



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

DEVOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS

OF SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIMS

AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

16 - 18 NOVEMBER 2006
THE ISMAILI CENTRE
LONDON



DEVOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS OF SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIMS

The confluence between Muslim and Indic traditions in South Asia has given rise to a rich variety of devotional, artistic and literary forms of expression from medieval times to the present day. The aim of this conference is to draw together an international array of scholars to present new research on South Asian Muslims from historical and contemporary perspectives. Speakers will explore links between devotional forms and reflect on the relationship between religious traditions and their lived expression.

The conference will bring out the plurality in the expression of Muslim belief in the Indian subcontinent and the role of this diversity in the lives of Muslims. It will foreground new approaches to the study of texts and traditions from South Asia. Finally, it will place Muslim expressions from South Asia in the wider contexts of the Muslim world.



PROGRAMME

Thursday, 16 November

Inaugural event

8.00 pm Evening reception and welcome address by
Professor Azim Nanji, Director, Institute of Ismaili Studies,
followed by a cultural programme

Friday, 17 November

9.30 Registration and welcome

Session I:

Texts in Indian Islam – interpretations and comparisons

Chair: Dr. Sharmina Mawani

9.45-10.15 Hussain Jasani (ITREB India)
'Issues and Prospects of Patronage of Ginanic Literature: A
Fieldwork Report of a Recent Attempt in India'

10.15-10.45 Françoise Mallison (Paris)
'Socio-religious context of the Gujarati devotional songs of the
Chisti Sampraday of Kayamuddin Bava (eighteenth c.)'

10.45-11.15 Discussion

11.15-11.30 Tea/coffee

11.30-12.00 Zawahir Moir (London)
'Gujari Ginans of Nur Muhammad Shah, a 15th/16th century
Saint of Gujarat'

12.00-12.30 Derryl Maclean (Simon Fraser University)
'Writing the Mahdi: The Devotional Literature of the
Mahdaviyah Community of South Asia'

12.30-1.00 Discussion

1.00-2.15 Lunch at the Ismaili Centre for all speakers and registered guests

Session II:

Living Islam – genres of devotion in Muslim South Asia

Chair: Dr. Zulfikar Hirji

2.15-2.45 Ali Asani (Harvard)
'Sufi Rock in Pakistan: Salman Ahmad and Junoon'

2.45-3.15 Denis Matringe (Paris)
'Pakistani Resistance Poetry in Sufi Style: Kafiya (1965), by
Najm Husain Sayyid'

3.15-3.45 Discussion

3.45-4.00 Tea/coffee

4.00-4.30 Nile Green (Manchester)
'Ministers, Masons and Madmen: The Cosmopolitan Process in
Princely Hyderabad'

4.30-5.00 Syed Akbar Hyder (University of Texas, Austin)
'Josh Malihabadi and the invention of the new Urdu marsiya'

7.30 Dinner at a restaurant for speakers and organisers

Saturday, 18 November

9.30 Start of session

Session III:

Immanent frontiers: Muslim expressions in a hybrid world

Chair: Professor F. 'Nalini' Delvoye

9.45-10.15 Bazat-Saifiyah Qutbuddin (Mumbai)
'Fatimid Reflections in Tayyibi Bohra Religious Culture'

10.15-10.45 Pyarali Keshwani (New York)
'Si Harfi and Alif Nama: Texts and Contexts'

10.45-11.15 Discussion

11.15-11.30 Tea/coffee

11.30-12.00 Tony Stewart (North Carolina State University, Raleigh)
'Vaisnava Dhikr: the Tale of the Muslim Who Practiced
Vaisnavism in 16th century Bengal.'

12.00-12.30 Michel Boivin (Paris)
'The Paths of Devotion in the Sufi Centre of Jhok Sharif
(Sindh)'

12.30-1.00 Discussion

1.00-1.45 Lunch

1.45-2.15 Tour of the Ismaili Centre

2.30-3.15 Mehrdad Shokoohy (University of Greenwich)
'Islam in Somnath and some of the early mosques in the town'
(Illustrated talk)

3.15-3.45 **Keynote address by Dr. Aziz Esmail**, Governor, Institute of Ismaili
Studies

3.45-4.00 Thanks

4.00 Tea/coffee and farewell

SPEAKERS

Ali Asani

Professor of the Practice of Indo-Muslim Languages and Culture, Harvard University

'Sufi Rock in Pakistan: Salman Ahmad and Junoon'

Ali Asani has published widely on Ismaili literatures and traditions and on the Muslim literatures of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. He is also interested in Shi'ism, Sufism and popular or folk forms of Muslim devotional life and Muslim communities in the West. His books include *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literatures of South Asia* (2002), *The Bujh Niranjana: An Ismaili Mystical Poem* (1992) and *Celebrating Muhammad: Images of the Prophet in Muslim Devotional Poetry* (1995, co-authored). Apart from his academic activities, he serves on the advisory board of the Harvard Foundation for Intercultural and Race Relations and recently received the Harvard Foundation medal for promoting intercultural and racial understanding at Harvard and in the USA.

