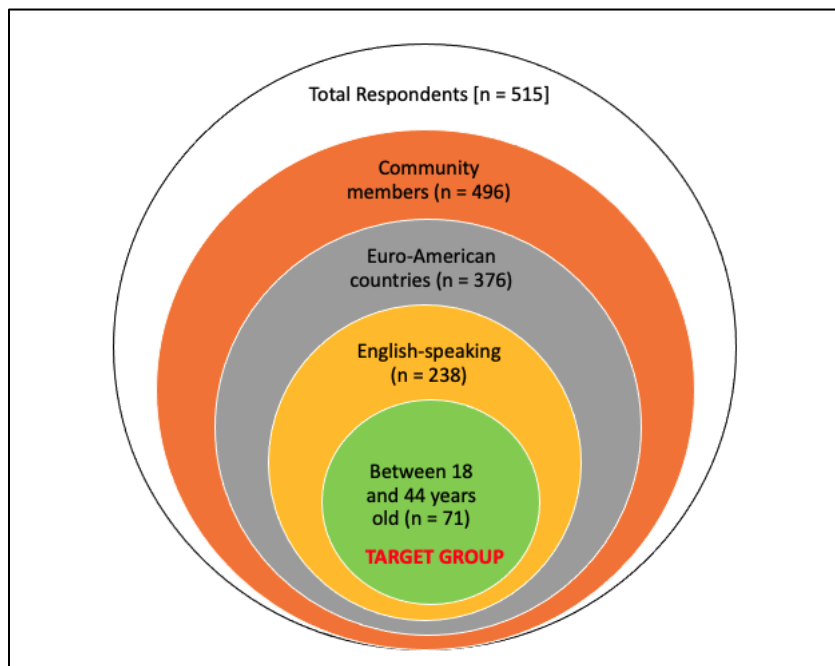


Figure 5
Identifying respondents in the survey target group.

Gathering Needs and Expectations

It was helpful to benchmark the target group in relation to the other respondents in the general group to analyze the needs assessment survey data. Doing so helped provide a consistent baseline in identifying and comparing, as well as contextualizing, unique needs and attitudes between the two groups. For instance, when analyzing the data for the question on the importance of ginans in their lives (Q7), the expected difference in the attitudes between the two groups could now be visualized. A lower percentage of the target group (89%) attached moderate to high importance to ginans than the general group (97%), as depicted in the figure below (Figure 6). The evidence also validates the fundamental premise of this study that ginans must be made relevant to the younger generations based on their current socio-economic contexts.

A strong agreement between the needs of the two groups was observed with regards to having access to ginan resources. An overwhelming majority (97%) in both groups attached moderate to high importance to having online access to ginan resources. On the question of preferred devices to access online ginan resources as well, there was notable synergy in the needs of the two groups. The use of mobile phones remained the most preferred device in the target group for 97% of the respondents in comparison to 91% for the general group. The two groups diverge in their preferences, however, when it comes to accessing ginan resources in the form of books, CDs, cassettes, etc. More than one-quarter (28%) of the respondents in the general group attach moderate to high importance to analog resources in comparison to less than one-tenth of the respondents in the target group.

