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## MESSAGE FROM THE CO-DIRECTOR



## Dear Alumni,

As we slowly begin to come together again in person, we are able to meet and collaborate once more in the inspiring environment of the Aga Khan Centre (AKC). It has been incredibly uplifting to see the return of our graduate students to face-to-face learning.

We continue to build on integrating a digital approach in all aspects of our work. We held six short courses with 190 participants from 23 countries and delivered more than 100 webinars for ITREB members and other Jamati audiences. We had two online conferences: 'Islamic Traditions in "Greater Khurāsān" and 'Fatimid Cosmopolitanism'. We celebrated the awarding of doctoral scholarships to two of our GPISH graduates. We launched the IIS Digital Curriculum e-book platform with the rollout of several Ta'lim and Secondary modules. This year we have also launched an online catalogue for our Ismaili Special Collections, allowing community members and researchers across the world to explore thousands of precious items of Ismaili heritage.

In the Department of Academic Research and Publications, we have continued with our activities, published several new books, and launched our first in-house series, Living Ismaili Traditions, created specifically for the Jamat. The first title in the series, *Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration*, by Dr Shiraz Kabani, is a rich and personal exploration of different Ismaili traditions worldwide. We have also recently published the second volume in our groundbreaking Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries series that explores a critical theme: women in the Qur'an. *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries, Volume 2: On Women* (Oxford University Press) represents a unique new resource for all scholars and students of the Qur'an and its interpretations, Islamic studies, and gender studies.

I would like to take a moment to remember and recognise the valuable contribution of a rare scholar with many skills and accomplishments: Dr Janis Esots, who sadly passed away in 2021. Janis joined the IIS in 2013 as a Research Associate in the Shi'i Studies Unit and, aside from his native Latvian, he was a master of the English, Russian, Arabic, and Persian languages. At the time of his passing, Janis was working on several IIS publication projects which he pursued with his usual dedication and commitment. The first of these was *The Renaissance of Shi'i Islam in the 15th–17th Centuries: Facets of Thought and Practice*, the edited proceedings of the [international conference](#) he organised at the IIS in October 2018. He was also working on a monograph, *Patterns of Wisdom in Safavid Iran: The Philosophical School of Isfahan and the Gnostic of Shiraz*, and updating, with me, the second edition of the *Historical Dictionary of the Ismailis*. In addition, Janis was managing editor of *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, a project to which he also made contributions as author and translator. His absence will be very noticeable for all of us at the IIS.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for your continuous support of the work of the Institute. I encourage your continued engagement with us on this exciting journey towards academic excellence and service to the global Ismaili community.

**Dr Farhad Daftary**

## MESSAGE FROM THE ALUMNI RELATIONS COORDINATOR



Dear IIS Alumni,

I hope you and your families remain well and in good health.

First, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome new alumni and wish them the very best as they begin their careers!

The IIS Alumni Association is a growing community with over 700 alumni dispersed across thirty-seven countries. I am pleased to share that 71% of the alumni who completed the 2021 survey reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the programmes, events, and services offered by the IIS Alumni Relations Unit. You can find more information on the benefits and services on the Alumni Community portal.

The Leadership of the various Chapter Groups organised seven virtual networking sessions and the first-ever virtual Annual General Meetings, which were attended by more than 150 alumni. Six alumni (three from GPISH and three from STEP) were awarded an Alumni Research Grant from the IIS: two to produce a film about Nasir-i Khusraw's *Safarnama*, one to virtually present a paper at the Third International Conference on Modern Research in Education, Teaching and Learning (ICMETL) in Ireland, one to attend an online documentary filmmaking course at New York Film Academy, and two to attend an online course on Inter-faith Relations organised by Cambridge Inter-faith Programme (CIP), Cambridge University. In addition, six internships were set up for GPISH 2021 graduates.

This issue of the Alumni Newsletter provides a snapshot of the alumni-related events and activities that have taken place in 2021, including our first-ever virtual Annual General Meetings, the contributions of our alumni to research and scholarship, and reflections by alumni who participated in our programmes. A big thank you to all who have contributed to this newsletter. I hope you enjoy reading it.

Please reach out to us at [alumni@iis.ac.uk](mailto:alumni@iis.ac.uk) with feedback. Stay connected!

With best wishes

Sabeen Bashwani

## ALUMNI CHAPTER GROUP LEADERSHIP

### ASIAN CHAPTER GROUP



#### **President – Malaik Sultana Mithani**

graduated from STEP in 2012. She completed her MTeach/MA from UCL Institute of Education (IOE). She is currently working as a STEP Teacher with ITREB Pakistan.



#### **Secretary – Farheen Meghani**

graduated from STEP in 2017. She completed her MTeach/MA from UCL Institute of Education (IOE). She is currently working as a STEP teacher with ITREB Kenya.

### EUROPEAN CHAPTER GROUP



#### **President – Saima Khakwani**

graduated from GPISH in 2017. She completed her MSc in Public Health from Imperial College London in 2018. She is currently working as a Senior Clinical Systems Specialist at ICON PLC.



#### **Secretary – Alisha Merchant**

graduated from STEP in 2016. She completed her MTeach/MA from UCL Institute of Education (IOE). She is currently working as a STEP teacher with ITREB United Kingdom.

### NORTH AMERICAN CHAPTER GROUP



#### **President – Alyssa Lalani**

graduated from STEP in 2019. She completed her MTeach/MA from UCL Institute of Education (IOE). She is currently working as a STEP teacher with ITREB Canada.



#### **Secretary – Sofia Ali**

graduated from STEP in 2019. She completed her MTeach/MA from UCL Institute of Education (IOE). She is currently working as a STEP teacher in the United States.

# KEY HIGHLIGHTS

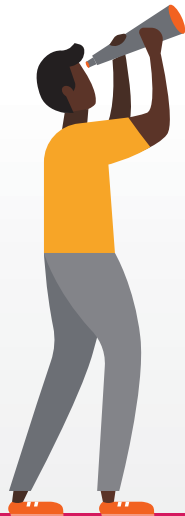
## FROM ALUMNI PROFILE REPORT 2021

The global IIS alumni body comprises **734 graduates** living in **37 countries**. In 2021, **66 alumni** engaged with the IIS in various ways, e.g., supporting curriculum development; participating in or presenting at our short courses, the STEP Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme, and the Mentor Development Workshop with the Department of Community Relations; assisting in the Postgraduate Preparatory Programme application and student recognition process with the Department of Graduate Studies. In addition, **260 alumni** volunteered on significant projects or assignments within Ismaili Imamat institutions and external organisations.



**27 alumni**

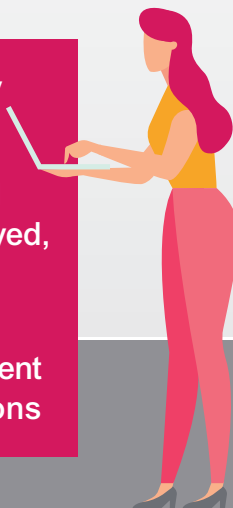
received awards and grants, including fellowships and scholarships.



**20 alumni**

published papers in academic journals.

A significant majority of our alumni (**625 or 87%**) reported themselves as employed, with more than half **373 or 60%** in professional employment with Imamat institutions



**24 alumni**

presented papers at international conferences.



