

PART 1

Historiography



The historiography of the Khōjā presented in this study draws from both textual and oral sources. It is an attempt to engage both disciplines, history and anthropology, in their own right, to provide “a sharper sensitivity to the conditions—practical, cultural, political, institutional” (Geertz 1990, 334)—of the development of Khōjā religious identities from the colonial to postcolonial eras in Tanzania. The advantage of employing both methodologies is that a more complete context emerges of how Gujarati and Sindhi texts functioned in the everyday religious life of the community, from major public religious performance to private female household rituals, in ways different than originally intended. Embedded within contemporary language and cultural practices are echoes of vernacular traditions, which the Khōjā brought with them from Kacch and Kathiawar in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These living traditions complement the manuscripts and the early printed materials of their religious history on the Swahili coast. As Peter Burke has outlined, this form of historical anthropology is evidence based and necessarily microhistorical, focusing on one community for which the political and social context of the region is useful in locating the community geographically (Goodman 2003, 790).

For the Khōjā, imposing a strict written—versus oral—dichotomy would be contrary to the interaction between both forms of texts. Slavica Ranković’s ‘oral-literate continuum’ is a better model for conceptualizing this relationship, although not in a strictly linear fashion (Ranković 2010). Some of the earliest Khōjā texts from the late eighteenth century are written oral texts (*Dhoā:māhādhinje:chañṭe:vijanjī: Manuscript, 1865. MS Indic 2534 1778*). In addition to texts that were intended to be read, such as polemics, Gujarati publications in Zanzibar included ‘voiced texts’ (Foley 2010, 20–21) of religious poetry, which were written but were primarily intended to be recited in the *imāmvādō*. For skilled reciters, they functioned as *aides-mémoires*. In reconstructing the historical evolution of a living community’s religious identity, written texts can serve to validate its oral history.

To better illustrate the integrative potentiality of the written and oral in historical anthropology, let us take the case of a late nineteenth-century Khōjā *majlis* (‘religious service’) book used in colonial Zanzibar (further described in Chapter 4). This book is a daily lecture book for the leader of the *majlis* that contains an extensive glossary at the end. Because of its poor condition, many pages from both the beginning and the end of the book are missing, making it difficult to contextualize the publication and its intended use. When asked about the book, female septuagenarians corroboratively explained that the *jhākirā* (‘female reciters’) used to memorize the book in order to learn Gujarati and the new Perso-Arabic vocabulary of Gulāmālī Ismā’il’s publications. These

jhākirā would travel from village to village in colonial Tanganyika, reciting sermons and providing literacy education to the women of the community. Without oral history, the poor condition of the book would have limited its analysis to a theological and philological study. The use of validated oral history allowed for a recovery of women's narratives through oral history (Perks and Thomson 2006) on the book's role in the development of late colonial African Khōjā female religious identity and literacy.

The underlying subject of analysis is the internal dynamics of change through multiple vectors of power and its expression through discourse on language, text, space, and the body. The methodological approach used is based on 'discursive institutionalism,' which focuses on how ideas are constructed, communicated, and evolved within institutional contexts (Schmidt 2008). As is discussed in Chapter 3, the Khōjā, as a caste-based merchant community with a plutocratic elite, evolved a corporate institutional structure that appropriated municipal functions in late colonial Zanzibar and postcolonial Tanzania. Within this bounded entity, the study seeks to reconstruct the evolution of Khōjā religious identity through written and oral discourses as well as material culture. For example, the construction and normative associations of terms such as 'Islamic' are examined diachronically through written texts. Analyses of how these ideas have shifted and have been expressed through oral history also allow minority perspectives and gendered voices to be heard in the context of performative spaces as confirming or contesting institutional definitions of normative Khōjā identity. Examining the discourse of what it means to be Khōjā and what is Islamic reveals where power is located and how authority is constructed and reconstructed to fundamentally reimagine what it means to be a Khōjā Muslim in contemporary postcolonial Africa.