Michel Boivin

Research Fellow, Centre for South Asian Studies (CNRS-EHESS), Paris

'The Paths of Devotion in the Sufi Centre of Jhok Sharif (Sindh)'

Michel Boivin works on the Muslim communities in Sindh and Gujarat in the colonial and post-partition periods from the perspective of the historical anthropology of religions. His last book, *La Rénovation du shi'isme ismaélien en Inde et au Pakistan* was published in 2003. Other publications include histories of India and Pakistan and *Les Ismaéliens : des communautés d'Asie du sud entre islamisation et indianisation* (1998), in addition to several articles in academic journals. He currently heads an interdisciplinary programme on Sufi devotion in the pilgrimage centre of Sehwan Sharif (Sindh, Pakistan).

Aziz Esmail

Institute of Ismaili Studies, London

Keynote address

The former Dean of The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London (1988-98), Aziz Esmail now serves as one of its Governors. He was trained in philosophy, literature and religion, and has held academic positions at various American universities as well as the University of Nairobi, Kenya. He has also been associated in a consultative capacity with the Rockefeller Foundation, the University of Chicago and Harvard University. In addition to numerous articles in journals, his writings include *The Poetics of Religious Experience: The Islamic Context* (1996) and *A Scent of Sandalwood: Indo-Ismaili Religious Lyrics* (2002).

Nile Green

Lecturer in South Asian Studies, University of Manchester

'Ministers, Masons and Madmen: The Cosmopolitan Process in Princely Hyderabad'

Nile Green works on the social and cultural history of Islam in South Asia, in particular on Sufi expressions of Islam from around 1700 to the early twentieth century. His publications include *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (2006) and more than twenty articles on Indo-Muslim and Sufi history and culture. He has also worked on the history of Sufism in Iran and on Sufi movements among the Afghans. He is presently completing a book on Sufi movements in colonial Hyderabad State and gathering material for a research project on Sufism in modern Afghanistan.

Syed Akbar Hyder

Assistant Professor of Asian Studies & Islamic Studies, The University of Texas at Austin

'Josh Malihabadi and the invention of the new Urdu marsiya'

Syed Akbar Hyder works primarily on themes from Urdu literature, Shi'ism and Islam in South Asia. He has a PhD from Harvard and is now based at the University of Texas in Austin. His most recent work is the monograph *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (2006). At the University of Texas at Austin, he teaches courses on South Asian religion, literature, film and popular culture. He is presently working on the Persian poetry of the nineteenth century poet Ghalib and on Urdu literature from the subcontinent.

Hussain Jasani,

CEO, ITREB India, Mumbai

'Issues and Prospects of Patronage of Ginanic Literature: A Fieldwork Report of a Recent Attempt in India'

Hussain S. Jasani, the CEO of ITREB India, is a passionate student of Ginanic literature, who has presented papers on the subject at the EPHE, Paris and Saurashtra University. A product of The Institute of Ismaili Studies' graduate programme, he holds a Masters degree in Islamic Societies and Culture from SOAS and a Diploma in Religious Education from the Institute of Education, London. He regularly lectures to students of Islamic Studies in Mumbai and is associated with groups working towards the empowerment of women and young people in India. In 2004, Penguin Publishing House named him a "Rising Personality of India".

Pyarali Keshwani

Independent Scholar, New York

'Si Harfi and Alif Nama: Texts and Contexts'

Pyarali Keshwani holds Masters degrees in Indo-Muslim culture from Harvard University and in Islamic Studies from Osmania University, Hyderabad, India. He has written widely on the Ginans in Gujarati and English and has translated works on Shi'i thought from English to Gujarati. He is closely involved with the Curriculum Development Committee and plays an active role in educational activities within the Jamat. He is presently a research consultant to the Department of Community Relations at The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

Derryl Maclean

Professor of History, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada

'Writing the Mahdi: The Devotional Literature of the Mahdaviyah Community of South Asia'

Derryl MacLean is Director of the Centre for the Comparative Study of Muslim Societies and Cultures at Simon Fraser University. A social historian of religion specializing in Islam, his research interests range from pre-modern India, Iran and Central Asia to Muslims in contemporary Canada. His work on issues of conversion, syncretism and millennialism include the monograph *Religion and Society in Arab Sind* (1989) and numerous articles in scholarly journals, collections of essays and encyclopedias. He is currently researching the Mahdaviyah, an Islamic millennial movement of South and Central Asia.