EMPLOYMENT

ACADEMIC  
ACHIEVEMENTS



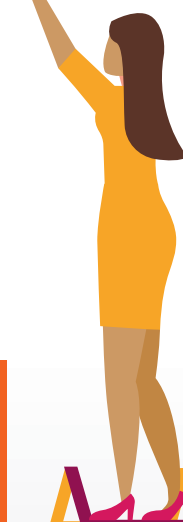
**74 alumni**  
conducted training  
sessions in a  
voluntary or  
professional  
capacity.



**67 alumni**  
completed further  
studies on a  
part-time or a  
full-time basis.

**24 alumni**  
earned promotions  
in their professional  
roles.

**2 alumni**  
completed their  
doctoral studies:



**71 alumni**  
participated in  
conferences and  
workshops related  
to their professions.

**Taushif Kara –**  
*GPISH 2017*  
University of Cambridge  
**Thesis:** *Abode of Peace:  
Islam, Empire, and the Khoja  
Diaspora (1866–1972).*

**41 alumni** were  
involved in organising  
conferences, serving  
as board members in  
various organisations,  
raising funds for and  
setting up their own  
companies.



**Azzam Al Kassir –**  
*GPISH 2014*  
Birkbeck University  
**Thesis:** *Change and Continuity  
in the Thought and Praxis of  
Salafi-Jihadism: Studying the  
Case of al-Nusra Front in  
Syria between 2012  
and 2018*



**OTHER  
ACHIEVEMENTS**

**CONTINUING  
EDUCATION**



## NEW IIS GRADUATES

We welcome 2020 graduates to the IIS Alumni Association.

### GPISH 2021

Abdul-Wahid Khan, Imran Khan, Lubna bin Zayyad, Mahek Virani, Nazra Ranmal, Nishat Taranum, Saher-Ashiq Ali, Shafaat Saleem, Shaheera Pesnani, Uzair Ibrahim



### STEP – C12 – 2021

Alisha Hakim Bardai, Altaf Aziz Somani, Arman, Attiya Rafiq Nathoo, Elham Khorasani, Faiza Ali, Faiza Mehmud Lalani, Faryal Qayyum, Hameeda Ilyas, Khushnur Toshmamadov, Nadia Didar, Naveed Ullah Baig, Nazira Bibi, Nilufari Miraziz, Rafiq Rayani, Rehana Dholasaniya, Roshini Abdulla Makhani, Rubina, Saba Moosa, Saleeta Shirazali Rajwani, Samir Haji, Sonia Bandali, Suleman Pirani, Yasmeen Lila, Zain Asrani, Zara Syed, Zubair Aly Virani





**Anisha Lakhani –  
Class of STEP 2019**

## AND A STAR WONDER...

Once upon a time, listening to an inner call  
I looked down upon this blue ball...  
Some days, it was blazing like a fireball  
On others, gushing like a waterfall  
What were the creatures on it like? I wonder  
Did they even, like me, think and reflect? I ponder  
How do they meet each other?  
How do they know each other?

Curiosity in me reached its height,  
As something within me took flight,  
I landed safely on the blue ball,  
Surprised to have had a safe fall  
Around me were creatures of all colours – from black to grey,  
Some raising voices to slay  
Some raising hands to pray  
I wonder who they were praying to  
And what in their prayers did they say?

Did they pray out of love?  
For the one above  
Or did they pray out of fear?  
For someone who is dear  
Oh, but who am I to judge them clean  
Isn't there someone called "Maliki Yaumiddin"<sup>1</sup>  
"Excuse me" came a voice from somewhere creeping,  
What alien language are you, dear star, speaking?  
We don't do any religion here,  
Science is our main affair, so have no fear  
Miracles and folklores have no existence here,  
Logic and reasoning give us proof, so clear!  
Oh wait, did I hear faith has no place here?  
Then who created you and I, my dear?  
"Let me tell you, my dear friend"  
Came a voice from a corner end  
"They call me scripture, and what's your name?"  
Star am I and that's my fame!  
"You want to know to whom they pray?  
They call it many names and give it many colours  
They call it many or one, in their own flavours  
Yet they all have some things in common,  
Things that at the end make them human  
Emotions, values, arts and science bring them together  
But there are two things that pull them apart"  
Apart? Tell me what they are about?  
"Faith and intellect – call it convenience if you are smart  
Or use it as conviction – if you speak from the heart"

Everything I now know about you,  
Dear humans, amazes me beyond clue  
How you humans co-exist is a mystery to me, though true  
There are more ways in which you connect than few  
Bonds that you develop every time, on this planet blue

Fortunate you are to experience this on earth,  
As the star that I am, I can't feel it, but I heard  
That each heart wishes to be ONE someday,  
Different are you all for a reason and in more than one way!  
And in more than one way

<sup>1</sup> Lord of the Day of Judgement, in Arabic



## DOCTORAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

**Taushif Kara – Class of GPISH 2017**

completed his doctoral studies at the University of Cambridge with a thesis titled: *Abode of Peace: Islam, Empire, and the Khoja Diaspora (1866 – 1972)*.

**Abstract**

This dissertation traces the modern intellectual history of the Khoja diaspora. It follows the Khojas, as well as the various ideas couched within and beyond their texts, during the formative periods of colonialism, nationalism, and decolonisation around the Indian Ocean, ca. 1866–1972. A trading community originally from western India, the Khojas were defined in the colonial imaginary as a permanent “minority” regardless of the vantage point: they were Muslim subjects in India, Indian subjects in Africa, and Shia subjects in the world of Islam. This dissertation primarily argues, however, that they consistently escaped or rejected this minority status, and with it the grasp of colonial power itself, through a shifting subjectivity rooted in the practice of *taqiyya* (concealment). It further argues that, seeking stability as well as escape, the Khojas sought to craft in East Africa an “abode of peace” for their community; a conceptual and literal space of dominion existing in relation to but nonetheless distinct from colonial modernity. Crafting a site such as this often saw the Khojas seize power and so claim

sovereignty for themselves, relying as much on their inherited forms and ideas as well as newly forged ones.

Dr Kara takes as a point of departure the arrival of the Aga Khan in India as well as his subsequent claim to authority over the Khojas and his unveiling as the Ismaili imam in the nineteenth century. He claims throughout that the Aga Khan and his heirs mapped their contested and unstable authority out of rather than onto dynamic Khoja ideas about subjectivity, gender, space, and history. Because the Khojas often grounded their thought and their community in material forms such as architecture and institutional structures, this dissertation makes novel connections between the history of ideas and that of the built environment. It also contributes significantly to histories of the Indian Ocean world, especially its intellectual history. Moreover, it provides empirical as well as theoretical insights into the formation and consolidation of “global Islam” in the twentieth century and engages directly with contemporary debates in Indian political thought and world history more broadly.

**Azzam Al Kassir – Class of GPISH 2014**

completed his doctoral studies at Birkbeck, University of London, with a thesis titled: *Change and Continuity in the Thought and Praxis of Salafi-Jihadism: Studying the Case of al-Nusra Front in Syria between 2012 and 2018*.

**Abstract**

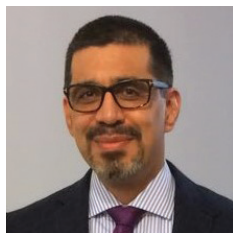
The thesis’ main contribution pertains to demonstrating the importance of factoring in the agency of Islamists when studying militant Islamist activism. The surrounding structural and cultural conditions offer opportunities and pose constraints that in turn are interpreted by Islamist activists. Islamists, however, are not equally involved in processes of strategic framing and decision making. The inside of militant Islamist activism is more dynamic than it is often depicted as it hosts constant competitions over power, wealth, prestige, and influence. The research shows that intra-movement vying for power is central to determining the group’s actions and strategic preferences in response to turning points in the political milieu.

