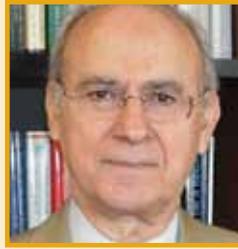




# IIS Alumni

Newsletter 2010

This has been another momentous year in the life of the IIS. We have settled down in our new location on Euston Road, which we now share with AKU-ISMC and AKF (UK), and a new management system has been put in place by our Board of Governors according to which Professor Karim H. Karim, an alumnus himself, and I function collaboratively as Co-Directors of the IIS. We all look forward to working with Professor Karim and taking the aims of the IIS forward.



With some 70 publications and 50 translations, the IIS is now increasingly recognised as a point of reference in Ismaili and Shi'i studies. Our books are being used extensively as textbooks in many major universities throughout the world, and they are also cited widely by scholars of Islamic studies in their own publications.

In the past year, the milestones in our publications record included Epistle 22 of the projected 16-volume series of the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (*Rasa'ul Ikhwan al-Safa*); the second volume of our *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, which has received "The Best International Book of the Year Award" in Iran, and the *Companion to the Muslim World*, inaugurating our new accessible series of publications entitled "Muslim Heritage Series". In addition, several important primary texts were published in our "Ismaili Texts and Translations Series" which continues to provide a scientific basis for modern scholarship in Ismaili studies. Finally, we also published an illustrated book on Historic Cairo, which contains chapters on the renovation and conservation work carried out by AKTC and other organizations in al-Darb al-Ahmar district of Cairo.

**Dr Farhad Daftary**

While climate change and global warming were high on the lips of individuals in late 2009, the year will certainly be remembered for financial storms and economic meltdowns, not least among institutions of higher learning which suffered a dramatic drop in the value of their endowments. The horizon seems to paint a brighter picture as we enter a new decade, and 2010 will hopefully serve as the impetus for re-evaluating past challenges and setting new goals.

As you are well aware, 2009 was the year when the IIS completed its move to new premises at Euston Road, where the AKU-ISMC and AKF (UK) are also now based. But more significantly, especially in terms of the global alumni body, the past year has seen a unique milestone: the appointment of an IIS alumnus, Professor Karim H. Karim, as a Co-Director of the Institute. I am sure you will all share my sentiments in wishing him and his family every success.

On the first anniversary as your Alumni Relations Coordinator, I have been reflecting on the past 12 months and am wondering where time has gone! In this position, I have had the opportunity to meet some amazing people who share at least one thing in common – they are all proud to



It has been a great honour for me as an alumnus to be appointed Co-Director of the IIS. I am in good company with several other alumni in London and elsewhere who contribute to its work. The Institute has grown significantly since I attended its collaborative programme with McGill University in 1982-84. It is gratifying to note the vastly increased diversity of its staff and students. The Institute is a multi-dimensional organisation that conducts research and publishes scholarly materials, runs graduate programmes, develops religious education curricula, serves as a repository for Ismaili collections, and engages with Jamati and non-Jamati constituencies.

In November 2009, I had the pleasure of attending the meeting of the IIS' Alumni Association Central Executive Committee, which discussed various issues affecting the Institute's alumni. April 2010 will see the addition of alumni from the Secondary Teacher Education Programme, who will have obtained double master's degrees from the University of London's Institute of Education in collaboration with the Institute.

From the outset, the IIS has provided unique educational experiences and continues to produce alumni that are equipped with the knowledge to address some of the most pressing issues of the day. In these troubling times, it is all the more important that we collectively seek solutions to ensure better understanding among Muslims as well as between Muslims and the rest of humanity.

**Prof Karim H Karim**

be graduates of the IIS. I have also had the opportunity to meet some of the Institute's new students who one day will join the Alumni Association.

The continued growth of the IIS – both in terms of space and its programmatic activities – is also reflected in the number of graduates: now more than 250. The Alumni Association's vision is to be an inclusive body that involves and serves the interests of the alumni, and creates educational and social opportunities for alumni to grow in their academic and professional careers, while staying connected with the Institute and supporting its endeavours, wherever possible. As you read this newsletter, I hope that you will reflect upon ways in which you can contribute to the IIS in fulfilling its mandate.

I would also like to extend my heartiest congratulations to all alumni who have been appointed to Jamati and Imamati institutions as well as to those who completed academic and professional milestones during the year. Let me also take this opportunity to wish all alumni Nawruz Mubarak.

**Shellina Karmali, Alumni Relations Unit**

### **ZULFIQAR KHIMANI**

In his third year, Zulfiqar completed an MPhil in Modern Society and Global Transformations at the University of Cambridge. He has joined the AKDN as a Survey Coordinator for the Quality of Life Assessment Programme.

### **OTIF SOMIDDINOV**

In his third year, Otif undertook an MA in Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of London's SOAS. He is currently working on the Manuscript Project in Khorog that is being conducted by the IIS Library.

### **ALEEM KARMALI**

In his third year, Aleem undertook an MA in Visual Anthropology at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He has joined ITREB Canada as their Youth Program Manager.

### **SHARMIN KHOWJA**

Sharmin is undertaking an ongoing 3 year Juris Doctorate in Law at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, San Diego, California in the United States.

### **ZARANGEZ KARIMOVA**

In her third year, Zarangez completed an MSc in Social Anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Science. She is currently on an internship with the Ismaili National Council for the UK as a research assistant.