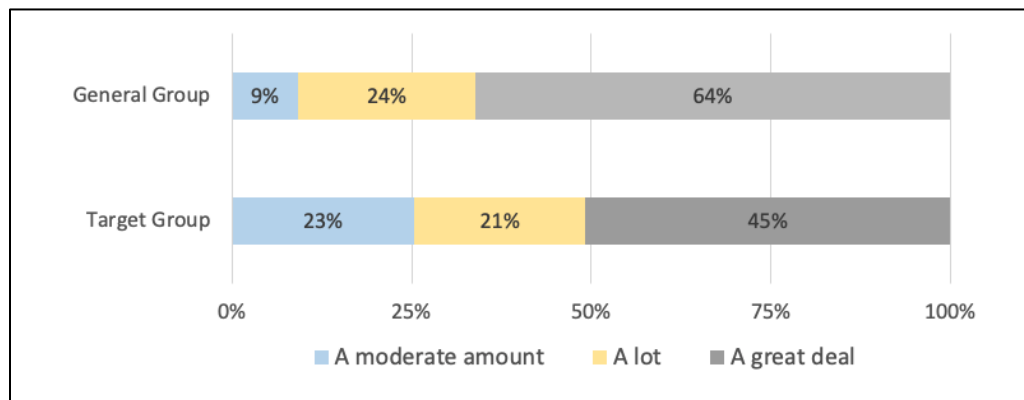


Figure 6
Importance of ginan in target and general respondents groups.

Given the demography of the target group, it was expected to find an overwhelming demand (97%) for the Latin script and English as the language of instruction for the ginans. It was surprising, however, to find the English language to be preferred by 91% of the respondents in the general group. While none of the other scripts come close to the strong support shown for English, Khojki and Gujarati remain alive and important in the community even today (Figure 7). The findings of the survey reflect the historical decline of Khojki and Gujarati scripts in favour of English as a substantial number of the community members have moved away from the Indian subcontinent to the West.

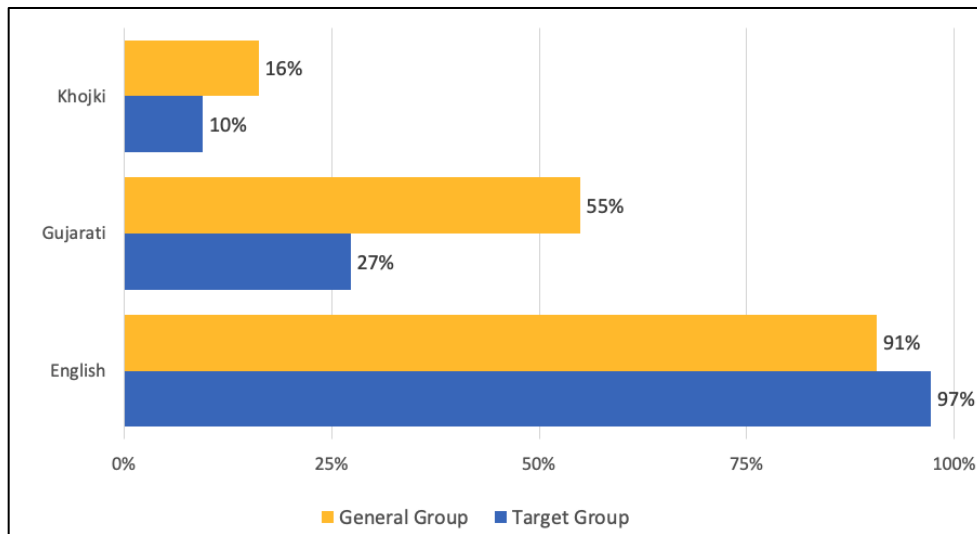


Figure 7
Language preference for learning and understanding ginans.

Most of the respondents in both groups (89%) considered online access to ginan materials to be important. Due to the lack of useful ginan content on the official community institutional websites, community members use various external websites to access ginan materials (Figure 8). Thus, there is a deep desire in the community to use online ginan websites and content that are either produced or endorsed by community institutions. As one community participant stated, the need for developing “a unified website which is accredited by IIS that is made available globally and it should have authentic text and raags of ginans” (Respondent #506).