The thesis questions the validity and utility of scholarly attempts to “exceptionalise” Salafi-Jihadism on the bases of being extant and rigid. The research does so by showing that Salafi-Jihadism is an extension of the modern phenomenon of Islamism. The qualitative analysis of the discourse of al-Nusra’s ideologues demonstrates that Salafi-Jihadists share

with other Islamists the centrality of politics in their discourse, the long-term objectives of activism, and the vision of how an ideal society should be. Notwithstanding such ideological conformity, there is ample room for strategic prioritisations, manoeuvrings, and adaptations in Salafi-Jihadist activism. The historical and discursive experiences of Salafi-Jihadists reveal a dialectical interplay between ideology and pragmatism. The necessity to bridge the gap between discourse and real-life considerations has given rise to new and modified branches in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). These aspects of religion are theorised and elaborated by an increasingly empowered class of jihadist strategists.

Specific choices made by the strategists have shaped the trajectory of al-Nusra and determined its oscillation between “moderation” and “radicalism” between 2012 and 2018. Armed with relevant geopolitical knowledge, the strategists marginalised other competing currents accusing them of being either ghulat “extremists” or too lenient and compromising.





### Rahim Gholami – Class of GPISH 2002

completed his doctorate studies at University of Exeter with a thesis titled: *The Wayfarer's Sojourn at the Banquet: The Hermeneutics of Nāṣir-e Khusraw's Esoteric Guidance* (With A Parallel English Translation and New Persian Critical Edition of Nāṣir-e Khusraw's Khwān al-Ikhwān).

#### Abstract

The book of Khwān al-Ikhwān (The Banquet of the Brethren) consists of 100 chapters. The focus of the book is on divine knowledge whose main source lies within the scripture as the Book of God.

The author's pedagogical approach underlines the methods and sources of acquiring this knowledge. Nāṣir-e Khusraw methodically utilises the hermeneutics of the Ismaili esoteric interpretation (ta'wīl) as his main interpretative apparatus. Having been appointed as one of the top official representatives (sing. *hujjat*, lit. clear proof) of the Ismaili Imam of the Time, who is recognised as the Speaking Qur'ān – i.e., 'being himself the scripture made incarnate in speech' as Nāṣir-e Khusraw expresses in his prelims to the book – the author is justified in having access to the main source of divine knowledge and in his practice of the Ismaili ta'wīl.

The one-hundred chapters of the book address the following 10 main themes that – while synthesising the architecture of the Ismaili esoteric interpretation (ta'wīl) – they follow the order of Revelation (tanzīl) and esoteric interpretation (ta'wīl): 1. Origination 2. Ontology 3. Cosmogony 4. Cosmology 5. Divinity 6. Epistemology 7. Humanity 8. Revelation 9. Eschatology 10. Resurrection. In expounding and elaborating this esoteric interpretive framework, which Nāṣir-e Khusraw calls the ladder of ta'wīl, the author defines the Origination and Resurrection as the source and return of divine knowledge whose conscious realisation enables human beings attain their true spiritual and intellectual divine state, to which he refers as mankind's second birth. This second birth accentuates the eschatological significance of Resurrection as the purpose of ta'wīl in acquiring divine knowledge.



### Nazmin Halani – Class of GPISH 1998

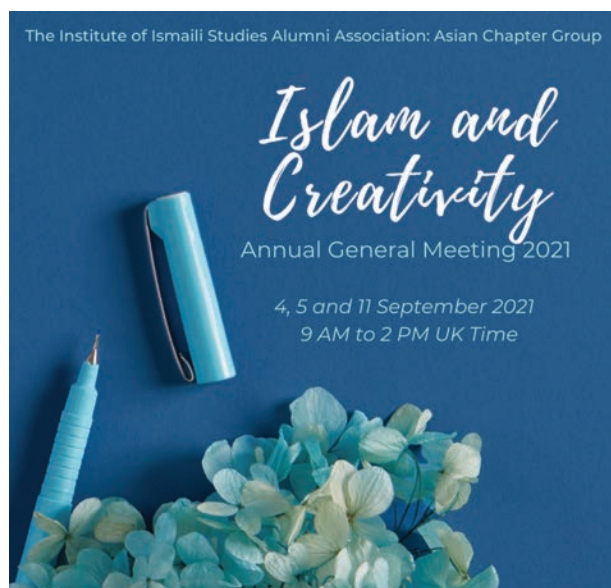
completed his doctorate studies at University of Warwick with a thesis titled: *Religious Nurture of Ismaili Children in the UK*.

#### Abstract

The research sets out to study the religious nurture of Ismaili children and young people (between the ages of 4 and 15 years) from single- and multi-faith families. It focuses on investigating these children's and their families' experiences and perceptions of religious nurture. The study was undertaken within the methodological framework of ethnography.

The research findings challenge some of the stereotypes concerning children from multi-faith families. In addition, it questions the thesis of a conflict of religious beliefs in these families. Finally, the study offers a number of recommendations, including making the teaching of RE in mainstream schools more inclusive of internal diversity within faith traditions,

and of children from multi-faith families. Beyond the Ismaili community, the research makes a significant contribution to areas in the existing literature on religious upbringing where critical gaps exist such as research on children from multi-faith families, the influence of family members other than parents, and children's agency.



The Institute of Ismaili Studies Alumni Association: Asian Chapter Group

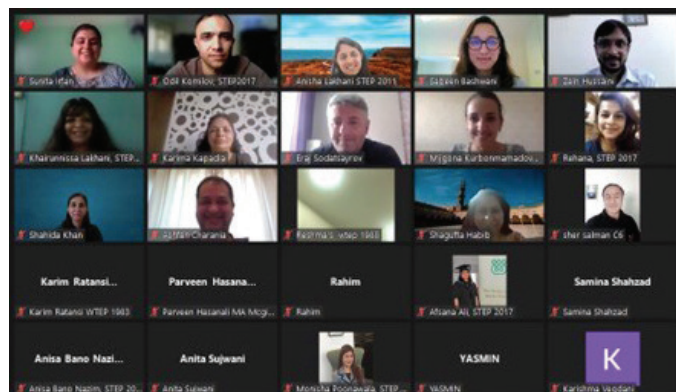
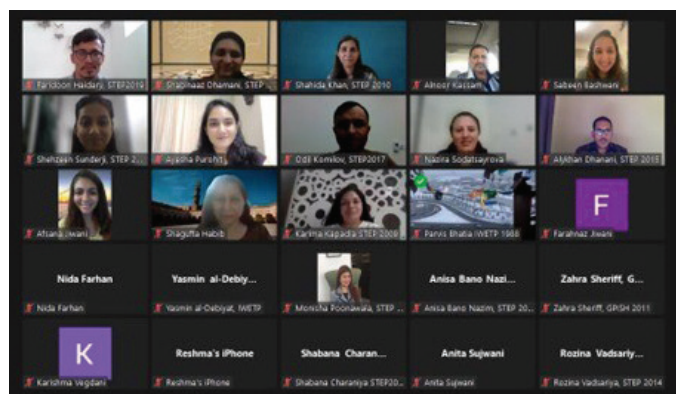
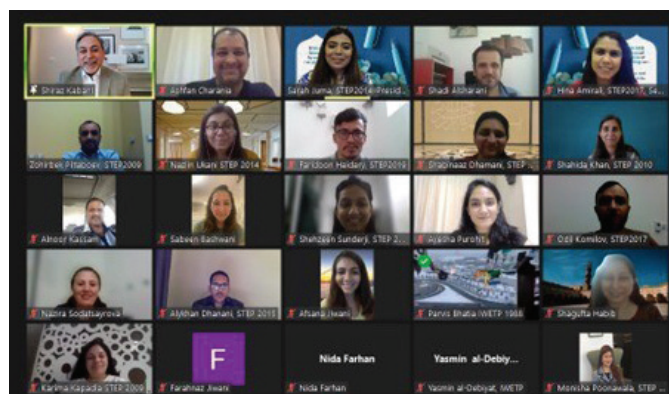
# Islam and Creativity