Genealogy: The Origins of the Khōjā

Religious Origins

It is likely that the Khōjā are descendent of two groups. The principal group being Kashmiri-Punjabi Hindu known as the Cakk and the other group the Lōhāṇā. Details about the first group are recorded and can be found in the *Phirastānnī tavārikh*. The Lōhāṇā were *mātāpanthī* [‘followers of the Goddess’]. They were descendent of Lav.¹ The Rāṭhōḍ Lav and Lōhāṇā Rāṭhōḍ migrated from Kanōj to Lauragaḍh. The essence of the *mātāpanth* faith is that the world was created from the power of Brahma. When fire burns, it results in a blister. As fire and its power are one, so too are Brahma and Prakṛti. This is the core philosophy of the doctrine. This is similar to *kaulamārg*, which was later known as *vāmamārgī*.² (Nānjiānī 1892, 245)

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Muslim and Hindu saints, such as Pīr Sadradīn Sāhēbē and Sahadēva Jōsī, respectively, ostensibly ‘converted’ subcastes (Sahib 1972) within the Cak and Lōhāṇā to a multivocal form of Indic religion known as *khōjāpanth*, thereby creating a new ethnic identity, a Muslim³ caste known as the Khōjā. According to the Khōjā,⁴ the singular or

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- 1 Lav here refers to the son of Ram in Hindu cosmology.
 - 2 The Gujarati term *vāmamārgī*, used in the text to describe this system of worship, has a complex set of meanings. It is associated with the particular goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati as well as the general female divine power, *śakti*. The rites are defined as ‘left-handed’, taken from the Sanskrit *vāma* (‘left’), which has the connotation of improper or obscene acts by its detractors. The traditions appear to have been Tantric and Vaishnavite in classification.
 - 3 At the theological level, elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism, and Shiism seem have been present in the medieval Khōjā religious complex. The shift toward a Muslim religious identity can be clearly seen in the change of the death rituals from cremation to burial and the later importance of controlling the cemetery among competing Khōjā factions in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bombay and Zanzibar.
 - 4 Āgākhānī Khōjā scholars claim that the name *khōjā* is a corruption of the Turko-Persian term *khwājā*, which came into being as a replacement title for the Lōhāṇā *thākar* (‘lord, master’) (Asani 1987, 439). This narrative of corruption is troubled by internal linguistic inconsistencies. For instance, how did such an irregular corruption of the initial conjunct syllable from *khw* to *khō* occur? As observed by Beames, the summary of Persian and Arabic terms

plural proper noun ‘Khōjā’ and its derivatives⁵ can be traced to the transitive verb in Sindhi *khōjaṇu* (‘to search for’) (Stack 1855, 82). This verb is common in many Indo-Aryan languages, from Pali (Frankfurter 1883, 151) to north Indian modern vernaculars. This explanation is a robust argument for the Indic etymology of *khōjā* and challenges the view that it is a Persian corruption. For the Khōjā, it is an appropriate name for a community in perpetual movement in search of both economic security and a perfected form of spiritual being.

Khōjāpanth was an eclectic combination of various Indic religions, from *sādhupanth* (‘ascetic philosophies’) to more mainstream traditions like the Vaishnava religion, suffused with Islamic mysticism.⁶ A dynamic unity was created on which Khōjā religious philosophy was based, both in theory and in praxis. For example, some of the medieval Vaishnava Khōjā prayers illustrating this dynamism, reprinted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have survived. One such prayer is the Viśanāpurī (‘The Perfected Viṣṇu’), which begins with an Indic Genesis-like genealogy of creation, continuing through a list of the avatars of Vishnu and of Khōjā demi-avatars, until the eighth avatar of Vishnu, the Buddha. The Khōjā demi-avatars emanate from the Buddha, uniting Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam into a continuum (Dēvarāj, 4–7).

into Indo-Aryan languages, such as Gujarati, rarely sees a modification of the original term, and when there is a modification, it is an addition of a suffix—rather than a prefix or initial syllable—while the original Arabic or Persian noun remains “unaltered and uninflected throughout” (Beames 1872, 40–41). Why, specifically, did the corruption occur only in this instance, when more than forty words exist in the Gujarati language that are of Persian origin and have retained the initial conjunct syllable *khv*? (Note: In Gujarati, the Persian phoneme /v/ is pronounced /və/ and is transliterated with a *v*.) Additionally, why does the term *khvājā* also appear in its ‘uncorrupted’ form in the Gujarati language from Persian, with a myriad of definitions in a plurality of Gujarati dictionaries (Chandaria 2006)?