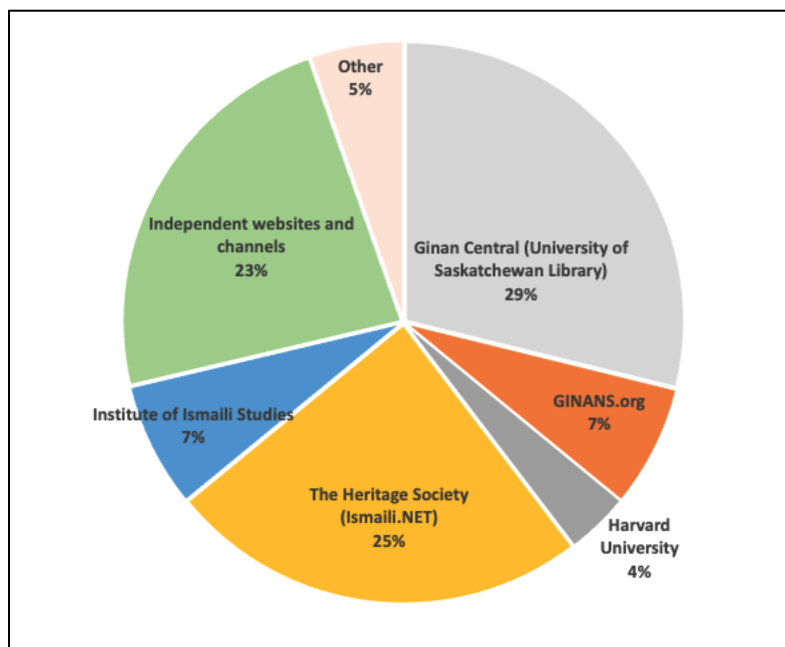


Figure 8
Most preferred websites for accessing ginan materials.

To ascertain the types of online materials desired by ginan learners, a variety of options were presented to the respondents to rank as part of the needs assessment survey. These options were ranked independent of each other by the respondents. Having access to ginan texts and translations in English was ranked as the most desirable resource for learning and understanding of the ginans (Figure 9). This outcome is not surprising as it is a common practice to use ginan text and translation side-by-side during in-person instructional sessions.

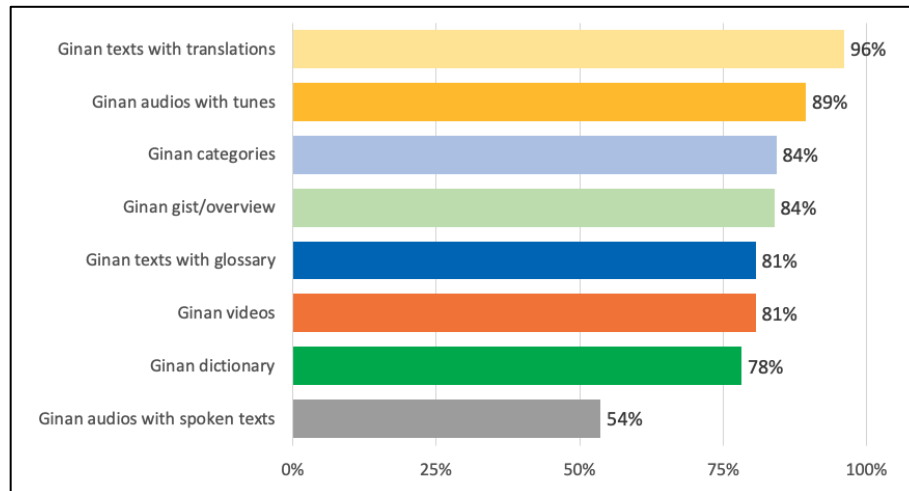


Figure 9
Useful resources for learning and understanding ginans.

The second most desired content type was audio recitations of ginans. In an in-person instructional setting, the instructor is responsible for reciting ginans to the learners. In an online and self-learning setting, where there are no instructors, the availability of digital audio is crucial. The need for information on ginan categories was also ranked as desirable by 84% of the respondents. The ginan categories are used to group ginans based on various ceremonial and topical themes. In recent years, the knowledge of ginan categories has been confined to the community elders and experts who typically impart this knowledge to learners during their in-person instructional sessions.

Another sought-after resource for learning and understanding ginans that was ranked considerably higher in the needs assessment survey was the summary of individual ginans, commonly referred to as ginan “gist” in the community. Over the past decade, it has become a common practice for reciters to read out the gist of the ginan in English that they are called upon to recite during congregational services held for special occasions. The gist texts explain the message and sentiments of ginans in broad strokes for the English-speaking members of the congregation who often struggle to understand what is being recited. Despite this being a common practice, the community institutions have yet to produce any publication with ginan gists that can be readily accessed by the community.