Annual General Meeting 2021

4, 5 and 11 September 2021  
9 AM to 2 PM UK Time

These academic sessions were supplemented with a musical performance by the duo Zain Asrani and Asif Virani, popular emerging musicians from the Ismaili community. The alumni also had the chance to listen to their fellow alumni deliver presentations on diverse topics, from the use of board games in education to interfaith encounters and creativity. The alumni also got the opportunity to discuss their aspirations with members of the IIS Board of Governors and to speak of the Institute's role in supporting the alumni in their development and in giving back to the community. A special session on Muslim women's representation in Iranian cinema was delivered by Professor Nacim Pak-Shiraz, a member of the IIS Board of Governors and the Head of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Apart from intellectual discussions, the alumni had the opportunity to network with their fellows and meditate during screen breaks over the three days of the virtual AGM.

One alumnus praised this year's AGM for being "An excellent feat... a sophisticated, well-thought [out]/planned/executed virtual meeting conference". The ACG leadership was supported by a very dedicated team of fellow alumni who helped with the execution of the whole process. One alumnus remarked: "I think this course has demonstrated that a structured inquiry led by a thoughtful scholar can be a great way to benefit the alumni during an AGM. In future, as well, if such short courses are offered on this platform, it can be very beneficial." Overall, the AGM 2021 provided an excellent opportunity for the ACG alumni to come together in an intellectually stimulating environment for alumni growth and development.





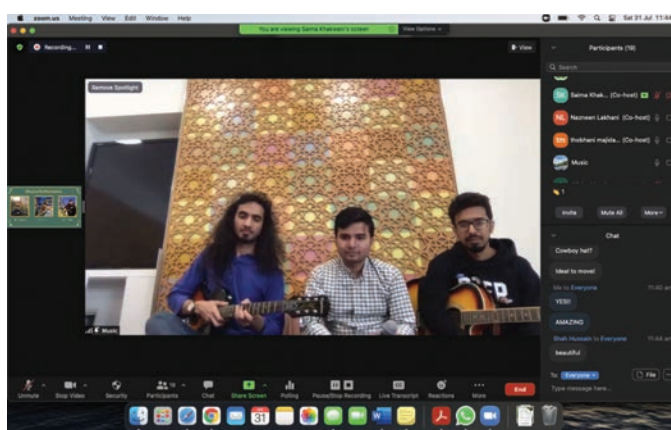
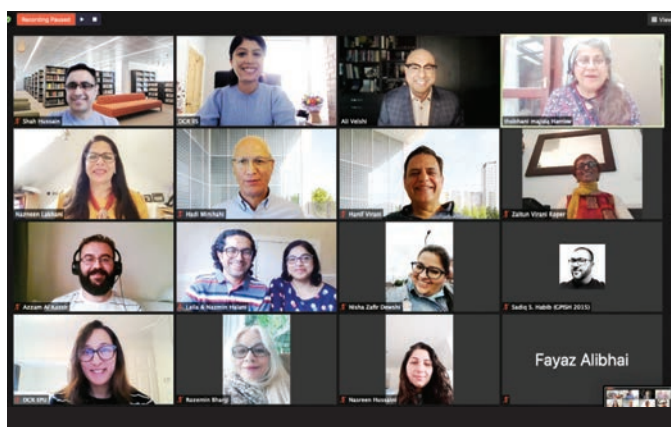
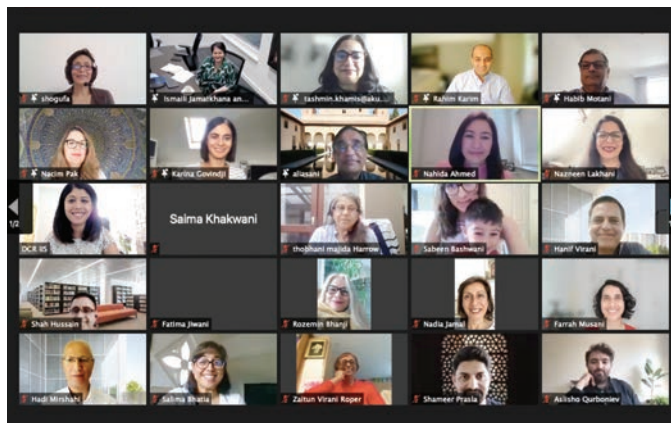
## The European Chapter Group's Annual General Meeting (ECG AGM)



The European Chapter Group (ECG) hosted their Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2021 virtually on 31 July 2021 and 7 August 2021. The theme of the AGM was *Contemporary Challenges in the Muslim World*. A total of 31 participants from various European countries and the United Kingdom attended the event, more than half of whom are currently working at The Institute of Ismaili Studies. The turnout was encouraging and the leadership appreciated that alumni took the time to be a part of the event. This year's AGM included updates from the IIS by Dr Shiraz Kabani, a keynote address by Ali Velshi on the portrayal of Muslims in today's media, discussions on building an inclusive community by Karina Govindji, a dialogue on the evolution of the Ismaili diaspora in the 21st century by Shakeel Hirji, and an interesting discourse on gender and identity by Assistant Professor Shenila Khoja-Moolji.

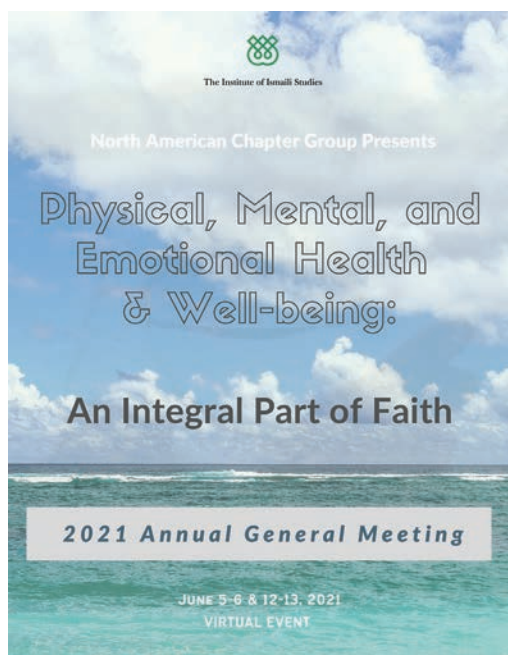
The highlight of the AGM was the Alumni Symposium during which four alumni shared their experiences in their fields of work, which was not only intellectually stimulating but also very much appreciated by all the attendees. The alumni also had the opportunity to meet with the new IIS Board of Governors in an interactive and an engaging session. All the participants of the AGM were presented with Dr Daftary's book as a token of appreciation for their attendance and participation.