- 5 The term ‘Khōjā’ is used both in academic discourse and by the Anglophone Khōjā to describe an individual member, the collective, or communal attributes of the community. In Gujarati and Kacchī, the term is differentiated into *khōjō* (singular masculine); *khōjī* (singular feminine); *khōjē*, *khōjēn*, *khōjan*, *khōjanī*, or *khōjēnī* (singular or plural feminine); and *khōjāō* (plural) (Kēśavrām 1976, 643).
- 6 The principal figures of Islamic mysticism that appear in Khōjā oral and written traditions are Muḥammad, ‘Alī, and Ḥusayn (Amiji 1971; *Narratives to Be Recited at the Commemorative Assembly (Majlis) Held on the 10th and 20th Days after the Martyrdom Anniversary of Imām Ḥusain: Manuscript 1890?* [1890?]; *Various Shiite Devotional Texts to Be Recited in Religious Assemblies (Majālis) Commemorating the Events Leading to the Martyrdom of the Shii Imam Ḥusain b. ‘Alī (d. 860)*: *Manuscript, 1900?* [1900?]).

Migration and Diaspora

Over the course of the following centuries, a great migration of the Khōjā ensued, from Kashmir and Punjab, down the Indus River valley, and culminating in the Sindh-Gujarat corridor, today located between Pakistan and India. This migration meant the absorption of various communities—such as members of the Bhāṭiyā, Pāṭidār, and untouchable castes—along the way, which expanded trading networks and expertise. The Lōhāṇā and Bhāṭiyā are traditionally classified as Kshatriya. Within the Kshatriya hierarchy and specialization of knowledge, according to the *Śrī hiṅgulā purāṇā* (chapters 86 to 291), both the Lōhāṇā and Bhāṭiyā specialized in the knowledge of merchantry (Hīrāṇī 1990, 33). Despite being smaller ancestral communities among the Khōjā, the Lōhāṇā and Bhāṭiyā subcastes were instrumental in the transition of the Khōjā from agriculturists to merchants in the medieval southeastern trek down the Indus.

By the eighteenth century, the Khōjā had settled and acculturated in the Sindh-Kathiawar corridor. During the beginning and middle of the nineteenth century, they migrated toward a rising Bombay, and their merchant knowledge and instincts thrived in this preeminent mercantile entrepôt of the British Raj. By the late nineteenth century, the Khōjā had become a formidable trading community, creating elaborate trading networks throughout the western Indian Ocean region from Karachi and Bombay to Muscat, Mogadishu, and Zanzibar. See Map 1.

