

The Concept of “GOD beyond God” in the *Khat Nirinjan* of Pir Sadardin.

By Nagib Tajdin

Long before the establishment of the Fatimid Empire in Maghreb, the Ismaili *Dawa* had already started in the Indian sub-continent. Dai Haitham the nephew of the famous Dai Ibn Hawshab was already preaching there around 884 AD¹. Some authors date the *Dawa* in India to even much earlier times².

Pir Sadardin [b. 1290 AD³] was raised to the status of Pir by Imam Islam Shah⁴, the 30th Imam of the Nizari Ismailis, at a rather old age. His name comes sequentially as number 26 out of the 51 “*Satadhari*⁵” - authorised - Pirs. He is especially revered and for good reasons: He is one of the rare Pirs of which so many works – Ginans and Granths - have survived to this date. He has also composed the Dua⁶, the three times ritual prayer recited almost unchanged upto 1956 AD amongst the Ismailis. More, He brought the name Khojas to the community in the Sub-continent.⁷ Pir Sadardin carefully chose that name as it befits the person in search of the Gnosis (*Ginan*⁸). Gnosis could be attained only by a person that would be in search [*Khoj*], not by a person that would merely be an honorable person [*Khwaja*].

We have based this note on manuscript #19 in the collection of the Heritage Society. It is a 400 pages manuscript in Khojki scripts written in 1895 AD. The text is in black ink but sometimes green and red ink have been used for titles, numbers or separations. It contains several Granths, Ginans and Garbis. The table of content is at page 398. The manuscript starts with *Khat Nirinjan*, one of the lesser-known works of Pir Sadardin. There are minor variances with the text published in early 1900s'. This work is divided into three parts. Each of the 3 parts of this Granth are well separated and start in the manuscript with the words "*Shri Satgur Bhirmaa ho Waatchaa*" – The Word (or teachings) of Satgur Brahma. The number of verses in the first part matches a symbolic number: it contains 49 couplets [7x7]. The first part is the main part as far as we are concerned as it brings the concept of divinity, which we will study, in these notes. The second part is 83 couplets in length and the last part, also known as “Vel”, is 128 couplets long. The rhymes are respected for each of the couplets.

Within Islam and particularly Ismailism various attempts have been made to define the divinity. Even recently, Pir Shihabuddin Shah (d. May 1885) discussing the nature of God wrote in his “*Risala dar Haqiqat-I Din*⁹”: “*All that is beyond thy imagination, Is merely the limit of thy fantasy, not God*”.

Ismailis have traditionally explained in various ways the concept of “God the Attributes” and “GOD beyond God” sometimes called the Essence by opposition to the word Attributes. As Corbin puts it so well in his *Trilogie Ismaélienne*¹⁰, the First Intellect is equaled with God the Attributes, which is itself instituted - not emanated - from the “Will” of the Essence. The Will therefore precedes the Existence. [The GOD beyond God]. This is precisely what Pir Sadardin will explain in this work in a colourful language using a conversation between the “GOD beyond God”, the *Khat Nirinjan* and

secondly God, Brahma, the Creator, to brings us at the last verses of this work with his conclusion on the identity of the Khat Nirinjan.

To define both Khat and Nirinjan is somewhat difficult because behind the obvious meaning lays a secret. *Khat* means "the Highest"¹¹ and Nirinjan comes from the word *anjan*, the eyes. Nir-anjan¹² means beyond what one can see, beyond the reach of the physical eyes. So the expression Khat Nirinjan¹³ may well have a meaning that is hidden, the "One beyond the reach of the eyes of the Highest God". And here we meet Corbin's explanation, as he puts forth, of the Name Allah itself which is the name of the First Intellect, "God the Attributes" (illah – wallah). That name which is the support of all the attributes, comes from the root "wlh"¹⁴, the same root as that of the word nostalgia. Corbin explains that this refers to the nostalgia of "God the Attributes" unable to reach his own Origin. Pir Sadardin also explains the same concept but as part of the conversation of Brahma with the Nirinjan. In that conversation Brahma tells, "you are my mother, you are my father, you are my creator, the invisible without form." [Verse 15]

Lets now see the content of that first part.