Françoise Mallison

Directeur d'Études émérite, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris

'Socio-religious context of the Gujarati devotional songs of the Chisti Sampraday of Kayamuddin Bava (eighteenth c.)'

Françoise Mallison is a scholar of Gujarati literature and tradition. Her early work was on the early modern Vaisnava poet Narasimha Maheta and on Krsnaite Vaisnavism in Gujarat. Her publications include *Au point du jour: les Prabhatiyam de Narasimha Maheta poète et saint vishnouïte du Gujarat (XVe siècle)* (1986) and numerous articles in journals and essay collections. She has also edited anthologies of works on South Asian devotional literature. In recent years, she has published widely on the literatures of the Ismaili and Satpanthi groups of Gujarat.

Denis Matringe

Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris

'Pakistani Resistance Poetry in Sufi Style: Kafiam (1965), by Najm Husain Sayyid'

Denis Matringe is a senior researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research, and the Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies of the Ecoles des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. He studies the pre-1947 cultures of Indian Islam and Sikhism. His publications include *Hir Varis Shah: poème panjabi du XVIIIe siècle* (1988), *Sassi Punnum* (2004) and numerous articles on the literature and religious history of Punjab. His latest book, *Un Islam non arabe: Horizons indiens et pakistanais* (2005), is a historical perspective on the articulation of the various cultural heritages of Indian Islam.

Zawahir Moir

Independent Scholar, London

'The Gujarati Ginans of Nur Muhammad Shah, a 15th/16th century Saint of Gujarat'

Zawahir Moir is a scholar of Ismaili literature and tradition in South Asia. Her publications include *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans* (co-authored with Christopher Shackle, 1992) and articles on the Ginans and Ismaili and Satpanthi traditions in western India. She has also co-edited John Stuart Mill's writings on India (1990). Her present work explores the writings of Nur Muhammad Shah and the history of the Imam Shahi sect of western India.

Azim Nanji

Director, Institute of Ismaili Studies, London

Welcome address

Azim Nanji has been Director of the Institute of Ismaili Studies since 1998. He has authored, co-authored and edited several books including *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition* (1976), *The Muslim Almanac* (1996), *Mapping Islamic Studies* (1997) and *The Historical Atlas of Islam* (with M. Ruthven) (2004). In addition, he has published numerous articles on religion, Islam and Ismailism in journals and collective volumes. He has served as Co-Chair of the Islam section at the American Academy of Religion and on the Editorial Board of the Academy's Journal.

Bazat-Saifiyah Qutbuddin

Independent Scholar, Mumbai

'Fatimid Reflections in Tayyibi Bohra Religious Culture'

Bazat-Saifiyah Qutbuddin did doctoral work on the political history of the Ismaili-Tayyibi Da'wa in Yemen at Oxford where her supervisor was Professor Wilferd Madelung. Since then, she has been teaching Ismaili texts within the Bohra community. She also studies Ismaili texts with her father (the Mazoon) and assists him in research. She is now revising her DPhil thesis for publication and researching the Tayyibi Dawat in India. Her article on Bohra history will appear in Dr. F. Daftary's forthcoming publication, *Modern Ismaili History and Thought*.

Mehrdad Shokoohy

Chair of Architecture and Urban Studies, University of Greenwich, London

'Islam in Somnath and some of the early mosques in the town'


Mehrdad Shokoohy is an architect and specialist in the conservation of urban environments. He has a particular interest in the architecture and painting of the Middle East and of South and Central Asia and has published widely on the history, archaeology, epigraphy and numismatics of these regions. His recent publications include *Muslim Architecture in South India* (2003), and works on early Muslim architecture and archaeology of sites such as Hisar Firuza, Bhadresvar and Nagaur. For his contributions to South Asian studies, he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science by Heriot-Watt University and the Edinburgh College of Art.

Tony K. Stewart

Professor of South Asian Religions and the History of Religions, North Carolina State University, Raleigh

'Vaisnava Dhikr: the Tale of the Muslim Who Practiced Vaisnavism in 16th century Bengal'

Tony Stewart has worked extensively on the texts of the Gaudiya Vaisnava movement that began in sixteenth century Bengal including the *Caitanya Caritamrta of Krsnadasa Kaviraja* (1999, with E.C. Dimock). He has also explored literary manifestations of the Hindu-Muslim encounter in Bengal, in particular, the story traditions of Satya Pir. His recent publications include *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal* (2004) and a translation of Rabindranath Tagore's early poems, *The Lover of God* (2003, with Chase Twichell). He is presently completing a monograph on literary practices as deployed in the creation of the Gaudiya Vaisnava movement.



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*Designed and produced by
The Institute of Ismaili Studies*

Printed by Jubilee Printers

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