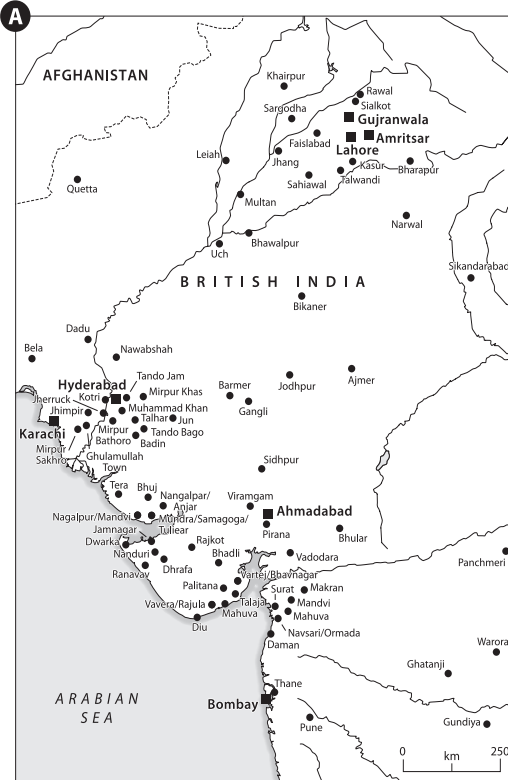
Schism

The rapid economic and geographic transition in the nineteenth century to the Bombay cosmopolis meant both exposure to a variety of different traditions in the religious economy of the city and a need for a new form of religious identity and praxis for the Khōjā as urban transnational merchants (Green 2011, 155–178). Although they still observed common caste rituals, by the mid-nineteenth century, the Khōjā were distributed into various and sometimes multiple Indic religious traditions (Nānjiāṇī 1892, 262–263), including but not limited to *mātāpanth*, *satpanth* ('the true path'), *sādhupanth*, *svāminārāyaṇ* ('followers of saint Sahajanand Swami'), *sājanbahāt* ('followers of saint Sajan'), *brāhma samāj* ('Brahmoism'), and *prārthanā samāj* ('Maharashtra Hindu reform society'). (Sahib 1972, 14–15).

Competing religious traditions, increasing communal mercantile wealth, and new ideas such as modern education and democracy among the Khōjā



MAP 1 *Map of Khōjā settlements in the Western Indian Ocean littoral, circa. 1899.*



MAP 1 A



MAP 1 B

eventually resulted in internal conflicts over caste authority, education, democracy, religious observances, and ownership of communal resources (*Dhī khōjā sōśīyal prōgrēs yunīyan nā āśarā hēṭhaḷ apāyalā bhāṣaṇō* 1897; Goolamali 1864). At the turn of the nineteenth century, factions within the Khōjā began to contest the authority of the Khōjā leaders, and this dissent subsequently escalated in degrees, leading, in 1866, to a court case in the Bombay High Court—*Advocate General ex Relatione Daya Muhammad et al. v. Muhammad Husen Huseni et al.* (Bombay (Presidency)—High Court of Judicature). This case began a trend in which the British colonial administration claimed the authority to define Khōjā ethnic and religious identity, resulting in a fracture of the Khōjā caste into multiple religious communities—Āgākhānī (see Green 2011, 155–178), Ithnā ‘Asharī, and Sunnī (Shodhan 1999; Purohit 2005; Shodhan 2010). The arrival of Hassan Ali Shah (Aga Khan I) in the province of Kacch in 1900 v.s. (c. 1844 CE) (Nānjiānī 1892, 251) was a nexus point in the development of modern Khōjā identities. The ramifications of his decisions and of responses by various factions of the Khōjā leadership throughout the western Indian Ocean littoral have continued to reverberate in the construction and trajectories of the religious identities of Khōjā worldwide. Much of the academic discussion of the schism has focused on the legal and political responses of the various factions within the Khōjā communities in India, particularly in Bombay (Shodhan 2001; Green 2003; Purohit 2012; Boivin 2013). Whereas the judicial rulings of British India generally favored the Āgākhānī faction of the Khōjā, the political and religious environment of the Khōjā communities in regions outside of India—such as Zanzibar and Oman—was quite different. For instance, Nānjiānī records a provocative episode in Muscat in which the Khōjā community asserted their religious identity:

In Saīvat 1904 [c. 1847] a row developed among the Khōjā of Muscat, they were of two factions. The faction of Jāgaṇ Hañjī’ānī was orthodox Muslim and encouraged others to follow the Sharia. The two factions were those who were followers of the Sharia and those who were reconciled [with older beliefs]. The faction of those reconciled declined as those who opposed [this position] grew. Then ten of the prominent members of the community voted upon and then executed a gathering of all the books and puja utensils from the *jamātkhānā* and threw them into the sea. Thereafter this faction grew in size. Āgā Jāpharkhān [a cousin of the Aga Khan] offered a proposal of reconciliation to them, but they refused this agreement and instead took up arms against the faction, which landed some of them in jail. This demonstrated their obstinacy and refusal to pay [the tithing to the Aga Khan]. Finally, Āgā Jāpharkhān had to return back [to Bombay]. Thereafter their numbers swelled. They