The first couplet says:

001. *Eji anant jouge to aage wahi gayaa, taare aapohi aap Nirinjan raheaa. -*
Many cycles went by and at that time there was only you the Nirinjan [Invisible - not seeable]

The works name is Khat Nirinjan but Pir Sadardin starts the first verse by calling the entity "*Nirinjan*" instead of "*Khat Nirinjan*". The obvious reason is that it is invisible but the "*Khat*" having not yet been instaurated¹⁵, it could therefore not be called yet Khat Nirinjan, it could not be called Invisible to *Khat* - God the Highest.

From the 2nd couplet to the 12th couplet the work brings the idea of the transcendental God instauring his "image" on his navel (or center). We see here that for the sake of simplicity and to approach the subject of the divinity without entering into the concept of defining God by the double negativity¹⁶ [God can not "be Attributes" and God can not "not be Attributes"], the author found a very candid approach appropriate to the time and the people he was addressing to. His simple explanation brings the concept that the image of GOD is not GOD but it cannot "exist" if GOD "is" not. So, now we have the Nirinjan that brings out his own Image, puts it in his center with love and affection for many more cycle. Here the Khat Nirinjan is also identified as the Alakh Nirinjan. [Alakh means that which cannot be described].

The Name Brahma refering to that image appears for the first time in the 13th couplet:

13. *Taare match niraalanbh aasan kari, taare te Bhiramaa rahyaa naabhaj dhari -*
There the Supreme GOD rested; there Brahma stayed in his center.

The following 3 couplets bring us a Brahma, unable to understand [comprehend] his nature and his origin. This is very close to the Declaration of the Great Resurrection in Alamut [8 August 1164] when the Imam says that He, "Mowlana", is beyond all existential considerations and attributes as He transcends them all¹⁷.

Upto the 31st couplet, we see Brahma, God the Creator, asking humbly from the Invisible GOD, the permission to "Create" and asking for the eventual salvation of what He is about to create which is conditionally granted and which is detailed in the following verses. The capacity to create is given to the God Brahma by GOD through the gift of the "Tran Kaal nu Jaap", the "Word" of the 3 Times [Past, Present and Future]. This is close to the theology of Aristotle that identifies the *Amr* to God's volition and as close as it gets to the concept of "*Kun Faya Kun!*"¹⁸

31. *Khat Darshan*¹⁹ *upaaeaa saar, Te Alakh Narinjan, aape kartaar.* - The Absolute Invisible [GOD] instated the stage of the Supreme Vision

The first time we come across the expression "Khat" is in the expression *Khat Darshan*, the word referring to the Highest Vision. Because our interpretation of this expression is different from the widely repeated meaning, it needs to be explained. In another *ginan* of the *Arti* category from the same Pir Sadardin²⁰, we find the following verse:

*Khat Darshan sun pujayē*²¹, *amar bhed koi virle payaa.* - Believing in the "Sun"²² [sometimes pronounced *Sunya*) is The Highest Vision, only few understand the eternal [highest] essence.

Now let's look at the alternative translation of the same verse: Believing in the "Sun" is the Highest Vision, only few understand the significance of The Command [*Amr!*].

Here we can equate the command with the origin of Brahma. In reality, Brahma, Allah, God is always associated with the number ONE²³. The Highest Vision could be nothing but that Command (*Amr* – Order - Will) which institutes, and therefore precedes, the "One". What can better symbolize that stage than he who is at the level of "Sun", the ultimate Zero preceding the One?

Brahma now creates Light, Matter and the Cycle of the Intellect [*Chatur*²⁴ *Kalap*]. And therefore "Khat Darshan" in this context really means Highest Vision as at this stage the Universe is not yet formed.

The remaining of the couplet upto the 49th brings the notion of various Avatar of the first cycle [Haw, Kaw, Dharam and Keshaw] as well as the saved souls of that time who, it is said here, will become one with the [Brahma-Meshwar-Vishnou] "all-in-one" God.