Ginan dictionary and multimedia ginan videos were ranked equally high in the survey. When analyzed based on specific groups, only 67% of the respondents in the target group attach moderate to high importance to a ginan dictionary as opposed to 80% of those outside the target group. The need for multimedia videos is also relatively less pronounced in the target group at 77% as opposed to 81% in the general group.

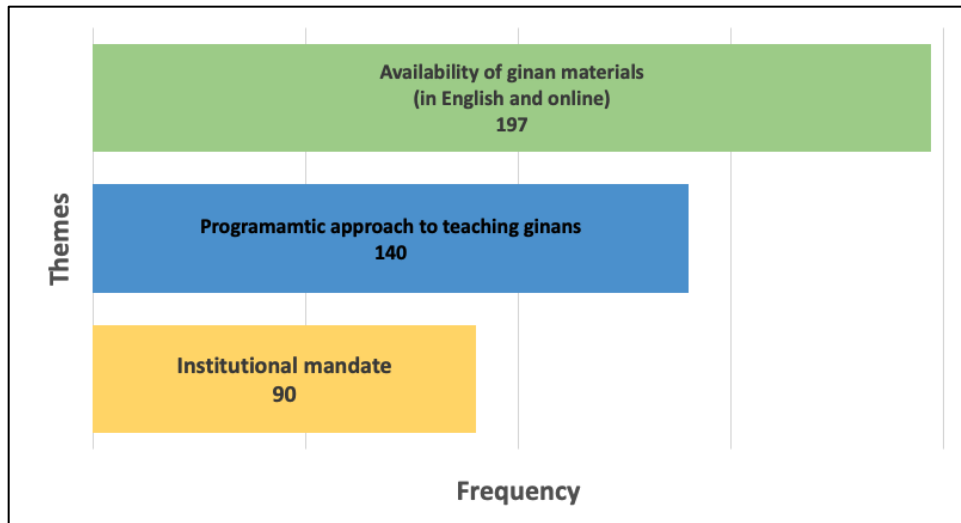


Figure 10
Thematic summary of the needs and expectations of the survey respondents.

The qualitative analysis of the only open-ended question in the survey (question # 20) revealed three distinct themes (Figure 10). Overall, the survey found that the availability of ginan resources in English remains a crucial need for the target group members who have little or no knowledge of the language of the ginans. The development and dissemination of curriculum-based educational programs and supporting materials for the ginans emerged as the most urgent and unmet expectations. The sentiment for a more pronounced acknowledgement of the heritage of ginans and its significance in the communal and scholarly undertakings of its institutions and leaders was found to be equally prevalent amongst the target and general group respondents.

Discussion

Based on the analysis of the survey data, an aggregate profile of the needs and expectations of the target group – English-speaking Ismaili community members aged between 18 and 44 years who currently reside in the West – can be depicted as follows. A typical target group member is an educated citizen of an English-speaking country such as Canada. They consider ginans to be an important part of their life even though the language of ginans remains mostly foreign to them. They value the emotive and performative aspects of the tradition that help them express their devotion and solidarity to the Ismaili faith and community. They remain very concerned that the ginans, and more so the teachings that the tradition encapsulates, will be lost if nothing is done about it by the community and its institutions.

The survey results provide tangible evidence of the need to utilize information technology for making ginans accessible. The survey revealed that close to 90% of the survey respondents preferred having access to ginan materials online, which challenges the taboo of incorporating contemporary information technology to complement traditional ways of accessing and teaching the ginans. From a learner-centric perspective, the use of information technology is imperative for engaging learners to embrace traditional languages and traditions.