નરનાર છે. પ્રુથા જામકમ આપતો હાલજાહાલ દીનને
 મરણી છે. આડા ઘાતો જામકમ છે. તે આપતને હાલજાહાલ
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 નરણી જામકમ? અને, તેના હાલજાહાલ છે? જાતો નાકર જાતો
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 છે. તે જાકે હાજા હાલજાહાલ આપે. અને, જાકે હાજા નરકે તે
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ન. ૦૦૧૬૬. નવપાલો જાજાહાલ દુર રકે જુ તે હાલજાહાલ.
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 જાલજાહાલ. વહી ન જાને અને જાજાહાલ. જીને જાજા વપવા જાજા
 જાલજાહાલ. જી જાલજાહાલ. ન જાને. જી જીને આપતો દીન-
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 નાપવા વાજાહાલ છે. જાતો પવા પહાલે જાજા. અને, પવા
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ને આડા જાલજાહાલ દીન હાલજાહાલ જાકે જાજાહાલ. જાજા-
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 એવા નરણી. પલજાહાલ. ન જાલે. ન પાવાજાહાલ. ન જાજા-

ॐ शान्तिः ॥ ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ श्रीगणेशाय नमः ॥
 ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ श्रीगणेशाय नमः ॥
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 ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ श्रीगणेशाय नमः ॥

27th Mercy Dar-es-Salaam 29 September 1899

The true master and ruler, Aga Sultan Mohamed Shah, the generous present Imam has commanded: “My faith is Ismailism and your faith is also Ismailism. For those who are not Ismaili, daughters [in marriage] are not to be taken from or given to them. It is forbidden (*harām*) to give daughters to them or take daughters from them. To any resident, he should not give a daughter to an Ithnā ‘Asharī or accordingly take a daughter from an Ithnā ‘Asharī. This I forbid you.

Your faith and their faith is different. There is great difference between you and them. Reflect upon this, that you do not give your daughters to the Hindu, Memon, *nasārā* (Christian), or other communities. The practices of the Ithnā ‘Asharī faith are even more different to the practices of your faith. Then why do you give your daughters to them? To give your daughters to them is forbidden. The Vōrā [Bōhrā] are closer to you [in faith] than the Ithnā ‘Asharī. You are Ismaili and so are the Bōhrā. They are much closer to you than the Ithnā ‘Asharī. There are many other traditions that are much closer to you than the Ithnā ‘Asharī. Our Ismaili religion is closer to the Sufi tradition. There are many other traditions that are much closer to you than the Ithnā ‘Asharī. What of the belief that “we were originally one”? How are we to understand this? You are unjust giving your daughters to the Ithnā ‘Asharī. Taking daughters from them or giving daughters to them, that is a great evil. For those who publically (*jāhērī*) sign and say, “I am Ismaili,” he is counted as Ismaili. If one practices or does not practice in private (*bātun*), it is not your business to inquire into his private affairs. Your concern is the public. It is of no concern if you see he is faithless in private. Stay away from those who say, “We are not Ismaili”, as you distance yourself from the Jews and Christians.

Do not harbor enmity towards them, demean their religion, or curse them, as these are great sins. If you do, then this is not correct as per your religion. Stay far away from them. Heed all these matters. If it is said of

any officer [of the community] that he has taken a daughter from or given to an Ithnā ‘Asharī, then he is not a leader. He is removed from the position. If he advocates on behalf of an Ithnā ‘Asharī, he is not a leader. Whomever signs publically is an Ismaili.⁷ Your concern is not private affairs. Whomever signs publically and then attends masjid, forbid him [from doing so]. If he disregards this and goes, then forbid him a second time. If he disregards this and goes, then forbid him a third time. If he persists and does not obey, then he is outcaste from the faith. Do not allow him to come to the *jamātkhānā*. Nevertheless, do not belittle his faith. If one belittles his faith, then it is reasonable to silence him. If this work is thusly observed and completed, then you will return in an exalted state to the home above.

You do not have any business with anyone else’s religion. Your duty is that to those who do not give their allegiance, to them no daughter should be given or taken from them, do not attend their marriages, do not attend their funerals, do not eat from them, do not entertain them as guests, or interact with them socially in any way. If you must meet with them for purposes of business, speak only of business matters and nothing else. I trust that the entire community shall hear and observe my command. For those who disobey my command, he shall be stained with a mark of black ink.

