

Update

Edition 24
2025



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

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Update

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The Institute of Ismaili Studies





PROFESSOR

Zayn Kassam

Director

The Institute of Ismaili Studies

The year 2025 was both successful and challenging for The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS). It was the first year of our ten-year Strategic Plan. Our efforts have therefore centred on gradual and careful alignment: ensuring that our resources, programmes, and institutional capacities support the long-term priorities articulated in the Plan.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
Rehana M. Virani



We undertook a substantial organisational restructuring in order to deliver on the priorities set out in our Strategic Plan. The restructure has entailed dismantling and reformulating departments and offices to break down silos and create better synergies among workstreams. We have also hired needed expertise to ensure that IIS remains resilient, focused, and fit for purpose in a changing global landscape.

One of the key priorities of the Strategic Plan is leveraging our knowledge resources to reach the wider public.

In 2025, we made progress in this area through the publication of a number of noteworthy and easily readable World of Islam books, such as those of the notable Harvard professor, Ali Asani, among others. We have also begun producing books for children, as well as a puzzle. Another series we have begun is titled Read and Reflect, with the pilot publication focusing on two qasidas accompanied by explanatory essays, in a size and length that is easy to carry and read. These publications reflect our commitment to making IIS knowledge resources available to non-specialist audiences, while remaining grounded in scholarly rigour and intellectual integrity.

In addition, we are reviewing all our postgraduate and educational programmes. These reviews provide us with the opportunity to reflect on our training of educators and graduate students, to ensure that our students receive an excellent education and are equipped to teach children and youth in the Ismaili community, while our educators are able to serve the Ismaili community in rapidly evolving times.