### **AMINA NURMAMADSHOEVA**

In her third year, Amina chose to read for an MA in Social Development from Sussex University. She is currently doing an internship at the IIS Co-Director's Office.

### **SHUMAILA HEMANI**

Shumaila is completing a 2-year graduate programme in Ethnomusicology at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada.



### **ZEHRA LALJI**

In her third year, Zehra began an MSc in Sustainable Heritage at University College, London. She is currently doing an internship with the Places of Worship Unit at English Heritage, UK.

### **MAHNAZ YEKKEH**

In her third year, Mahnaz completed an MSc in Globalisation and Development at University of London's SOAS. She currently works as a Website Technical and Research Officer at the IIS.

### **MUNIRA SHOINBEKOVA**

In her third year, Munira chose to undertake an MSc in Educational Studies (Higher Education) at the University of Oxford. She was then offered an internship with the Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa, Kenya, which will commence in March 2010.

### **LAILA KADIWAL**

In her third year, Laila opted for an MSc in Higher Education at University of Oxford and is currently on an internship with the IIS' Department of Curriculum Studies as a research assistant.

## ASIA CHAPTER GROUP

Given that the Asian Chapter Group (ACG) is as diverse as the region, one of the foremost priorities of the group has been to channel this diversity and expertise together under a single platform. In order to facilitate this, several meetings have been held with the heads of different AKDN institutions and ITREBs to brief them about the range of expertise represented amongst the alumni, as this could prove beneficial to the institutions. This has been a step forward in bridging the gap between alumni and the human resource needs of various AKDN and Imamat institutions.

As part of their annual activities, the ACG held a two day meeting from 8th to 10th May, 2009, in Damascus, Syria. Alumni from Afghanistan, India, Kenya, Pakistan, Syria, and Tajikistan attended the meeting. The weekend consisted of academic sessions, visits to historical sites and discussions on the future role of the alumni within and beyond the AKDN and the Jamat.

The meeting began with a presentation by Shiraz Kabani, Head of the Department of Operations, Finance and Development at the IIS, in which he shared information about recent developments at the IIS and discussed the relationship between the Institute and its alumni. Dr. Paul-Francois Tremlett, a visiting lecturer at the Institute, conducted a session that provided an introduction to anthropology. The participants also had the opportunity to visit historical sites in Damascus, such as the Ummayyad mosque, as well as in the city of Masyaf, including the fort of Sinan which has been restored by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. The meeting provided a space for alumni to exchange ideas and experiences, and to discuss matters pertinent to members of the ACG.

Besides delivering professional services in their respective institutions, members of the Asian Chapter Group have been involved in a range of voluntary services. They have held meetings with students, delivered presentations about IIS' programmes, and participated in seminars and workshops. IIS alumni also delivered lectures and held training courses for various non-Jamati institutions. In addition, several alumni who work in academic institutions have played

an instrumental role in promoting the literature produced by the IIS, which are increasingly used as references in academic circles.

Finally, the alumni of the ACG have been entrusted by various Imamat institutions to carry out research within the community on poverty, local traditions and the oral histories of the Jamat.

## EUROPEAN CHAPTER GROUP

**Alumni Film Club:** The Film Club organised two events earlier in 2009. In March 2009, a group of alumni and IIS students visited the National Film Theatre to view "In the City of Sylvia", a film by José Luis Guerin, followed by another visit to the Duke of York Theatre, London, in May 2009, to see "A view from the Bridge", a play by Arthur Miller.

**Chapter Group Meeting:** The European Chapter Group held its two day annual meeting on 20th and 21st June 2009 at the IIS.

The first day began with the Chapter Group's President, Shah Hussain (Class of 2004), welcoming the participants and presenting a brief overview of the group's activities over the past year.

Dr Omid Safi of the University of North Carolina then delivered a thought provoking keynote lecture, entitled "Islamic Spirituality". Drawing on the rich literature around the theme of love, Professor Safi explained the use of terms such as *rahma* (mercy), *irfan* (knowledge), *ishq* and *muhabbat* (love) in the context of Islamic spirituality.

Dr Nader El Bizri, a research associate at the IIS, delivered a presentation entitled "The Ikhwan al-Safa' and Their *Rasa'il*: An Introduction". This was followed by the screening of a documentary entitled, "Home away from Home: The return of Ismaili Muslims to Uganda" by Aleem Karmali (Class of 2009). The first day of the meeting concluded with an opportunity to view an array of historical documents and manuscripts housed within the collections of the IIS Library. This was showcased by Alnoor



Merchant, an IIS alumnus and Head of the IIS Library.

The second day began with a talk by Dr Tom Kessinger, General Manager of Aga Khan Foundation. In his presentation, entitled "Aga Khan Development Network: Scope and Opportunities", Dr Kessinger presented an overview of the AKDN, focusing on new projects outlined by His Highness the Aga Khan, as part of the Golden Jubilee initiatives. Current students from STEP and GPISH programmes were invited to attend this presentation.

As part of the Alumni showcase, Salima Bhatia, (Class of 1999), shared her experiences and contributions as a co-producer of the theatre production, "Ali to Karim - A Tribute to the Ismaili Imams", which was part of the global Golden Jubilee programmes.