There is little doubt that the present-day ginan corpus has survived over the past centuries primarily due to the foresight and adaptability of the Ismaili community to embrace print technology to preserve the

ginan texts. Now it is time for the community to once again summon its spirit of adaptability and courage to embrace information technology to ensure the continuity of the ginans in the digital age. The future survival of the tradition of the ginans in the West remains highly dependent on the continued engagement of the community youth through information technology.

With its deliberate focus on the *people* dimension of the e-learning framework to gather community needs, this research opens pathways to expand on the *technology* and *process* dimensions of the e-learning system framework in charting the future of the ginans by the Ismaili community and its institutions. The community institutions are well-positioned to address some of the fundamental issues to ensure continued transmission and preservation of the ginans in the Western diaspora.

Standardized Romanization

The phonetic demands of the oral and mixed nature of the ginan language posed challenges for the limited phonetic strength of the Khojki script initially used to transcribe the ginans (Virani, 2017). Unfortunately, these shortcomings were never addressed systematically and were passed on as the ginan corpus was canonized from Khojki to a more established Gujarati script. The canonized ginan corpus in Khojki and Gujarati were then used as the basis for the romanization of ginans into the Latin or English writing system. As a result, variant ginan romanization conventions started to emerge from different countries where the community resided. For instance, the palatal or hard “d” sound as in the word *doctor*, is found to be romanized with variants such as the use of successive d (dd), capitalization (D), italicization (*d*), and with a dot below (*ḍ*). Community institutions such as the national ITREBs and the IIS are well-placed to standardize romanization conventions for the transliteration of the ginans.

Having a standardized romanization convention will not only make the ginan corpus more reader-friendly but will allow ginan texts to be computationally analyzed using natural language processing for various purposes, including creation of lexical resources. As Bowker (2018) explains, availability of credible and representative corpus remains at the heart of enhancing human understanding through computational analysis in language learning:

Consider that a corpus is a text file. It could be made up of tens, hundreds, or thousands of documents and may run to hundreds of thousands or even millions of words. Trying to count the number of words, or the number of times each word occurs, would be a time-consuming, labor-intensive and error-prone process if it were done manually. However, this type of work is easily accomplished by a computer, and corpus analysis software can be used to calculate several different measures of frequency, including raw frequency counts (e.g., word lists), measures of disproportionate frequency (e.g., keyness), and measures of relative frequency (e.g., collocations) (p. 361).

Ginan Dictionary

Another potential measure that the community institutions can take is to commission an English dictionary of the ginans. While several ginan resources feature back-of-the-book ginan glossaries with English meanings, an English dictionary of the ginans is yet to be developed and published. If ginans are to be understood by English-speaking youth of the community, the availability of a ginan dictionary must

become a priority for community elders and leaders. Given the high preference in the community for online access, it may be worthwhile to make such a dictionary available online.

When it comes to forgotten and endangered languages, a dictionary becomes a tool for language preservation (Gippert et al., 2006). With the language of the ginans being oral, mixed, and endangered simultaneously, it must be preserved not just for the community but also for scholarly research. Thus, a comprehensive ginan dictionary will make it possible to study rare and complex forms of linguistic expressions manifested in the vocabulary of the ginans.

Ginan Curriculum

There appears to be a deep desire in the community for its institutions to embrace a programmatic approach for the development and administration of curriculum-based in-person and online ginan classes. The expectation here is that the curriculum for these classes will not only teach the meanings and tunes but will ensure that the history and teachings of ginans are also made relevant to the community's contemporary context as a diaspora community. At a deeper level, this need of the community youth is indicative of their desire to find comparable and compatible expressions of their faith and devotion in English-speaking societies. From this perspective, "translation" is no longer an exercise in finding linguistic equivalence but, as Stewart (2006) notes, a quest to seek equivalence of one's faith in the local culture (p. 286-87):

[T]he search for equivalence in the encounter of religions—when understood through the translation models we have characterized as literal, refractive, dynamic, and metaphoric—is an attempt to be understood, to make oneself understood in a language not always one's own; it does not necessarily reflect religious capitulation or theological ignorance or serve as the sign of a weak religious identity.... The texts that reveal actors attempting to locate commensurate analogues within the language tradition capture a unique 'moment' in the process of cultural and religious encounter, as each tradition explores the other and tries to make itself understood (p. 286-7).