These are some of the highlights of the first part. Further down the text brings the identity of the Pir with Brahma the Creator. But it also clarifies that this is not a defining of multiple gods or two gods²⁵. There is one God but two aspects of the same God. And

in a reminiscence of the Surah Nur²⁶, the author says that the essence of a light is light itself and he brings the Quranic image of Light upon Light:

- Verse 107: *Diwa manhe thi diwo saar, sohi diwo Narinjan Nirakar* - Light upon Light and that Light is Nirinjan Nirakar [Invisible ineffable God]
- Verse 250: *Pir-Shah ek, te nahi jouda* - Pir and Shah are ONE they are not separated.
- Verse 251: *"Pir te je Sahebe thapiya* - Is Pir [only] He who has been "Instaured" by the Saheb [Master]

This refers to the establishment of Brahma as Pir by the Khat Nirinjan.

And indeed, all over the Ginanic literature, the Pirs have defined themselves as the Brahma. In fact, the Pirs claim, in "ginanic" terminology, to be what was known in the pre-Fatimid period as *Imam Mustawda* and in the Fatimid period as the *Hujjat-ul Imam*. In Post Alamut documents, such as the later "Pir Pandiyat-e Jawanmadi" revered by both the Persian and the Indian Sub-continent Ismailis, the importance of the Hujjat is capital and has retained its meaning in the word Brahma or Pir. Coming back to the expression "*Shri Satgur Bhirmaa ho Waatchaa*" in the beginning of each part: If we consider that this expression has been added by the scribe, it means that the scribe accepted Pir Sadardin as Satgur Brahma. But if it were part of the original work, it would mean that the author is telling us that whatever he writes is the word of Brahma.

We see this confirmed by the works of the "*Satadhari*" Pirs by the use of expressions such as:

- Pir Shams²⁷: *Aad Bhirmaji aavea, Gur Shams-no avatar* – Came the Eternal Brahma, Manifestation of Pir Shams.
- Pir Sadardin²⁸: *Bhanre Pir Sadardin, Satgur Bhirma*. – Said Pir Sadardin, the Satgur Brahma.
- Pir Hassan Kabirdin²⁹: *Eh Dhol boliya Hassan Kabirdin, sresti na sirjanhar-re* - Hassan Kabirdin spoke those words, he (is) the Creator of the Universe.

It is only in the last three verses of this work that Pir Sadardin tells us about the identity of the "Khat Nirinjan", perfectly in tune with the Declaration of the Resurrection in Alamut and also with the concept of the unity of "Pir-Shah" as defined by the 3rd part of the works.

- 258: *Gour Nar ni tame karjo sreewaa, e Khat Narinjan outtam Mewa* - Serve the Gur [Pir] and the Nar [Imam] that is the highest reward of the Khat Nirinjan

- 259: *Pir Sadarddin boleaa sat watchan, e Khat Narinjan ehi Darshan* - Pir Sadardin says the true word, that is the Vision of Khat Nirinjan [The Highest God.
- 260. *Shah na Darshan thi jaawe paap, te Alakh Narinjan Aapohi Aap*³⁰ - By the Vision of the Lord [Shah-Imam] all sins are gone [because] He himself is Alakh Nirinjan

There were many ways to look at the beginning of this work. One way would have been to analyze the Love Relation between Brahma and its Origin. The other approach would have been to see it as an explanation of the Eternity and the Pre-Eternity through the various Cycles of divine time that lead to the appearance of Brahma the Creator. A third way to look at his would be to take it as a work that defines what happened between the “Kun” and the “Faya Kun”. Another option was to approach it as the defining of the two aspects of God in the work of Pir Sadardin. That is the one we choose here.

The *Khat Nirinjan* distinguishes itself amongst the hundreds of Ginans and Granths because it is one of the rare works that courageously attempts to explain the beginning of the beginning. The difficult task of explaining the origin of God is tackled in the most simple and understandable way, and it is, but progressively, that the Pir Sadardin brings the reader, through the knowledge of that dual aspect of the same God, to the knowledge of the identification of *Khat Nirinjan* with the Imam of the Time.

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¹ Dachraoui, Farhat : Les commencements du califat fatimide au Maghreb. Tunis: S.T.D., 1975. A critical edition and analysis of the *Kitab Iftitah al-Da'wa* of the Qadi al Nu'man (A.H. 342/A.D. 957), p.43

² According to *Man Samjani Wadi*, the monumental work of Pir Shams in 10,000 verses (500 chapters of 20 verses each of which 420 chapters have been published), Imam Ismaili, the son of Imam Jafar Sadiq, himself converted to Ismailism in Hind during the last ten years of his life. [Chapter 153 - 154].