One of the determinate markers of a caste is endogamy, and for the Khōjā, the preceding prohibition against giving or taking a daughter in marriage to or from a non-Āgākhānī Khōjā, particularly an Ithnā ‘Asharī, combined with the prohibitions against any familial relations, effectively cleaved the Khōjā communities of East Africa. In interviews, Khōjā septuagenarians mentioned stories from their grandparents that are quite stark: young adults were disowned for adopting the Ithnā ‘Asharī faith, and families were abruptly cut off from all social interaction by their Āgākhānī relatives. This separation was so profound for the outcasted and so closely tied to their struggles to establish a new community that a subconscious animus can be detected more than a century later.

Since their first arrivals into East Africa in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, caste membership was crucial in terms of delineating economic and social ties. The flexibility of Khōjā religious practices hitherto was jettisoned with Aga Khan 111’s 1899 commands to his followers. With these

7 The Āgākhānī practice of making Khōjā men publically sign a declaration of faith was widespread, particularly in India (Massetos 1978, 110; Shodhan 2001, 74, 126, 131–132).

edicts, the discontinuity of religious allegiances came to the fore and was determinate in marking communal identity. Religious allegiance was also the lens through which Khōjā history was reinterpreted and remembered and through which Khōjā religious heritage was divided trilaterally. For the Āgākhānī Khōjā of the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century, the *dhu'ā* and associated rituals in the *jamātkhānā*, observance of the *pharmān*, and recitation of the *jñān* in Kacchī formed the core of religious practice and the frame for constructing a memory of a glorious Near Eastern Ismaili past. In contrast, the Khōjā built their religious practice on rejection of these forms of worship and, in their place, preservation of the Hindustani *navhā'ō*; *majlis* in Gujarati performed in the *imāmvāḍō* for men and in the *mēhphīl* for women that retold the lamentations from the Battle of Karbala; and *namājh* ('daily ritual prayers') in the masjid.

Both communities consciously and subconsciously repel and mirror each other in their political, economic, and social developments. Although both communities were already on the path toward higher levels of communal bureaucratic organization at the time of the schism, the Āgākhānī Khōjā further developed a hierarchical structure in which power was vested at the apex. In contrast, the Khōjā fiercely defended their democratic organizational structure and the independence of the local *jamāt*, even as they established regional and worldwide federations. In terms of developing an identity narrative, the Indic civilizational components of Khōjā heritage have been weakened considerably for both communities in deference to Near Eastern forms of Shiism. For the Āgākhānī Khōjā, this can be clearly seen in the transition of the *dhu'ā* from Kacchī to Arabic in the mid-twentieth century, and for the Khōjā, this change evidenced by their rejection of Khōjā vernacular rituals in Gujarati, such as the *kahānī* ('narrative prayers'), in deference to politicized postrevolutionary Iranian Shiism.

The schism ended the period of the development of the Khōjā as *jñāt*, once religious allegiance became determinant for membership. This is different from traditional caste membership in Kāṭhiyāvāḍ. For example, if one is Lōhāṇā, this is determined by ancestry and marriage, rather than by faith. A Lōhāṇā can be a member of another Hindu religious community, such as Svāminārāyaṇ or Ārya Samāj, without this affiliation having an impact on his caste membership. Post-schism Khōjā membership is inextricably linked to a specific Islamic creed as determinant for membership. This change solidified a *jamāti* identity in which religious identity is foregrounded while still effectively functioning as a caste in Tanzania, a *jamāti* identity overlaid *jñāti* communalism.