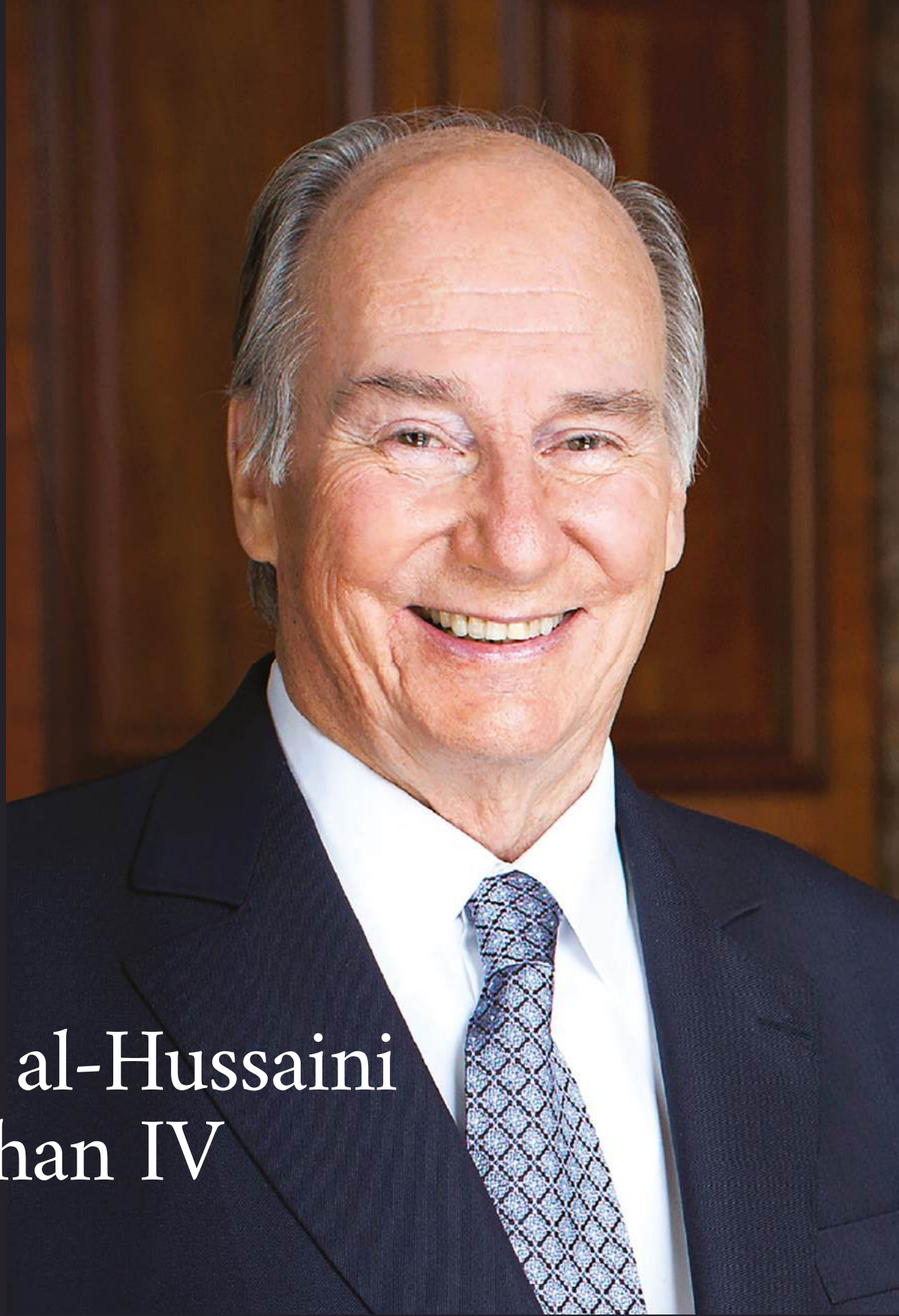


In 2025, we also made meaningful progress on the “digital turn” of our Strategic Plan, expanding the reach and accessibility of The Institute’s work. Key sections of our website are now available in four additional languages alongside English, reflecting our commitment to global audiences. We have strengthened our engagement across social media platforms, broadened access to our publications through digital, audio, and Open Access formats, and launched a dedicated eCommerce platform to facilitate access to our products. We are producing short educational and informative videos featured on the IIS YouTube channel as well as Ismaili TV. We are also embracing the digital turn in our research, teaching, and creation of curriculum. Together, these developments mark an important step in ensuring that The Institute’s scholarship and resources are more visible, inclusive, and readily available.

In January of this year, we received approval for our Operational Plan and Budget for 2026, which will mark the second year of our Strategic Plan. This approval allows us to move forward as we continue to implement our strategic priorities in a measured and sustainable manner.

A key area of focus for us this year is working on the revision of the Primary Curriculum.


None of this work would be possible without the support of those who contribute in myriad ways to the life of The Institute. In addition to the Board of Governors, alumni, staff and students, we deeply value our supporters and thank them for their continued confidence in our endeavours. The engagement and commitment of all our stakeholders remain central to the work of IIS, now and in the years to come.



His Highness

Prince
Karim al-Hussaini
Aga Khan IV

1936 – 2025

A blurred background image of a room. On the left, a person's shoulder in a dark blue suit is visible. In the center, a glowing yellow lamp with a conical shade is out of focus. The background shows a wall with a blue and white patterned curtain or wallpaper.

A lifelong commitment to promoting education was a cornerstone of Prince Karim Aga Khan IV's global vision for a better world. In 1957, when he acceded to the Imamate of Ismaili Muslims, two major events heralded developments that would characterise the remaining years of the 20th century. The first was the independence of Ghana on 6 March 1957, which marked the official process of decolonisation in Africa and in other parts of the world. The second was the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik 1 on 4 October 1957, which gave rise to the Space Age and initiated a geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union that impacted the so-called developing world for decades. These events defined the socio political and ideological orientations of many of the countries in Africa and Asia where the Ismaili communities then lived.