Shiraz Kabani, Head of the Department of Operations, Finance and Development, presented an overview of the activities and new developments at the IIS, including implications of the co-location of the IIS with AKU's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations and the Aga Khan Foundation (UK) at the new premises.

The annual meeting concluded with a panel discussion where the participants discussed some of the issues and challenges faced by the IIS Alumni Association in general and the European Chapter Group in particular. A number of suggestions were tabled to ensure maximum participation and support of the alumni in the activities of the Chapter Group.

### **NORTH AMERICAN CHAPTER GROUP**

The North American Chapter Group (NACG), through a working group organised by Ruksanah Pirani (Class of 1991), president of NACG, has undertaken a planning exercise related to alumni development and involvement initiatives for the future. Through engagement with the alumni and reflection on the direction provided by His Highness on the occasion of the IIS' 25th anniversary in 2003, several thoughtful responses were developed

and presented at a meeting with IIS leadership in November 2009. These will form the basis of the programmes proposed for 2010.

**Webinar:** Webinars are being offered by the NACG, every alternate month, to facilitate the continuing education endeavours of alumni. These have included, 'Understanding and Addressing Poverty: the Bangladesh experience' and 'Issues of Mental Health in the Jamat.'

**Online Alumni Community:** The NACG has developed a paper under the guidance of the IIS, to suggest creating an online alumni community interface that would allow the IIS, the Aiglemont Human Resource department and the AKDN to access alumni details and keep them informed of emerging opportunities. This facility would also allow interaction and exchange of ideas and research within the alumni community.

**Institutional Involvement:** The Jamati institutions in Canada and the USA have absorbed alumni into various positions, to increase their involvement in various endeavours such as the Poverty Alleviation Project, Women's Portfolio, Aging Gracefully, Early Childhood Development, Ismaili Magazine, etc. A few alumni are also serving as waezeen, youth facilitators and teacher-educators.

**Chapter Group Meeting:** An annual meeting was held in Ottawa in June 2009 where Dr Reza Shah Kazemi and Rizwan Mawani presented enlightening sessions on Shi'i spirituality. Sher Lakhani was present on behalf of the Aga Khan Academies to share the vision of this ambitious programme as well as to meet with alumni who may be interested in future careers with the Academies. The highlight of the conference was a visit to The Delegation of the Ismaili Imam where Professor Karim H. Karim gave a talk and led a tour of the facility.

**Local Branches:** Currently three local branches continue to function in Eastern Canada, Western Canada and Texas. These have convened at different intervals to meet the objectives of ongoing education and peer bonding.



## PALLA PALLAEV

Palla Pallaev (Class of 2008) began his internship with AKF Russia in November 2008. For the first three months, he assisted AKF in identifying and relocating to new and larger premises required to house the programme staff and from where programme activities could be implemented. Thereafter, Palla was given the responsibility to initiate AKF's Civil Society Programme (CSP). Initially, this involved conducting a base line survey of labour migrants from CIS countries and organisations, both local and international, and addressing the needs of this vulnerable group. The survey was undertaken by a professional, guided by AKF's approach to civil society, and coordinated by Palla. Using the survey findings and recommendations, Palla went on to draft the CSP objectives, strategies and budget. He also assisted the CEO in strengthening relations with migrant community leaders and AKF partners. In addition, he helped organise and participated in Round Table meetings, attended conferences with the CEO, and also represented AKF independently. Through the above activities, Palla has developed an excellent working relationship with staff members and the AKDN Director for Civil Society Programmes. At the end of his internship, Palla was formally recruited as a full time CSP Projects Officer.

*During my internship with the Aga Khan Foundation, Russia, I began initially as the Office Administrator and now work as the Civil Society Projects Officer. My role is to study formal and informal Civil Society Organisations that work with migrants in Russia, build relationships with them and implement joint projects. I also train and assist newly founded NGOs to develop their capacities in order to receive grants from various donors in the future. The experience here has been extremely valuable and will help facilitate my future professional and voluntary work with migrants in Russia.*

*I succeeded in achieving significant outcomes using the knowledge and skills that I acquired over my three years at the IIS. I grew to understand that poverty does not only mean lack of constant material income but is exacerbated by other factors such as social exclusion, racial discrimination, lack of information and access to affordable education, health care, etc. In the course of my work, I have also established contacts with various local and international organisations, scholars and experts on poverty and migration, and am hopeful that this will allow for future academic and economic collaboration to respond to the needs of migrants in Russia. I would thus like to express my deep gratitude to IIS*

*and AKF Russia for organising this internship and giving me the opportunity to participate.*

## SALIMA BANDJY

In 2009, Salima Bandjy (Class of 2008) spent several months at the Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa. Salima's role consisted of: (a) Working with the Manager for Professional Development Centres to provide administrative, logistical, translation and planning support for the future Aga Khan Academy in Antananarivo (Madagascar); and (b) Working with the Head of the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, and the IB Coordinator on various projects.

Head of Academy Peter McMurray described Salima's contributions as "immediate and sustained. Salima very quickly became a valued contributor and was always so positive and willing to help where needed. We hope that her experience of working at the Academy was a career-changing experience."

At the end of her internship, Salima described her experience at the Academy as 'amazing' and one which had instilled in her a love for teaching, a career which she would now like to pursue. She hopes to return to work at the Academy in Mombasa in the future.