This was the first ever AGM that took place virtually, and the leadership strongly believes that the objectives of the AGM were fully met. Technology has proven, once again, that distance does not matter if you are in search of effective learning and that it can help us in connecting to any person in any corner of the world; it enabled us to successfully execute our ideas and thoughts and we received positive feedback from members of our chapter group.





## The North American Chapter Group's Annual General Meeting (NACG AGM)



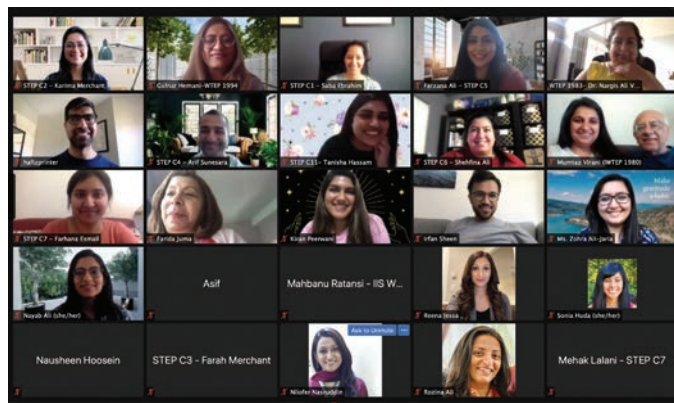
The North American Chapter Group Annual General Meeting was held virtually for the first time ever over the course of two weekends (5–6 and 12–13) in June 2021. A total of 55 alumni attended various sessions of their choosing. The virtual format gave them the opportunity to engage in the sessions from either their personal or their professional environment. It also cut the cost of the AGM by 75%.

The theme selected by the alumni for the AGM was *Physical, Mental, and Emotional Well-being: An Integral Part of Faith*. At the AGM, the alumni explored the spiritual and physical aspects of well-being through sessions led by professionals, academics, and skills-based experts. To ensure the success of the first NACG virtual AGM, an advisory board was formed of people drawn from different programmes, professions, cohorts, and countries. We believe this greatly enhanced the representation of different voices and perspectives and ultimately led to a successful and diverse programme. The alumni provided feedback on what they learned overall, and below are a few notable responses they gave about the various sessions that took place over the two weekends.

*[I appreciated] the great deal of expertise that exists in our community and how, when harnessed well, it can create different learning platforms and networks. STEP Alum*

*[I learned about the importance of] taking care of myself, working towards creating that safe space for my students, and about the great things the IIS is working towards. STEP Alum*

*I really enjoyed learning about the health and well-being perspective within the religious and cultural framework, especially when the speakers rooted their thoughts in the Qur'an. GPISH Alum*



Finally, the virtual NACG AGM 2021 was not only successful in delivering the content but provided a great opportunity for the North American alumni body to be in contact with each other, share our best practices, which were of mutual benefit and interest, and win some amazing gifts related to well-being through a raffle.



## ALUMNI INTERNSHIPS FOR 2021 GRADUATES

Each year, the Alumni Relations Unit creates internship opportunities for new GPISH graduates to facilitate their transition from student to professional life and further their career development. Since 2006, we have set up internship opportunities for 107 GPISH graduates. In 2021, the following internships were offered to GPISH graduates:

**Nishat Taranum** with the Aga Khan University, Pakistan, for six months.

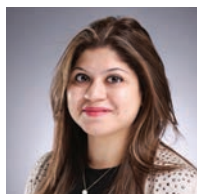
**Saher Ali** with Focus Humanitarian Assistance Europe, UK, for three months.

**Shafaat Saleem** with the Department of Community Relations at the IIS, UK, for three month.

**Shaheera Pesnani** with the South Asian Studies Unit at the IIS, UK, for three months.

**Uzair Ibrahim** with the South Asian Studies Unit at the IIS, UK, for three months.

## REFLECTIONS ON INTERNSHIPS PROGRAMME BY ALUMNI



### **Nayab Tufail – Class of GPISH 2020**

“ My experience as a Research Assistant for the South Asian Studies (SAS) Unit, within the Department of Academic Research and Publications (DARP) at the IIS, was both meaningful and enriching. During my nine-month internship with SAS, the newest unit at the IIS, I had the unique opportunity of working in an area directly relevant to my research while participating in the strategic thinking process involved in building a new academic unit from the ground up.

My key responsibilities included researching, writing and editing state-of-the-field documents, strategy documents, executive summaries as well as drafting content for key departmental communications. The work also entailed surveying digital catalogues of archival sources pertaining to South Asia and identifying unique and understudied materials relevant to the unit's focus.”



### **Amjad Ali – Class of GPISH 2020**

“ To begin with, I would like to thank the IIS Alumni relations unit and my mentor at AKAH for providing me with an enabling start for my professional career. During the placement, I have not only had a chance to experience the planning affairs within the development sector, but also have a grass root experience by interacting with the community.

Given my background in Economics, I had always remained keen towards conducting assessments, analysis and contributing towards budgeting processes. My masters in Development Studies had further equipped me with tools and knowledge on the topics around Green Economics. And this academic practice was realised in true essence when I was given the chance to be a part of the team at the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat Pakistan. Since, the agency's goal is that people live in safe, sustainable, and resilient habitats with the opportunity to thrive, whether in a remote mountain village, a town, or a densely populated urban centre. It works with communities to help them prepare for and respond to natural disasters and the effects of climate change. AKAH also works to expand access to services and opportunity for people to improve their life. I was provided with a platform through which I could experience the implementation side of climate related work and also have the chance to contribute by utilizing my academic background.

The most important learning during my placement was to be able to learn the necessary technology skills enhancing my stability and leveraging my professional growth. Moreover, while GPISH had enabled a multitasking ability in an academic sense, my placement at AKAH has further contributed in being organized; establishing priorities and managing my time.”



### Shakeel Ahmad Shah – *Class of GPISH 2020*

“ Having career aspirations is easy but getting into the right career is difficult. Finding the right career path that leads to the right career destination is challenging. However, the IIS’ Alumni Relations Unit made this process easier for me by offering me a placement in the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) section of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP). It was a wonderful experience that taught me a lot and contributed to my growth. In the AKRSP’s

M&E section I was engaged in practical M&E tasks. Through this type of engagement with M&E tasks, I was able to build on my previous experience in M&E. While working with AKRSP, I had the opportunity to apply my academic knowledge to on-the-job situations. I was also able to acquire demonstrable skills related to data management, impact evaluations, financial management and monitoring designs. With these key skills, fundamental to M&E, I was able to compete for a position among M&E specialists at AKRSP. Now I look forward with confidence to building my career in M&E within the development sector and becoming an M&E professional in the years ahead who can significantly contribute to positive changes.”



### Irum Iqbal – *Class of GPISH 2020*

“ I interned with the IIS’ Department of Curriculum Studies (DCS) where I was tasked with identifying readings and resources that would aid primary teachers in their understanding and subsequent teaching of the Ta’lim curriculum. I also assisted with content proofing and editing for the curriculum digitisation project underway at the department.