AUTHOR

Dr Mohamed M. Keshavjee

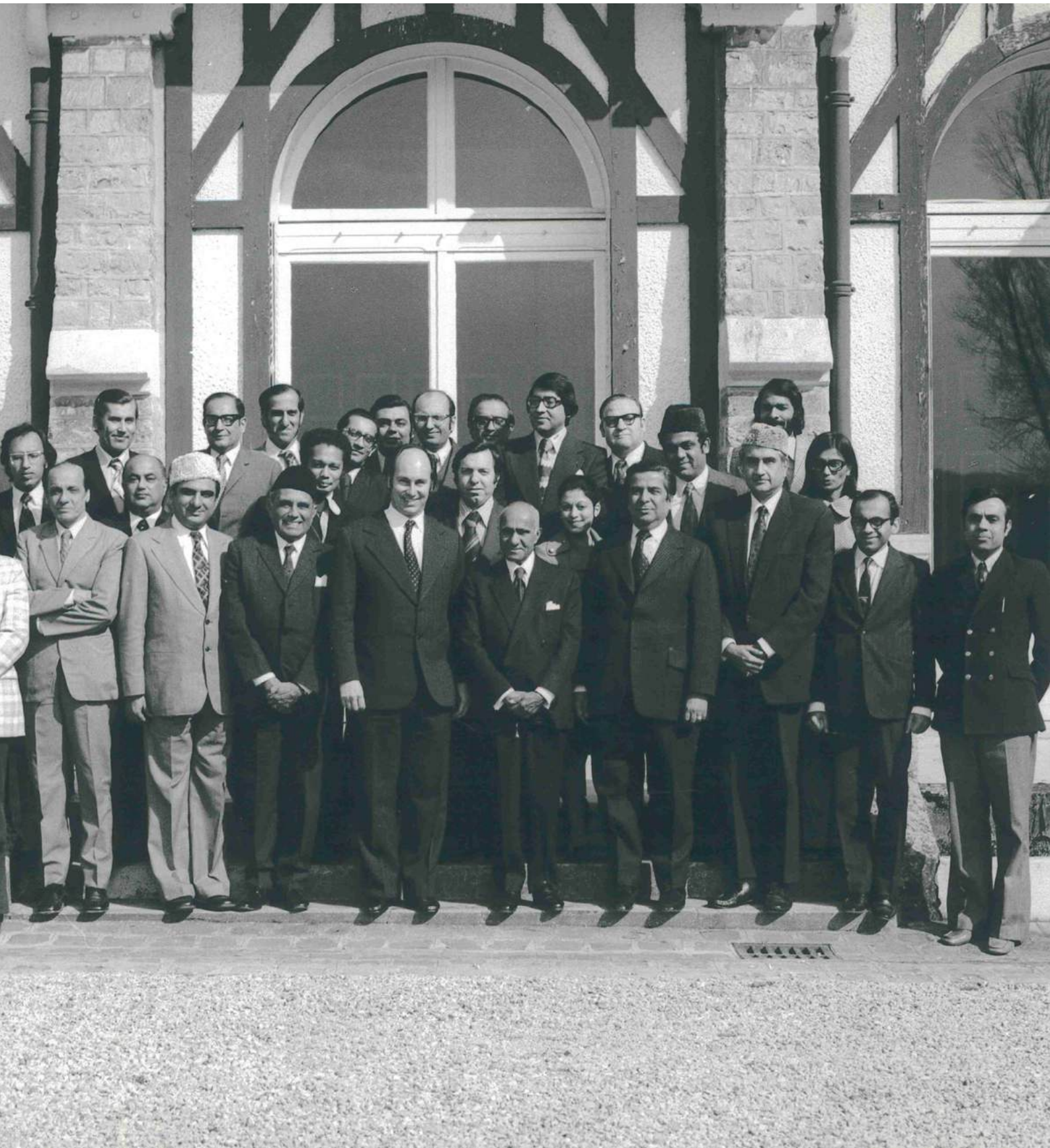
The vision of the Aga Khan was clearly articulated immediately following the independence of Tanganyika, marked by ceremonies which he attended on 9 December 1961. On 10 December, he arrived in Nairobi, Kenya, to open the new Aga Khan Secondary School where he said:

“I feel assured that the anxieties caused by multiracial education are felt today more keenly by the parents than by the children. Surely, it is a fact of which we can take advantage. If we sincerely seek to build a country which under African rule permits people of different races to live happily, the page to start it is in the schools. If Mohammed and Jonathan and Njoroge can take [their] school certificate together and play football together, the chances are that they [will] get to know and understand each other far better than their parents were able to.”

In the unfolding decolonisation process in East Africa, the Aga Khan's contribution was mainly in the field of education, healthcare, low-cost housing, and economic development. In Kenya, following the building of a state-of-the-art hospital in 1958, he established a nursing school attached to it, which attracted students from across Eastern and Southern Africa. This commitment to good education continued despite the nationalisation of schools that took place in subsequent years in countries such as Pakistan and Tanzania, and was accelerated on denationalisation through the improvement of the schools run by the Aga Khan Education Services which remained operative in such countries.