The Aga Khan Academies are an integrated network of schools dedicated to expanding access to education of an international standard of excellence. The Academies will educate young men and women from pre-primary through higher secondary education, and are planned for key locations across Africa and Asia.

*After graduating from the IIS, I received the opportunity to undertake an internship at the Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa. One of my tasks was to assist French teachers and provide tutorials to students, while another duty was to assist the Diploma Program Coordinators. I helped in the implementation of a study room for Diploma students and was further involved in developing activities for students. The experience has allowed me to understand the challenges that such an institution goes through. Moreover, I was able to learn and observe how the Academy puts the values encapsulated in its framework into practice. The opportunity to be a part of this teaching community has been an excellent and rewarding experience.*



## MARIFAT ALIFBEKOVA

At the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009, the Aga Khan Education Services, Tajikistan (AKES, Tj) accepted its first interns – graduates of the IIS, Gulsifat Saidgulova (Class of 2006) and Marifat Alifbekova (Class of 2008). Established in 1995, AKES has been involved in educational initiatives, strengthening existing schools, improving processes at the national level and providing scholarships.

The IIS interns were based at the Aga Khan Lycee (AKL) in Khorog, which is part of the AKES system. Gulsifat Saidgulova was responsible for developing and implementing English language proficiency programmes for AKL staff and students. She initiated a TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) preparation course for higher secondary students (grades 10 and 11) at the AKL and from Khorog government schools.

Marifat Alifbekova's responsibilities comprised providing support to the HR department. She was engaged in staff recruitment, retention and discipline; student admissions and updating the existing HR policy and documentation.

The placements benefited both the interns and the host institution. For instance, as a result of the TOEFL preparation course organised by Gulsifat, the number of AKL graduates receiving scholarships to study at international universities has increased. Gulsifat was eventually offered a staff position at the AKL and will continue her work from January 2010.

AKES leadership is very pleased with the internship initiative and is looking forward to continue the program in the future.

*I began an internship at the Aga Khan Education Services in January 2008 as I wanted to develop my skill set, refresh my mind and think over my career goals. The internship proved to be very constructive for several key reasons. I learned about the contributions and efforts AKES is making to improve the quality of education in Tajikistan, particularly in the Gorno Badakhshan region. In addition, I acquired many useful skills and also tested personal abilities, aptitudes and interests regarding career choices. The internship program also allowed me to develop professional contacts. While working in the Human Resource Department, I interacted with other staff at the Aga Khan Lycee, helped with teaching, checking students'*

*work, examining reports and translating materials. This proved to be another method to discover new skills and competencies. Furthermore, this internship has strengthened my résumé and given me the confidence to take further steps towards my professional development.*

## MAVJIGUL DUSHANBIEVA

Mavjigul Dushanbieva (Class of 2008) joined the Aga Khan Humanities Project of the University of Central Asia in January 2009 as a Research and Teaching Fellow. Combining the dual roles successfully proved a little difficult for her at first, as her teaching load was often rather substantial. Nonetheless, she taught two courses during the year and, by the end of the semester, she had developed into an able and competent instructor, teaching the curriculum materials with an innovative and contemporary methodology.

Mavjigul is known for her calm and gentle nature within the AKHP/SPCE team at UCA, Dushanbe. She performs her responsibilities as Humanities Fellow and as a Research Fellow with distinction. She is an excellent team member and well-liked by both staff and students for her peaceful nature.

It is a pleasure to work with Mavjigul. I hope other IIS graduates display the same attitude and capabilities as Mavjigul has done and will join us in the exciting journey that we are on.

*After graduating from the IIS, I was offered an internship with AKHP-UCA as a Research and Teaching Fellow. I began teaching humanities courses to undergraduate students and simultaneously conducting research. My internship afforded me the opportunity to remain in academia, where I could share and, more importantly, gain new knowledge through interactive pedagogy and teaching. This in turn has helped me in furthering my own research.*

*AKHP-UCA is a unique programme where a multicultural environment together with various educational resources is available to students and teachers. This helps not only to improve understanding of the cultural heritage of Central Asia but also to promote pluralism by appreciating the diversity and similarities between different cultures that co-exist within one context. My internship has proven to be both challenging and exciting. The experience gained over the past year has been exceptional.*



A seminar on “*Understanding and Addressing Poverty*” was organised by the IIS in Dhaka, Bangladesh, from 16th to 18th October, 2009, which brought together IIS alumni, academics, and development professionals from around the globe to discuss the underlying causes of poverty as well as current and future models for poverty reduction. The seminar proposed a shift in the definition of poverty, taking it from a narrow measurement that exclusively addresses income, to a definition that includes deprivation and well-being. By drawing attention to the multidimensional nature of poverty, this approach encourages policy responses that are more holistic and comprehensive in nature.

Seminar participants used this new approach to analyse various efforts that tackle poverty and, through a series of visits to BRAC Development Institute’s rural and urban programmes, were able to conceptualise these interventions in practice. The AKDN’s HR Director, Luis Olivares was also present at the seminar providing excellent networking opportunities for the alumni to find out more about AKDN’s current human resource needs.

Shiraz Kabani delivered the opening remarks, which were followed by a presentation on the ‘*State of Poverty in the World*’ by Professor Syed Hashemi, Director of BRAC Development Institute, Bangladesh. This was followed by a presentation from Adil Ahamed of the Knowledge Management Office at the Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance. He highlighted the range of products on offer, including microcredit, savings, micro-insurance and socially-oriented services such as education, housing and health loans, in line with the multi-dimensional approach to poverty alleviation.