³ Ivanow: “The Sect of Imam Shah in Gujerat,” J.B.B.R.A.S. n.s. XII (1936): 19-70.

⁴ According to Mumtaz Ali Tajjain [Ismailis Through History, *Islamic book Publisher, Karachi, Jan 1997*], Pir Sadardin came to India during the period of Imam Kasim Shah (between 1310 C.E. and 1370 C.E.). Imam Islam Shah [1370-1423AD] is said to have given the status of *Pir* to Pir Sadardin when he was at a quite advanced age. According to Lakhani, [The Great Ismaili Heroes, Karachi, 1973], Pir Sadardin is said to have died around 1380. Obviously, each author gives a different date and there is no unanimity on the subject. However there is ample internal evidence in the ginans of Pir Sadardin to corroborate the fact that he was preaching during the time of Imam Islam Shah. In Ginan 2-026 verse 1, he says “*Mehdi Sri Islam Shah ne Srevo*”, in Ginan 2-035 verse 6 he says “*Eji Naam parsade Shah haatiddun dese, tthaam dise Sri Islam Shah hoji*” [Both Ginans are printed in the series of 6 Khojki Ginans books published by Recreation Club Institute, Bombay, Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, 1934]

⁵ *Sataadhari* from the word *Sataa*: Position, Authority, Power.

⁶ In fact he composed one *Asal Dua* of 17 chapters to be recited 3 times a day and he also composed a much longer *Ghat Pat ji Dua* recited on special occasions on the establishment of the Gat-pat after the daily night meditation or on Fridays and on the day of the new moon. These prayers have now been replaced by an Arabic version, which still incorporates some parts from the *Asal Dua*.

⁷ Khojah is a name, which comes from *Khoj* [to search - to be absorbed] (Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadiq Ali: *Ismailis Through History*", Islamic book Publisher, Karachi, Jan 1997), and not from the usually accepted Khwaja. - In fact, Seyyed Imam Shah attributes the concept of Khojas - in the sense of the one that search - to Pir Satgur Noor [*Moman Chetamani* v. 199]. This understanding is further confirmed by verse 132 of the Khat Nirinjan that commands: "*Khojo ginani, e sat ni rahaa*" - "Search, O Gnostic, for that way which leads to Truth."

⁸ Ginan means Gnosis. It comes from the same root "jna". According to Daniel Donnet, «Les termes sanskrits traduits respectivement par *notion* et par *connaissance* sont de même racine (*jnâ*: cf. grec *gi-gnôskô*; lat. *co-gnoscere*; gnose) » [*Aux sources du Bouddhisme*, Folia Electronica Classica (Louvain-la-Neuve) - Numéro 2 - décembre 2001]

⁹ Shihabu'd-Din Shah al-Husayni: *The True Meaning of Religion*' or *Risala dar Haqiqat-I Din* . Transl. Ivanow. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.

¹⁰ Corbin Henri: *Trilogie Ismaélienne*. (3- Symboles choisis de la Roseaie du Mystère de Mahmoud Shabestari.) Bibl. Iran. No. 9. Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1961. p.60

¹¹ Somewhat the equivalent of the Arabic "The Most High", one of the 99 names of Allah, as defined in the Quran Chapter 87:01, in this context Khat can not obviously mean the number six. We are at this point in the Granth where God is somewhere before the ONE and after the Zero.

¹² According to Tajddin Mumtaz Ali: *Glossary of Holy Ginans*, Dar ul Ilm Prakashan, Bombay 1993, Nirinjan means that which cannot be seen by the eyes, that which is invisible and it also means the Light.

¹³ The paucity in ginanic studies has pushed some scholars to copy each other's definitions mainly from Ivanow who has defined *Khat Nirinjan* as the "six invisible world". We differ from that definition, as Ivanow does not put the expression in its context and fails to realize that before God came into "being" there was no such thing as six "invisible worlds". Ivanow himself candidly admits of his weakness in the understanding of the Ginanic vocabulary. ["Not being an Indologist myself, I was unable to refer to the original gnan literature" – *Collectanea*, Vol. 1. 1948]

¹⁴ Corbin, Henri : *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, vol. I. Paris: Gallimard, 1964. p.123

¹⁵ I have used that word as translation of the French word "instauré" in the sense Corbin use it and as representing the ginanic word "*Thapiya*". None of the word "instituted" or "established" come close to the meaning and depth of the word "*Thapiya*". It has been frustrating to find in the English language the exact meanings of complex theological concepts found in the ginanic literature.