From Indic Caste to Islamic Nationhood

As a result of these rapid changes in the mid- to late nineteenth century, Khōjā religious identity and expression in the twentieth century could be summarized as a systematic suppression of popular expressions of Khōjā religion. This can be seen particularly in the elimination of their ancestral Hindu philosophies, which were carried out by the respective religious leaderships of the various Khōjā religious communities. Gujarati and Kacchī prayers were replaced with Arabic prayers, hierarchical forms of religious authority were created and institutionalized, and orthodox⁸ belief replaced vernacular expressions of faith. In this manner, the various Khōjā religious identities assumed the ideological orientation of a modern Islamic national identity. At the theological level, Indic elements of belief, ritual, and symbolism, such as the messianic Vaishnavite avatar of ‘Alī and worship of the Goddess, were banned as un-Islamic and were purged as an incomplete Near Eastern identity was assumed. This process of transmuting religious identity from the Indic to Near Eastern Islamic was relatively rapid and sometimes provoked fierce resistance from within.

In the twenty-first century, contemporary Khōjā identities are the summation of a century of communal policies, resulting in a systematic amnesia about the pre-Islamic and medieval Indic heritage of the Khōjā in exchange for narratives of Near Eastern Islamic religious identity and ritual practice. The Khōjā practice of imagining Near Eastern genealogies was instrumental in this enterprise, linking the medieval Indic heritage of the Khōjā to earlier Arabic and Persian religious authorities (Boivin 2008). For the two Shia Khōjā communities, Āgākhānī and Ithnā ‘Asharī, modern religious identity and caste status is found through three avenues: service to the community (*sēvā*), loyalty to the imam of the age (*imāmajh jhamān*) (Jamal 2008; Strohl 2011), and ideological conformity to and zeal for the established orthodoxy. Resisting this modern ideological definition of Khōjā identity can result in communal marginalization and, in extreme cases, a modern equivalent to the medieval practice of outcasting.

8 The term ‘orthodox’ has been sufficiently problematized within the discipline of Islamic studies (Wilson 2007). Here it is used in a narrow, anthropological manner to describe what Lawrence Kohlberg refers to as ‘conventional’ morality—a public consensus that religious and community elites construct and enforce through communal peer pressure (Duderija 2007). This entails both actions, such as gender segregation, and perceptions and thoughts, such as a pro-Iranian and anti-American political worldview, both of which are articulated through symbolic religious discourses.

Esoteric versus Exoteric Readings of Khōjā Religion

The field of Khōjā studies, as an academic discipline, is a relatively young one, divided into essentially two positions⁹ regarding the theological orientation of the Khōjā. The first position posits that the Āgākhānī Khōjā were always Ismaili, hidden for five centuries, and that all material contrary to this position should only be understood as dissimulation in the subcontinent and diaspora to avoid persecution. The oldest academic thesis on the Khōjā articulating this position was published by Syed Muġtaba Ali at Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in the early twentieth century (Ali 1936). Ali presumes, in accordance with contemporary Āgākhānī Khōjā doctrine, that the Khōjā were the spiritual descendants of the refugees who fled the destruction of Alamut in 1256 by the Mongol emperor Hülegü. He provides little textual evidence and proceeds to narrate a Near Eastern genealogy of the early Khōjā saints. The famed Orientalist Wladimir Ivanow (Ivanow 1948), commissioned by the Ismaili Society, further developed the narrative through the use of Persian texts, providing considerable personal authority in this stage of the narrative's development. Later scholars following in this vein include Azim Nanji (Nanji 1969), Gulshan Khakee (Khakee 1972), Aziz Esmail (Esmail 1972), Shirin Walji (S.R. Walji 1974), Ali Asani (Asani 1984), Farhad Daftary (Daftary 1990), Tazim Kassam (Kassam 1992), Shafique Virani (Virani 1995), Zawahir Moir and Dominique-Sila Khan (Khan and Moir 2000), Zulfikar Hirji (Hirji and Daftary 2008), and Zahra Jamal (Jamal 2008). They attempt to deal with the lack of evidence—and the sometimes contradictory texts and historical data—by presuming that such evidence does not exist or by employing the Near Eastern Islamic concepts of *bāṭin* (inner form) and *taqīyah* (dissimulation) to manage the discrepancy.