A range of local and international speakers lectured over the next two days including Professor Sobhan, Chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue in Bangladesh, Professor Pervez Hoodbhoy, from Quaid-i-Azam University in Pakistan, Dr Aziz Esmail, a member of the Institute’s Board of Governors, Dr Fariyal Ross-Sheriff, Professor at Howard University in USA, Dr Parveen Hasanali, Professor, Guildford College, USA, Azim Manji, CEO, Shiree, Bangladesh, Hanif Virani, an IIS alumnus, and Dr Martin Greeley of the Institute of Development Studies in Brighton, UK. The speakers provided a

theoretical framework and indicators through which participants could discuss the issue of poverty and identify its root causes, manifestations, and potential solutions.

Members of the development sector provided examples of projects which had proved successful in tackling the various dimensions of poverty. Professor Hoodbhoy had a very interesting perspective on the role of education in influencing national psyche and poverty alleviation. In his presentation, he outlined how other aspects of society, such as good governance and a reduction of corruption, also have a direct bearing on efforts to address poverty.

A highlight of the seminar was the presence of Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, Founder and Chairperson of BRAC (formerly Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee). In his presentation, he shared with participants the origins and evolution of BRAC and his personal reflections on some of the challenges the organisation had encountered during its initial years of growth. A field visit to BRAC’s ‘Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction’ – a programme for the ultra-poor – was organised on the final day of the seminar. Participants were able to engage with BRAC’s beneficiaries and learn about their experiences first-hand.

Another unique highlight of the seminar was the representation of poverty through the powerful medium of art. Participants travelled to the Bengal Gallery to view the work of a Bangladeshi artist, Shahabuddin Ahmed. Ahmed’s paintings concern the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and, in his work, he utilises strong, forceful, fearless figures. Amidst this colourful and powerful setting, Professor Firdous Azim from BRAC University discussed the political and social voice of the artists presenting the plight of the common people, particularly during the Liberation War. She also used the inspiring work of another Bangladeshi artist, Zainul Abedin, who was moved by the man-made Bengal famine of 1943.

Overall, the three day conference was a moving opportunity for participants to see and experience poverty through presentations, art and actual participation in committee meetings at a BRAC village. It provided excellent networking opportunities and a platform for future collaboration of resources and ideas.



## RAFIQ AJANI, CLASS OF 2006

Called the *Jatiyo Sangsad Bhaban* in Bangla / Bengali, the National Assembly complex is a structure that was originally conceived of in 1959 for the Pakistan government's second capital in Dhaka. While Islamabad housed the secretariat, Dhaka was designated to house the National Assembly and provide accommodation for ministers and delegates travelling to convene there from West Pakistan.

The renowned architect, Louis I. Kahn, began designing it in 1962. Construction followed in 1966 only to be halted by the civil war in 1971. The construction was eventually resumed and completed in 1982 to house the second parliament; not of Pakistan but Bangladesh. Spread over an area of 800,000 square meters around lakes and beautiful gardens, this structure won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1989.

I recently visited the *Jatiyo Sangsad Bhaban*. We entered the building through the least attractive entrance, i.e. the security clearance and handed our cameras to the security guard with great dismay. Suddenly, we emerged through an opening into a very wide, hundred foot high corridor. The curved pathways layered with passages, deep circular and triangular openings cut into the walls and many intricate stairways suggested immense hidden depths. How did Kahn conceive a building with such majestic complexity?

Aligned on a north-south axis, the complex appears to be in the shape of a grand necklace. The building has its principal attraction in the middle, a cylindrical parliament chamber that is octagonal in shape. Four blocks of the octagon face north and house the national library, secretariat, several halls and offices. The remaining four blocks in the south contain office space for ministries and an impressive

prayer hall. The whole complex appears to float on a man-made moat.

The exposed brick and cement walls of the complex have numerous arches and circles carved into the façade; a style distinctive of Louis Kahn. I was keen to know the reason for the horizontal and vertical white lines that conspicuously criss-cross the whole structure both inside and outside. While our guide could not answer the question, a little research allowed me to find the answer in an article by Selma al-Radi. Apparently, while Kahn was building the structure, he decided that constructing five feet daily would be a practical height for a day's work. However, placing concrete directly on top of the previous day's work left many visible joints. Unlike bamboo, this is not aesthetically pleasing in concrete and so, he decided to place a white recessed joint of six inches at five foot intervals; thus creating the design through necessity.

My impressions upon entering the building and upon leaving it were starkly different. The complex is without dispute an architectural masterpiece. It appears that after the construction was completed, hardly any attention was paid to developing the interior to complement the magnificent exterior. Even the carpets, (as I read later), did not correspond to Kahn's original specification.

With an annual maintenance cost estimated in 1983 at two million dollars, for a country engulfed in corruption and fighting persistent social and economic turmoil, it is hardly surprising to see bulbs replaced by tube lights, electrical wiring exposed and twisted like spaghetti, drain pipes blocked or broken, curtains and windows unwashed and even carpets and rugs in tatters. In its present condition it fails to sing a sweet requiem for its creator.