¹⁶ In fact, the Islamic Shahada, the declaration of faith, itself points to this: "There is no God but God". It could have simply said "There is God only" but it does not.

¹⁷ Corbin Henri: "Huitième centenaire d'Alamût", *Mercure de France*, février 1965, p.286-304. «Il est le seigneur des êtres, il est le seigneur qui est l'existence absolue (*wojûd motlaq*), excluant ainsi toute détermination existentielle, car il les transcende toutes»

¹⁸ “Be and it is”. It refers to the Word of God originating from the Will of God, and means the divine order to bring into “existence”. Hard to make is the distinction; between the stages of the Will of God transformed into the Word which itself is transformed into the result.

¹⁹ Here *Khat* refers to the Highest, not to the 6 schools of Hinduism [Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Védanta.] It is difficult to agree with Ivanow’s translation of *Khat Darshan* in *Collectanae* as six pilgrimages because of reasons already explained in Note 13.

²⁰ Ginan 4-002 Pir Sadardin: *Zaaher Dev iyun dip maan bethaa* – second verse. Bhag 4 of 600 Ginans published by: Recreation Club Institute, Bombay, Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, 1934.

²¹ Often this verse is mistakenly translated, as “The Six Schools of Hinduism attain only nothing”. These misinterpretations often stems from the fact that *Khat* is translated as “6” and some kind of translation has to be built to accommodate this number.

²² *Sun* [*Suniya*] is a complex concept with several meanings: Nothingness, zero, void, and there is even a Cycle or Time concept associated to this word in the often used ginanic expression “*Sun Kal*”. In the same way, *Amar* means eternal but it also means The Command, The Word, The Will, the “*Kun*” (Be!) in the expression “*Kun Faya Kun*”. It has also been used in conjunction with the word *Shabad* (Word, Name) in ginanic expressions such as “*Sun ma thi Shabad nipayaa*” – From the *Sun* appeared the Word.

²³ Quran [Pickthall’s translation] Chapt. 112:1 *Say: He is Allah, the One! – Abdullah Yousufali calls that Surah as Surah 112. The Unity, Sincerity, Oneness Of Allah*

²⁴ *Chatur* may also mean “4” [in reference to the 4 Kalaps: Jaelaa, Faelaa, Arajaa and Khalifaa Kalap].

²⁵ Pir Sadardin says in ginan 2-021 verse 15 “*Eji Ek Noor thi Shah Pir Upanaa, tene kem kari kahie joua joua*” - From one Light came Shah and Pir, how can we consider them detached? Bhag 2 of 600 Ginans published by: Recreation Club Institute, Bombay, Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, 1934

²⁶ Sura Nur (XXIV) - Ayat 35: *Allah is the Light of the heavens and earth. The similitude of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon Light. Allah guideth unto His Light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is Knower of all things.*” [Translated by Marmaduke Pickthall].

²⁷ Ginan 2-049 Pir Shams: “*Jiv tun jaavaa de*” Verse 2. Bhag 2 of 600 Ginans published by: Recreation Club Institute, Bombay, Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, 1934

²⁸ Ginan 5-031 Pir Sadardin: “*Aanand Aanand kariyo rikhisaro*” - last verse. Bhag 5 of 600 Ginans published by: Recreation Club Institute, Bombay, Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, 1934. In Ginan 2-031 verse 13 of the same series, he says “*Bhane Pir Sadardin Sat Gur Brahma, Athar Ved bhanne so mera – eji*”

²⁹ Ginan 1-004 Pir Hassan Kabirdin: “*Ramtaa Ramtaa Prabhu Paatane aawiya*” - last verse. Bhag 5 of 600 Ginans published by: Recreation Club Institute, Bombay, Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, 1934

³⁰ The expression *Aapohi Aap* has been translated here as an equivalent to the expression “*Tunhi Tun*” which one can find in other ginans pertaining to God. [i.e “*Awal Akhar Ya Ali tunhi tun*”] It may also mean “Himself”.