The most important insight I gained through my internship work concerned the necessity of designing a curriculum that takes into account the diversity of the students and teachers. Due to the Ta’lim curriculum’s inherent multiculturalism, its teaching stipulates that attention must be paid to the diversity of Ismaili students around the world. Wearing my teacher’s hat, I was able to think about the contextual differences in reception of the source materials. I learned, for instance, that devotional/literary texts may not hold the same significance if read by students in a language foreign to them. In a similar vein, I also felt compelled to question my own biases when deciding which background readings to exclude from the final version, and whether in excluding them I was privileging one cultural context or narrative over another.

I hope to continue learning from the creativity, commitment, and care the DCS team brings to their work.”

## REFLECTIONS ON THE ALUMNI RESEARCH GRANT



### Samaneh Niktinat – *Class of STEP 2019*

“ The IIS Alumni Research Grant provided me with a unique opportunity to take part in an international conference, meet numerous people who work in the field of education and present my own findings in the form of a paper entitled “Active learning in online classes”. The conference that I attended was the Third International Conference on Modern Research in Education, Teaching and Learning (ICMETL) that took place on 20–22 August 2021 in Dublin, Ireland. The

ICMETL 2021 conference provided me with the opportunity to network with academics and to learn about the latest innovations and developments in the field of education. Throughout the conference, I encountered great discussions, ideas and experiences that had been shared by other scholars and teachers such as those related to the differences between online classes and normal ones and how to make virtual classes a success. Information such as this will help me to a great extent in my profession as a STEP teacher. Attending the conference was an outstanding experience for me in terms of its contribution to my professional development and because it has enhanced my knowledge. I also encountered several teachers who faced the same difficulties as me in delivering online classes as a result of the pandemic. Speaking with them about their challenges, and collectively sharing experiences, has helped me to understand that I am not alone in this regard and has allowed me to move forward with more hope and confidence. In one instance, I and another teacher whom I met there have decided to work together on a project about how to make online classes more attractive.”





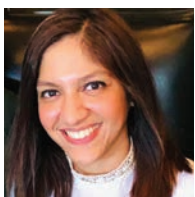
### **Shehzeen Sunderji – Class of STEP 2013**

“ The IIS Alumni grant provided me with an opportunity to engage in an interactive 10-day course led by the Cambridge Inter-Faith Summer Programme, which included a mixture of lectures, seminar discussions, workshops and immersive exercises. It provided me with an opportunity to engage in scriptural reasoning, visit a virtual photographic exhibition of shared sacred landscapes, attend a film screening, and participate in poetry and autoethnographic writing workshops where we tried our hand at conducting visual research and creating our own inter-faith archive.

Throughout the sessions and workshops, we explored different entry points for engaging in inter-faith dialogue, through the examination of topics such as Magic and Ecology, Ethics and Natural Law, Scripture and Violence, Poetry and Prayer across Religious Traditions, Life Elsewhere in the Universe, Anthropology of Religious Conversion, Inter-faith Conflict Resolution, Martyrdom and Sacrifice, and Encounters between Cultures, Traditions and Religions.

It is necessary for our generation and the future generations to critically engage with each other, across the globalised world, in meaningful inter-faith dialogue. Undertaking this summer course has provided me with tools that can be embedded within our existing secondary curriculum toolkit to facilitate students' understanding of their role as learners and inclusive leaders of the future.

More broadly, this summer course helped me to meaningfully engage with other course participants and course leaders and broaden my understanding of inter-faith relations. This will indeed help me in my professional role in my own country, where most of our learners come from multi-faith families and interact with people from diverse faith backgrounds in their daily lives. It also helps me to highlight the values of pluralism for my students and teachers in a meaningful and realistic manner.”



### **Tanya Panjwani – Class of GPISH 2012**

“ In 2016, I produced a documentary profiling the life of a Shia Pakistani artist and the socio-political struggles she faced in pursuing a vocation in Sufi music. The documentary was well-received and screened at film festivals around the world. It is my long-term vision to continue telling the stories of other Muslim creative artists, but in order to adapt to the evolving demands of audiences, it is important for me to learn to publish my stories in an ideal medium.

I believe that short films have the power to effect great social change and possess the potential to dispel commonly held misconceptions that prevail in our world today. Telling stories using the medium of short films can shatter stereotypes, and my particular focus is to use short films to achieve this for Muslims. I saw the impact my first feature-length film made to audiences during its showings around the world. The dialogue it sparked and the perceptions it changed made me confident that the workshop on short film-making that I was able to attend as a result of the IIS Alumni grant will steer me in the right direction and enable me to adapt my film style to create an even greater impact.

The film-making workshop focused on how to produce short films using basic equipment and editing software. Through a series of lectures, in class screenings, guided exercises, and practical workshops, the course taught by example how to produce a film efficiently from beginning to end. The course was taught by several prolific film directors, screenwriters, editors, and cinematographers, and it covered the practical techniques of contemporary minimalist film-making and highlighted best practices in the production and post-production processes for those on a microbudget.

Looking forward, I believe that the course in online film-making at the New York Film Academy will allow me to adopt a more modern approach to film production and to maximise a limited budget while still generating a greater impact and appealing to newer, broader audiences.”



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# MATERIALITY AND MOBILITY IN THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN: THE CASE OF FATIMID ROCK CRYSTAL

Nausheen Hoosein – *STEP 2014*



The movement of objects and craftsmen around the medieval Mediterranean is a much studied, yet still fascinating subject in the field of art history. Rock crystal presents a paradigmatic example of transmission. It tells the tale of how the movement of objects and ideas can result in profound changes in meaning and

function in different cultural contexts. With the plundering of the Fatimid treasury and the dispersal of its contents from Egypt into the Latin West, dramatically new uses for rock crystals were introduced by the Christian Church which fashioned them into reliquaries that would hold the blood, bones, and nails of venerated saints and even Christ himself. Today, nearly 200 rock crystal objects from the medieval Islamic world survive because of their adaptation in Christian practice as reliquaries, chalices, and cruets, and almost all surviving examples have come forth through cathedral treasuries.

Among the wonders that were part of the Fatimid treasures in the mid-eleventh century and later dispersed around the Mediterranean basin were large ewers carved of rock crystal, their transparency making them ideal for the display of holy relics. The Mamluk chronicler al-Maqrizi (1364–1442), writing in the aftermath of the pillage of the Fatimid coffers, makes note of a vast number of pieces that came onto the market: “among the objects there were 17,000 boxes, each one containing rock crystal either decorated in relief, or plain”, worth up to 1,000 dinars each. Various objects passed through Italian maritime cities, travelling in the pockets of pilgrims, merchants, and crusaders. Numerous items later found their way into Church treasuries and were prized as precious curiosities and eastern exotica, even if in a fragmentary state.



Perhaps the most famous extant example can be viewed in Venice. Bearing a dedicatory inscription to the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Aziz (r. 975–996), the San Marco ewer boasts seated lions, a recurring example of royal iconography. This ewer, thanks to its Arabic inscription, “Baraka min allah li’l-imam al-azi bi’llah” (“The blessing of God on the Imam al-Aziz bi’llah”), was instrumental in dating and identifying other extant Fatimid rock crystals (Fig. 1).

The production and patronage of rock crystal *objets d’art* reached its peak in the Fatimid court in al-Qahira (the Victorious), and more specifically in Fustat, Old Cairo. The Fatimids (909–1171 CE) were a Shi’i dynasty that ruled parts of Morocco, North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Sicily, and Turkey at its height. Cairo became the leading cultural centre of the Muslim world, linking the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, and producing pottery, metalwork, tiraz, and rock crystal.