## THEATRE PRODUCTION

*Ali to Karim - A tribute to the Ismaili Imams*

*'Whatever its vernacular forms, the language of art, more so when it is spiritually inspired, can be a positive barrier-transcending medium of discourse, manifesting the depths of the human spirit.'*

Excerpt from a speech by His Highness the Aga Khan at the Colloquium: 'Word of God, Art of Man: the Qur'an and its Creative Expressions', Oct. 19, 2003.

As a Theatre Studies undergraduate and an IIS graduate in Islamic Studies and Humanities, producing the play *Ali to Karim - A tribute to the Ismaili Imams*, was like "coming home". The journey from a page to the stage was not an easy one, but that it finally brought these two areas of my life together so seamlessly, made it an incredibly meaningful journey and ultimately a moving and satisfying experience.

The play, directed by Hafiz Karmali, is in my humble opinion, an example of a spiritually inspired artistic work. Its depth of language, layers of meaning and symbolism transcended barriers and spoke volumes to those listening. *Ali to Karim* is a beautiful piece of dance theatre – highly stylised and choreographed with precision – and at the same time a devotional ode, a poetic tribute, if you will, to His Highness the Aga Khan on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee.

This theatre production was one of the official Golden Jubilee International Programmes – a cultural initiative to commemorate the 50th anniversary of His Highness the Aga Khan's accession to the Ismaili Imamate. The play opened in Los Angeles on 19th July 2008 at the Redondo Beach Performing Arts Centre, before touring the United States and playing in seven cities including Dallas, Chicago, on Broadway in New York, Atlanta, Houston and Florida to packed houses and audiences in excess of 20,000.

Picture the scene. The play is set in a library, at once reminiscent of *Dar al-Hikma* (Academy of Wisdom) established during the Fatimid period and the impressive libraries at Alamut. We are magically transported into this wondrous and colourful world of books from which an illustrated story unfolds. Projections of Islamic art history and archived video footage appear together

with larger than life props and gorgeously designed costumes; and empower the actors and theatre goers alike to enter a realm where the stories of the past and present come to life in front of their very eyes. The viewer is enticed to listen to a bird's tale of Imam Ali's birth at the Ka'ba; to imagine an encounter between Freya Stark, Henry Corbin and Vladimir Ivanow at the foothills of Alamut as they recount its horrific capture by the Mongols, and to be an active mason in the construction of the city of Cairo.

*Ali to Karim* is a history play drawing on a number of established theatre conventions and turning them on their head at times to present key moments and events from the 1400 years of the Ismaili Imamate in a visually impressionistic, highly entertaining and memorable way.

Under the brilliant direction of Hafiz Karmali, whose dream it has been for 7 years to stage this *longue duree* of Ismaili history, the script was devised through an organic and iterative process. Through a series of "blood, sweat and tears" workshops, actors, both from within the acting profession and from the UK Ismaili Jamat, engaged with primary and secondary source materials, including poetry, chronicles, letters, paintings and choral *dhikr* to create and improvise scenes.

(Salima Bhatia, Producer *Ali to Karim*, Class of 1998)

## CONFERENCE

*"People of the Prophet's House: Art, Architecture and Shi'ism in the Islamic World"*

Fahmida Suleman (Class of 1997) has been appointed the Curator of Modern Middle Eastern Art at the British Museum where she recently organised a conference titled, "People of the Prophet's House: Art, Architecture and Shi'ism in the Islamic World". Co-sponsored by the IIS and the British Museum, the two day event was held from 26-28 March 2009. Twenty-nine international speakers and discussants were invited to participate, including IIS alumni Dr



Shainool Jiwa (Class of 1984) and Dr. Nacim Pak-Shiraz (Class of 2002).

The primary goal of the conference was to investigate the composition of the Shi'a community and whether specific historical examples of art, architecture and material culture inspired by Shi'i traditions around the world could be identified.

Fahmida presented a paper entitled "*The Hand of Fatima: Origins and Significance*", which investigated the origin and meaning of this ubiquitous amuletic symbol. The paper attempted to reconstruct the historical and mythological importance of Bibi Fatima (a.s.), daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.s.), wife of Hazrat Imam 'Ali (a.s.) and mother of Hazrat Hasan (a.s.) and Imam Husayn (a.s.), in order to investigate why Muslims – Sunni and Shi'a – chose to identify the universal symbol of the human hand specifically with her. The paper also traced the earliest origins of the '*Hand of Fatima*' or '*Khamsa*' to Muslim Spain; thereby reiterating one of the conference themes regarding the universal reverence accorded to the *Ahl al-Bayt* by all Muslim societies.

Other conference papers explored topics including pilgrimage, architectural patronage, '*Ashura* rituals, iconography and Iranian cinema. The proceedings of the conference are to be published in due course.

## LECTURE TOUR

Alnoor Merchant (Class of 1987), Head of the IIS Library and Keeper of its Special Collections, conducted a four-city lecture series on Muslim artistic, scientific, and architectural patronage. The presentations were held at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, Stanford University, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in February 2009.

Through artefacts from the Aga Khan Museum collection, Alnoor described their origins and the important role played by patrons in the history

of Islamic art. He recounted the exuberance and dynamism of artistic environments established from Indonesia to Spain by patrons who attracted celebrated artists to create vibrant and unique masterpieces. Although patronage of arts was primarily practiced by the royal court, it expanded to include other wealthy individuals and affluent business merchants. Alnoor explained that these works of art were not only made to grace the royal court — they also reaffirmed relationships between the ruler and his people.