Take, for instance, Khan's coining of the term *nizārpanth* to refer to a 'secret' Ismaili tradition. The term does not exist in any text; rather, the terms *nij* or *nijīā dharm* are interpreted to refer to this secret Ismailism (Khan and Moir 2000, 114). The absence of concrete textual evidence regarding the presence of a Nizārī Ismaili *da'wa* in Khōjā religious texts before the mid-nineteenth century itself becomes proof of its 'esoteric' existence. Within this position, being

9 This is not to simplify the complex arguments and methodologies of the scholars mentioned subsequently; however, there is little ambivalence on the core issue of who the Khōjā are in religious terms and their core identity—Ismaili. Scholarship on the Khōjā is predicated upon a stance on this foundational issue, and this stance is thusly reflected in the authors' respective works.

Khōjā, an ethnic caste identity, is synonymous with being Ismaili, a religious identity (Asani 2001). This position privileges a Near Eastern Islamic narrative of Khōjā history as contiguous in the subcontinent and its Indic spiritual geography as incidental in understanding Khōjā religious traditions.

The issue of language is crucial to this narrative of esotericism. The oldest surviving documents of the Khōjā are in Sindhi, written in a Brahmi-based Landa script adapted to the peculiarities of the Khōjā dialect. That an Indic-based linguistic system, rather than the parallel Arabic script, equally employed in Sindh was employed would be a strong indication of the community's cultural and religious identity as foundationally Indic rather than Near Eastern. Rather than placing the Khōjā script of Sindhi within the context of other similar scripts developed in Sindh (Grierson 1904, 15–17), it is separated from them, promoted as a unique 'Khojki,' and appropriated exclusively as the secret "script of the Nizārī Ismaili Muslim community of Sind, Gujarat and Punjab" (Asani 1987, 439). Some of the Khōjā *jñān* written in this script are deemed 'esoteric' and 'Ismaili' (Virani 2005) rather than being understood within their own geographical and cultural context as an expression of a vernacular bhakti shared by other Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim communities (Purohit 2005, 1–24).

The labeling of the dialect, the highlighting of *satpanth* as the 'true' and sole religious tradition of the Khōjā, and the appropriation of the corpus of extant religious literature as exclusive to the Āgākhānī Khōjā are critical stages in the reimagining of Khōjā heritage as solely Ismaili. The continual reinforcement of this Near Eastern genealogical narrative has been critical to maintaining the institution of the Aga Khan for more than a century and a half, without which 'spiritual' authority over the Khōjā is perceived to be weakened.

The second academic position within the field, hitherto underdeveloped in comparison to the first, is to understand the medieval and early modern Khōjā religious complex as an indigenous evolution in the interaction between Indic and Islamic religious traditions in the subcontinent. Rather than privileging a Near Eastern Ismaili narrative of Khōjā history, Hatim Amiji (Amiji 1971), J.C. Masselos (Masselos 1978), Amrita Shodhan (Shodhan 1995), Iqbal Surani (Surani 2003), Teena Purohit (Purohit 2005), Ludovic Gandelot (Gandelot 2008), Michel Boivin (Boivin 2008), Samira Sheikh (Sheikh 2010), and Nile Green (Green 2011) have attempted to understand the Khōjā, a Muslim caste, within its own context in the subcontinent as Indic. Their attempts to define Khōjā social, legal, and religious identities allow for a plurality of voices within the category of Khōjā, thereby giving the minority religious communities within the caste equal authority in articulating its history.

The early Khōjā religious complex, as per this second position, was an amalgamated Hinduism that became discretely Muslim in the nineteenth century as religious definitions of nationhood became solidified through political and social discourse as well as case law. As Masselos quotes from the testimony of Khōjā Habib Ibrahim in 1847, “Some say we are Soonees [Sunni], some, Sheas [Shias]. Our religion is a separate religion” (Masselos 1978, 103–104). In this context the Nizārī Ismaili tradition, now practiced by the majority of Khōjā worldwide, can be understood as a modern phenomenon from late nineteenth-century India, where a newly revived tradition (Green 2011, 155–178) was initially introduced to the Khōjā of Bombay by the Persian exile Hasan Ali Mehalatee (d. 1881). At its core, this position posits a fundamental question of the Āgākhānī narrative: what precisely is ‘Ismaili’ about Satpanth Ismailism?