Another fine example of a Fatimid rock crystal ewer is the one that serves as the crown jewel of the Keir Collection of Islamic Art at the Dallas Museum of Art. It dates from the late tenth–early eleventh century, most likely from the court of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Aziz. Carved from a single stone, this ewer is an exquisitely crafted piece, as thin as 1 mm in some parts. The gilded and enameled mount is a nineteenth-century French addition. The body is decorated with an inlaid design of twisting vines which frames a pair of cheetahs, again an example of princely pursuits (Fig. 2).

As is evident in these exceptional vessels, the skill and labour required for fashioning these objects cannot be underestimated. However, despite the absence of extant medieval documents and the lack of archaeological evidence, scholars have reconstructed the carving process of the Cairene workshops. First, a block of rock crystal is roughly shaped to size with a bowsaw. Next, a cavity is hollowed out using a cylindrical tool made of steel, used in combination with an abrasive. The crystal core is then



extracted, leaving a cavity. To widen the cavity, steel wires are used, scratching away at the inner wall. The exterior of the ewer is then shaped using grinding disks and drill bits, before carving the decoration. Given that this was a laboriously creative process, rock crystal ewers were a costly, luxury good, generally commissioned by the caliphs for courtly use. While large ewers were most likely meant for opulent pursuits, the workshops in Cairo were more diversified in their clientele and there does not seem to have been a state-sponsored monopoly on the material, as evident in the various extant utilitarian pieces of humbler designs and functions. For instance, phials and flasks were used to hold makeup and perfumes, while smaller bits were fashioned into chess pieces and seals (Figs. 3 and 4). Nasir Khusraw (d. c. 1072), the Persian Ismaili poet, traveller and philosopher, further corroborates this with his eye-witness account of the working of rock crystal in the Lamp Market of Cairo, suggesting an industry wider than the court. His remarks provide a glimpse into commercial workshops, most likely producing wares for all levels of Cairene society.

Besides its more mundane purposes, rock crystal also was also believed to hold certain talismanic functions and was valued for its amuletic qualities. Renowned for its purity, rarity, and clarity, medieval sources tell us about rock crystal's ability to prevent insomnia and even cure maladies. Some scholars have also suggested the original use of rock crystal vessels as mosque lamps, while others have commented on the association of rock crystal's properties of light, translucency, and clarity with the radiance of God or the Caliph himself.

Mobility has profound implications. We know that objects in the medieval Mediterranean world were objects in motion, travelling and taking on new meanings and functions. While it seems that rock crystal objects were mainly commissioned for secular pursuits in Cairo, they took on various other implications in their adaptation in European society. Many of these objects were given as imperial or diplomatic gifts or as donations to the Church. As has already been mentioned, the clarity and transparency of rock crystal lent to its suitability as a vessel for the display of relics. Thus, objects from the east were repurposed and reused in a different context, taking on new meanings of spirituality and religiosity, while shedding old ones. They were remounted, as seen in both examples, adding to their value, and made into composite objects of disparate materials, taking on new meanings in the churches of Middle Europe. Thus, while we see a transformation of the object from the profane to the sacred in its journey from Egypt to Europe, we still see an equal measure of value ascribed to the



materiality of rock crystal on both shores of the Mediterranean.

Fig. 1. Rock crystal ewer of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Aziz (r. 975–996), Egypt, h. 18 cm. Archives of the Procurator of the Basilica di San Marco, Venice.

Fig. 2. Rock crystal ewer, Egypt, late 10th–11th century, mounts by Jean-Valentin Morel, (France), 1854, rock crystal with enamelled gold mounts, The Keir Collection of Islamic Art on loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.

Fig. 3. Rock crystal flask, Egypt, middle of the 10th century, Fatimid, The Keir Collection of Islamic Art on loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.

Fig. 4. Rock crystal chessman, Egypt, early 10th century, The Keir Collection of Islamic Art on loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.

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## ART AS A CATALYST OF CHANGE IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES

Ambreen Saleh – GPISH 2008



As not only a religion but a way of life, Islam fostered the growth of a distinctive culture with its own unique artistic language. This language is reflected in the art and architecture found throughout the Muslim world. It includes geometric shapes, calligraphy, vegetal patterns, and figural representations.

Art is defined broadly as something that is created with imagination and skill and expresses important ideas or feelings. It is an amalgamation of older forms and new influences from diverse sources.

In many contemporary Muslim societies, art has been a powerful catalyst of change as it has enabled the open, unfettered expression of thought and emotions. In many highly regulated societies in South Asia and the Middle East, art, literature and cultural activities have provided a safe space for dialogue or quiet reflection and contemplation. For example, Expo 2020, which was held in Dubai, UAE, from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022, created a platform for over 190 countries to showcase their culture, achievements and aspirations to a global audience, thereby fostering peace and good multinational relationships, and creating innovative solutions to global challenges. The theme of Expo 2020 was “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future”, and the sub-themes were about mobility, sustainability, and opportunity, among others.

Art has also been used to raise awareness of social issues and give marginalised communities a “voice” and presence. Street theatre, films, and murals have often created a dialogue between the public sector, government and civil society in many Muslim societies, by bringing social issues to the forefront. For example, in Pakistan, the dancer and activist Sheema Kermani is famous for advocating for the rights of women and minority communities through her dance performances, and the Pakistani film producer Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy prompted the government to introduce a law protecting women from honour killings through the success of her Oscar-winning 2015 film, *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness*.

Festivals such as the Art Biennales held in Bangladesh and Pakistan over the last two decades have brought artists from around the world and their creations to public spaces and opened people’s minds to new ideas, thereby encouraging them to challenge the status quo. The 2019 Biennale held in Karachi,

for example, was titled “Flight Interrupted: Eco-Leaks from the Invasion Desk” and focused on the devastating “developmental footprint”. The Biennale created awareness about environmental sustainability and encouraged the audience to reflect upon the damage to the environment caused by their lifestyle.

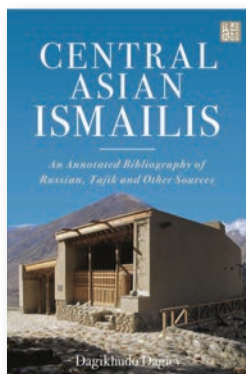
Artists have often captured the most invisible members of society – poor families, daily wage earners, dancing women and transgender people – on their canvases and given them the dignity and grace in their paintings that society itself does not give them. Artists also encourage the rest of society to appreciate and engage with marginalised groups. The artist Iqbal Hussain has immortalised his mother, a courtesan called Cooco, by naming his restaurant, Cooco’s Den, situated near Lahore’s Heera Mandi, or red-light district. His restaurant contains many artistic depictions of the life of his mother and her contemporaries. These are hung in the rooms of the restaurant for visitors to view and understand. This highly popular restaurant has destroyed taboos and allowed members of the public to mingle with life in the Old City’s Heera Mandi through cultural activities and gastronomic delights.

Artists living in societies where Sunni Islam is dominant have expressed their love for God and Imam Ali through the musical forms of Qawwali and Qasida. Their beautiful music has played an important role in creating a sense of identity and social solidarity through an alternative, creative platform. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, a Pakistani Qawwal, not only revived the genre of Qawwali in Pakistan, but by partnering with global artists such as Peter Gabriel, he made Qawwali popular among Muslims and non-Muslims and strengthened Muslim identity in the world of music. His music, for example, has featured in award-winning Hollywood movies such as *Dead Man Walking*.