Commencing his presentation with a page from the famous Blue Quran, Alnoor noted that beautifully decorated manuscripts adorned with calligraphy were among the most essential elements of Islamic art. One of the finest examples of Quranic productions, the Blue Quran is written on blue parchment in gold kufic script.

Beyond Quranic manuscripts, patrons supported other artistic creations including glassware, metalwork, textiles, and ceramics, which were often adorned with calligraphy, arabesque, and figural motifs of birds, animals and even human faces. The audience was delighted to see images of pottery from the tenth century bearing an inscription that reflected one of the traditions of the Prophet: "Generosity is a disposition of the dwellers of paradise."

Illuminated manuscripts and miniatures were also favoured by patrons, and were particularly important within the Central Asian, Persian and Mughal traditions. The Aga Khan Museum's collection includes outstanding illustrated manuscripts and single miniatures, which show scholars in discussion, architectural and garden settings, as well as musical scenes.

Turning to the Aga Khan Museum, which is due to open in Toronto, Canada, in 2013, Alnoor noted that it will be dedicated to the acquisition, preservation and display of artefacts from various periods and geographies, relating to the intellectual, cultural, artistic and religious heritage of Muslim communities. Mawlana Hazar Imam "has identified the need for greater engagement between the East and West," said Alnoor. "An important objective of this museum is to use culture and art towards creating an educational understanding between communities, and to show the diversities and the pluralisms that exist within the artistic traditions of Islam."



**AMIR HUSSAIN, CLASS OF 2005**

In his book *The Aga Khan Rural Support Program, A Journey through Grassroots Development* Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan has attempted to encapsulate the transformation of community-based development in South Asia. Khan is internationally acclaimed for bringing new wisdom to poverty alleviation through 50 years of grassroots engagement and, in his book, he lucidly describes the transition from a top-down approach to participatory development.

The book captures his experience of working across South Asia for over five decades, and relates this life journey to broader development issues. It offers deep insights into the challenges to human agency that arise by effecting social change in favour of the poor. Divided into three sections that are both logically and chronologically linked, the book is far more significant and comprehensive than a conventional autobiographical account, and goes beyond the anecdotal scope that many participatory development accounts generally entail.

The book begins with an autobiographical introduction and descriptions of the author's childhood. Expressed as a world of pomp and ceremony, the introduction situates him within the relatively well-off South Asian classes and thereby allows the reader to understand the cultural context of a development leader in the making.

The first section of the book also provides descriptions and information on the intriguing world of the Civil Services, built around power narratives, arrogance, conspiracies, struggle and a real test of the survival instincts for people with integrity. Here, his account of the Daudzai Project depicts a new dimension in the ability of government to deliver, if there is willingness and genuine concern for pro-people development.

In the second and third sections of the book, Khan

succinctly outlines a pragmatic approach for development professionals to plan and execute a transformative philosophy by unleashing the potential of local people. The most sustainable way to socio-economic development and poverty alleviation lies within the communities and not in the top-down paradigms that are formulated in professional comfort zones. Khan who worked initially with the Civil Services, eventually bid farewell to his lucrative job, to lead the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) in the northern areas of Pakistan, where his real talent was laid bare.

The story of AKRSP as a vehicle to transform the tribal village structure of Gilgit-Baltistan into modern interest based organisations reveals a great deal about the vision of its architect and his intellectual vigour. Shoaib Sultan's ground breaking work provides a viable alternative to both top down growth-driven capitalist and centralised socialist models of social development. Khan succinctly sums up the concept of AKRSP in three simple principles: organisation, capital and skills. The articulation of these principles in popular language has buttressed the process of community based initiatives through a new generation of social activists from the rank and file of the local populace in Gilgit-Baltistan.

People centred management and organisation of social, financial and human capitals is an enduring sociological and management issue which is intertwined with political structure, economic modes of production and the culture of a society, and hence cannot be generalised. The book provides a deep insight into these structural problems and suggests practical tips to improve the management strategy in varying contexts.

Academicians may argue that the book is less rigorous on development theory and discourses of social development, but it is the book of a practitioner, a leader and an activist whose actions will generate theory rather than a predetermined theory directing his actions.

**MAHBANU RATANSI, CLASS OF 1991**

*Inside Islam: What A Billion Muslims Really Think* is a documentary by Unity Productions Foundations.

Is the Muslim world anti-American? Who are the extremists and how do Muslims feel about them?

What do Muslims like and dislike about the West? What do Muslim women really want?

Even as the intellectually lazy notion of a 'Clash of Civilisations' takes the world by storm, the voice of 'the other' is often conspicuously absent. Focusing on issues of gender, justice, terrorism and



### MIR BAIZ KHAN, CLASS OF 1983

*Beyond the Roof of the World: Music, Prayer and Healing in the Pamir Mountains* is a book on spirituality as much as on medical ethnomusicology, therapeutic transformation and healing. Koen's research penetrates the cultural and spiritual landscape of the Pamir Badakhshani Ismaili community and is an insightful representation of the role of devotional music, meditative and prayer practices in healing.