The ginans, like many other ethnocultural traditions and knowledge, remain under-studied as an academic area of research in Western academia. From a broader perspective, the results of this study have wider relevance to other diasporic ethnocultural communities that may be facing similar challenges in imparting and safeguarding their traditions and knowledge.

Conclusion

This article presented a brief historical overview of how the Ismaili community members have managed to safeguard the ginans despite the geopolitical upheavals that the community has been subjected to as a political, ethnic, and religious minority community. It also unveiled the present divergent perspectives on the ginans between the community members of Khoja descent and the community institutions which continue to exacerbate the anxiety about the future of ginans. Finally, the responses of the global online survey were analyzed to identify the needs and expectations of the community to chart the future of the ginans in the Western diaspora. The survey found that the availability of online ginan materials and resources are highly desirable by the English-speaking community members who want to learn and understand the teachings of the ginans. In addition, the survey also uncovered the community's strong expectation to see the ginans become a priority in educational and scholarly programming and publishing initiatives of the community institutions.

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Appendix A

Online Survey Questionnaire

Survey Questionnaire

1. In what country do you live?

Other (please specify)

2. Which of the following age group do you belong to?

☐ 18 to 24 years old

☐ 25 to 34 years old

☐ 35 to 44 years old

☐ 45 to 54 years old

☐ 55 to 64 years old

☐ 65 to 74 years old

☐ Over 75 years old

3. What is your gender?

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Other

4. What is the highest level of school or degree you have received?

☐ No formal education

☐ Less than high school diploma

☐ High school diploma or equivalent

☐ Vocational training

☐ Some college but no degree

☐ College degree

☐ Bachelor's degree

☐ Master's degree

☐ Doctorate degree or higher

☐ Other (please specify below)

5. What is your primary occupation?

☐ Business owner
☐ Employed
☐ Homemaker
☐ Retired
☐ Self-employed
☐ Student
☐ Unemployed
☐ Other (please specify below)

6. Are you a member of the Ismaili community?

☐ Yes
☐ No

7. How important are ginans in your life?

Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Are you concerned that the tradition of ginans may be lost in the future?

Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Why or why not?

9. Are you concerned that the teachings of ginans may be lost in the future?

Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Why or why not?

10. Do you speak most often in English at home?

☐ Yes
☐ No

11. Which languages are you able to read or write in?

- ☐ Khojki
☐ Gujarati
☐ English
☐ Urdu
☐ Other (please specify)

12. What type of content do you currently use for ginans?

	Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Ginan texts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ginan translations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ginan audios	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ginan videos	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic articles & presentations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community talks & sermons (waez)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Glossaries & dictionaries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

13. How well do you understand the ginans?

Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. How interested are you in understanding the ginans?

Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. How important is it for you to be able to access content online to learn and understand ginans?

Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Which of the following sources do you use for accessing gnan materials online?

	Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Gnan Central (University of Saskatchewan Library)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Association for the Study of Gnanas (GINANS.org)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Ismaili Literature in Indic Languages (Harvard University)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Heritage Society (Ismaili.NET)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Independent websites, blogs, YouTube, social media, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

17. What language/script do you prefer to use for learning and understanding the gnanas?

	Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Khojki	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gujarati	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
English	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Urdu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

18. Which of the following online content will be useful for you to learn and understand the ginans?

	Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Ginan texts with translations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ginan texts with links to glossary	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ginan audios with tune (recited)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ginan audios without tune (spoken)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ginan videos with text, translation, audio, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ginan gist/overview	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ginan dictionary	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ginan categories	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify below)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

19. What kind of device would you most prefer to use to access ginan materials online?

	Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Computer tablet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Desktop computer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Smart phone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

20. In your opinion what additional measures can be taken to ensure that the tradition and teachings of ginans remain available to future generations?