Even in Muslim societies where poverty is rampant, activities such as dance and music are performed at weddings, birthdays, and other festive occasions, and they provide people with an invaluable outlet for their emotions of joy and hope.

Art has been a powerful catalyst for change in Muslim societies. As the role of information technology becomes increasingly important, electronic mediums are being used to create and distribute art. Digital art, for example, is made using computer software and distributed using social media and internet websites. In this new digital era, art has become part of the curriculum of leading universities and is used to support business sectors such as textiles and media. In the future, art will also be used to drive economic growth in emerging Muslim societies, building upon the role it has already played in social transformation.





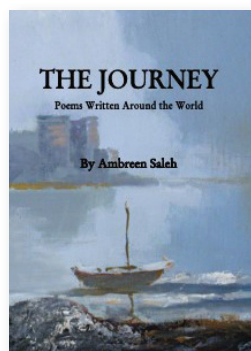
## CENTRAL ASIAN ISMAILIS: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RUSSIAN, TAJIK AND OTHER SOURCES

**Dagikhudo Dagiev – Class of GPISH 2003**

The Shi'i Ismaili Muslims of Central Asia have a complex political history. This open access book is the first English-language study of the Ismaili Muslims in this region, based on analysis of the Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet scholarship about them. It sheds new light on their history and heritage, and also shows how the Ismailis of Central Asia have been understood and presented in academic literature.

The book is divided into three parts. The first covers the spread of the Ismaili *da'wa* (mission) throughout Central Asia – known as Khurasan – from the third/ninth century to modern times. This part examines the prominent poet *da'i* Nasir-i Khusraw, who played an instrumental role in the expansion and development of Ismailism in Badakhshan in the eleventh century, and reveals the impact of his religio-philosophical legacy in the life of the contemporary community. The second part examines the initial interest in Ismaili Studies engendered by Russian imperial rule. It also shows how approaches to the study of Ismailism were affected by 70 years of Communist atheist rule and the demise of the Communist political and ideological system. The third part presents an annotated bibliography of books, articles, and published and unpublished materials, including documents and oral materials on the history, thought and practices of the Ismailis of Central Asia, most of which had not been hitherto easily accessible to Western scholarship.

This comprehensive survey, with its rich bibliography, aims to illuminate the history and historiography of the Ismailis in Central Asia and facilitate further study on the subject by experts around the world.



## THE JOURNEY: POEMS WRITTEN AROUND THE WORLD

**Ambreen Saleh – Class of GPISH 2008**

This book is a collection of poems written in different cities of the world, as far-flung as Karachi, Granada, London and Cairo. The poems describe these cities – and the thoughts and emotions of the poet in each city – tracing not just a physical journey but also a personal and spiritual evolution.

The book opens with a *hadith* and a letter to all the readers of the book, in which the author, a GPISH alumnus, invites the reader to be a part of her experiences and reflections. The author wrote the poems over a period of time, starting from her high-school days in Karachi, extending to her early professional life, continuing into her graduate studies period and culminating in her return to work in her country of origin. Each of the cities included had a profound influence on the poet and the unforgettable moments, and their significance, have been captured in the poems. For example, the poem written in Cairo describes the experience of watching a Sufi dance performance, whereas the poem written in northern Pakistan captures the scenic beauty of the mountains. A poem written in Granada reflects upon the fleeting glory of the Muslim empire in Spain. The book is decorated with beautiful images that complement the poems.

Readers may identify with some of the thoughts expressed in the poems and be compelled to visit these cities for themselves! They may also realise how life itself is a journey, one which is guiding and moulding the traveller, if he or she is open to change.



## HAZRAT ALI

**Rashida Noormohamed-Hunzai – IoE Class of 1982**

Written in an accessible format, the book attempts to shed light on Hazrat 'Ali's personality and character. It is a comprehensive account of Imam 'Ali's life using both Sunni and Shi'a primary sources to portray a balanced account of Hazrat 'Ali. The book also provides quotes from Nahju'l Balaghah, which the author has translated specifically for this book as its current two translations are not accurate. The book has been written primarily for the teachers, parents and religious educators who like to read an academic and yet accessible book about the life of Hazrat 'Ali, the first Imam of the Shi'a Muslims.

## IIS LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE



The IIS Department of Communications and Development is delighted to announce the launch of the new IIS website, which benefits from a complete redesign and the addition of several exciting new features. Visitors will enjoy faster and more intelligent search functionality and the way information is displayed has been upgraded, making it easier to find relevant information quicker. Key new features include redesigned alumni, publications and Learning Centre pages, and searchable listings on our news and events pages. We invite you to explore the new IIS website (<https://iis.ac.uk/>) and hope you enjoy the improved user experience.

### OBITUARY OF SULTONIYOZ KHOJANIYOZOV – CLASS OF GPISH 1999, (27/07/1962 – 26/07/2021)

#### Dr Otambek Mastibekov – *Class of GPISH 2002*

Sultoniyozi was one of the first three Tajik students of the IIS' GPISH programme in 1996. Sultoniyozi's educational background was influenced by the Soviet way of learning, thinking and methodology, but he adapted to Western liberal education in a very short period of time. As a GPISH student (1996–1998), and afterwards as a graduate student at SOAS, University of London, his teachers recognised him and treated him as an advanced intellectual. He was neither a prolific writer nor a man running after a career. But, his distinguishing feature was that he used his knowledge as a light for any student who approached him, to direct him/her in the right direction. Therefore, on hearing about his death, any person who knew him would say: "We lost a great intellectual." May his soul rest in peace!





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Dr Daftary. Co-Director of the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS)

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### Page 6:

IIS GPISG and STEP graduates. Image provided by graduates

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### Pages 10-12:

ACG, ECG, NACG group photos with alumni, speakers, and guest faculty

### Page 13:

Nayab Tufail (top), Amjad Ali (bottom)

### Page 14:

Shakeel Ahmad Shah (top), Irum Iqbal (below), Samaneh Niktinat (bottom)

### Page 15:

Shehzeen Sunderji (top), Tanya Panjwani (below)

### Page 18:

Image (top left): Nausheen Hoosein. Image credit Nausheen Hoosein

Image (right) Rock crystal ewer of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Aziz (r. 975–996), Egypt, h. 18 cm. Archives of the Procurator of the Basilica di San Marco, Venice. Image credit Nausheen Hoosein

Image (bottom) Rock crystal ewer, Egypt, late 10th–11th century, mounts by Jean-Valentin Morel, (France), 1854, rock crystal with enamelled gold mounts, The Keir Collection of Islamic Art on loan to the Dallas Museum of Art. Image credit Nausheen Hoosein

### Page 19:

Image (top) Rock crystal flask, Egypt, middle of the 10th century, Fatimid, The Keir Collection of Islamic Art on loan to the Dallas Museum of Art. Image credit Nausheen Hoosein

Image (bottom) Rock crystal chessman, Egypt, early 10th century, The Keir Collection of Islamic Art on loan to the Dallas Museum of Art. Image credit Nausheen Hoosein

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Book cover for Central Asian Ismailis: An Annotated Bibliography of Russian, Tajik and Other Sources. Publisher: *I.B.Tauris Bloomsbury* in association with *The Institute of Ismaili Studies*

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