Divided into six chapters, the book begins by defining illness as an imbalance between human beings and spiritual forces, and health as restoration of the equilibrium. It goes on, in chapter two to discuss the power of music and prayer in healing as being inextricably interwoven with cultural and religious beliefs and devotional practices. Chapter three introduces the *music-prayer dynamics*, a model that suggests that an integrated use of music and prayer leads to healing, a process in which the number 'five' is the most significant and power-laden symbol and metaphor. Chapter four describes the notion of *spiritual entrainment* where weaker rhythmic processes surrender to stronger rhythms, implying that participants in *maddah* performance surrender their lower self (*nafs*) to that of the higher

self (*ruh/jan*). Chapter five situates *maddah* poetry within the broader context of Sufism and Persian mystical poetry and, finally, in the last chapter, Koen employs the ontological principle of wholeness in that the certainty that emerges in human consciousness from an *unknowable* facilitates the experience of healing.

Koen's depth of understanding of the integrated use of devotional music, meditation and prayers practiced by the Pamiri Ismailis and their cultural transcendent values is remarkable. However, in his analysis, Koen overlooks the role of the Ismaili Imam in shaping those values. In his view, the Pamiri Ismailis owe their values of universalism entirely to Sufism. Despite sharing many values with Sufism, the Badakhshani Ismailis themselves essentially attribute this inspiration to the teachings of successive Ismaili Imams. As the following verse of a *maddoh* in the *Chiragh Nama*, a text for religious practice known as *Da'wat-i Nāsiri*, states, "*This is the rope of Imamah, which is firmly established until the Day of Judgment for the salvation of the community. May peace be on Muhammad.*" Similarly, Nasir Khusraw, who the Pamiri Ismailis consider as a founder of their tradition, reinforces this in his *Diwan*, "*I did not find a cure for the ailment of my soul in any knowledge save in that of the progeny of the Prophet.*"

### ALEEM KARMALI, CLASS OF 2009

The British Museum's exhibition, *Shah Abbas: The Remaking of Iran*, was a true joy to attend. Brilliantly curated, the exhibition walked the viewer through the life of this great ruler and clearly showed how he began the transformation of Iran into the Shi'ite state of today.

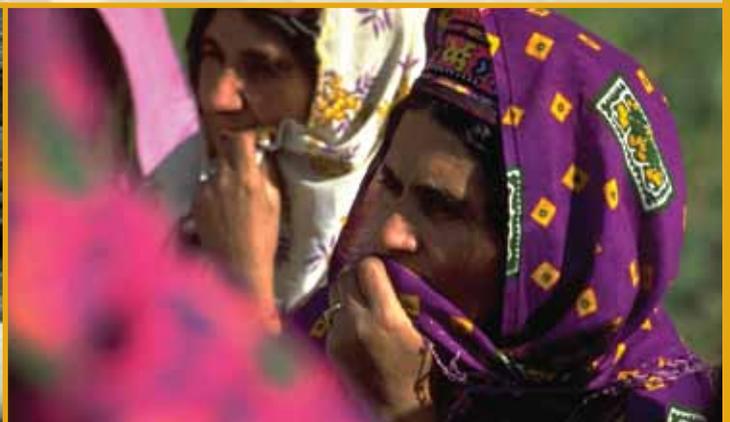
The displays were filled with magnificent pieces, including luxurious carpets, porcelains, illustrated manuscripts, paintings, metalwork and beautiful silks, all of which served to express the power, taste and piety of the most important Safavid shah.

Personally, the highlights of the exhibition were the screens that rose from the exhibition's centre, projecting massive images of the architectural masterpieces that were built under Shah 'Abbas' patronage. This provided a place to sit, relax and contemplate the majestic palaces, mosques and shrines that Shah 'Abbas built or restored during his reign.

It was refreshing to attend an exhibit that did not look through the lens of current Western political discourses towards Iran. It respected the splendour and power of the Safavids, and was particularly reverent to the personal piety of Shah 'Abbas.

democracy, *Inside Islam* is a 55 minute documentary, directed by Rob Gardner that seeks to explore the views and opinions of Muslims around the globe. Gallup researchers spent about six years gathering research and analysing data in order to try and represent the views of Muslims around the world. With over 50,000 interviews conducted with Muslims

from Muslim-majority nations, and those from Europe and the USA, *Inside Islam* is both an entertaining and compelling film that takes its viewers beyond stereotypes and challenges the popular notion that Muslims and the West are on a collision course.



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## THE MOON

When I looked far into the night  
A radiance shone, Moon, your radiant light  
And despite the stare I gave you  
A hard and frigid stare  
Thinking that your radiance may  
For a moment, turn grey  
But even as I did doggedly stare,  
O Moon, O beautiful Moon,  
Adamantly you shone  
Like a maiden fair, illumined there  
Who does a heart, clear as crystal bear  
Whose goodness, tenderness pure as gold  
Transform into beauty, that stands out bold!  
So stood you Moon, in your frankness eternal décor,  
Defying my doubt as you stood  
As if forever there you'd be forever there!

O Moon, when I look at you  
On such a night  
My body though tired  
My mind does light!  
Your radiance, your nobleness,  
And your grace, that keeps you fair  
Lay a way for me, to bring myself  
Even you are where!  
Your position's irresistible Moon,  
But my ambitions say  
I'll reach up to you,  
Upon some fortunate day!  
Till then, dear Moon,  
You remain, my pure, high aim,  
And though odds waylay,  
I'll reach you, all the same!

*Laila R. Lokhandwalla*  
*Class of 1983*