An important milestone to keep in mind is the expulsion of all Asians from Uganda in 1972, which included a large segment of the Ismaili community, who were forced to relocate to Western countries as displaced persons. This migration created a demand for appropriate religious education for Ismaili children and a curriculum suitable for their second diaspora in the Western world. As the Imam of the Ismailis, the Aga Khan consulted with national leaders of the global Ismaili community and established The Institute of Ismaili Studies in 1977, which became a hub for developing religious education curricula over the next half-century.





PHOTOGRAPH

His Highness Aga Khan IV with Ismaili community leadership and scholars at the Paris Conference in 1975.

Credit: Ismaili Special Collections Unit,
The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

The Aga Khan always believed that a good curriculum in the hands of an incompetent teacher could cause untold harm to children. Consequently, he established a high-level teacher education programme to match the new curriculum, which is now implemented in many countries where Ismailis reside today. In tandem with the religious education curriculum and teacher training, over the past 50 years, The Institute has developed a number of human resource development programmes, notably the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH). Speaking at the GPISH graduation ceremony in London commemorating the 25th anniversary of the IIS in October 2003, he said:

“ The Muslim world today is heir to a faith and a culture that stands among the leading civilisations in the world... This message is still potent in the Muslim world today, although it is sometimes clouded, distorted and deformed by political interests and by struggles for power over the minds and hearts of people. There are attempts at transforming what are meant to be fluid, progressive, open-ended, intellectually informed, and spiritually inspired traditions of thought, into hardened, monolithic, absolutist and obscurantist positions”

PHOTOGRAPH

His Highness Aga Khan IV in conversation with IIS leadership and staff during his visit in 1981.

Credit: Ismaili Special Collections Unit,
The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

In this context he emphasised why he saw good education as a way forward to address the malaise of the Muslim world. In 1988, the Ugandan government under President Yoweri Museveni took the bold step of returning the Imamat properties that were illegally appropriated by Idi Amin's government. The Aga Khan, on taking back most of these properties, decided to reboot the Ismaili health and educational development structure in Uganda. Today, over 30 years later, Uganda is host to many institutions of the AKDN , including a faculty of Health Sciences of the Aga Khan University in Uganda. Within weeks of his passing, the Aga Khan's daughter, Princess Zahra, in her capacity as Pro-Chancellor of the Aga Khan University, conferred diplomas and degrees on 86 Ugandan students in nursing and midwifery.

The Aga Khan Humanities Project (AKHP) in Central Asia, established under the direction of Aga Khan IV in 1997, is another example of how he deployed education, in this case the teaching of the humanities, to change the destiny of an entire region in the aftermath of the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Operating primarily in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, today AKHP collaborates with 60 academic institutions in that region.

With regard to the built environment, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), another initiative of Aga Khan IV, has become the umbrella organisation that subsumes the activities of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, established in 1977; the Aga Khan Programme for Islamic Architecture at Harvard and MIT, established in 1979; and the Historic Cities Programme, established in 1992. The AKTC plays a formative role in architectural education by advancing knowledge, encouraging critical reflection, and promoting best practices around the built environment in diverse cultural contexts. The Historic Cities Programme functions as a living laboratory for architects, planners, and conservation specialists, demonstrating how design education can be grounded in social, environmental, and historical realities.





PHOTOGRAPH

Mr Shams Vellani receiving His Highness Aga Khan IV as he arrives at the IIS at 14/15 Great James Street with Mr Amirali Bhatia and Mr Anil Ishani.

Image credit: Ismaili Special Collections Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.



In the field of media, the Aga Khan played a critical role in East Africa in establishing a responsible press as an integral part of a post-colonial democratic order. His endeavours over 60 years gave rise to the founding of the Graduate School of Media and Communications, now part of the Aga Khan University, which has campuses in six countries, three of which are in East Africa.

In 2006, the Aga Khan established a Global Centre for Pluralism (GCP) in partnership with the Canadian government, recognising the deleterious effects of conflict on human development. The GCP, among its various mandates, studies the pathology of conflict to anticipate trends and develop pre-emptive measures to avoid conflict. A pluralistic vision of society, coupled with a commitment to education and research, became the guiding star of the Aga Khan's vision.

The late Aga Khan undoubtedly was a longitudinal thinker par excellence. Yet at the same time he was a pragmatist who understood the need to provide for his community's daily life in fields such as healthcare, housing, ongoing education, and income regeneration. Perhaps his greatest strength was his ability to bridge his visionary aspirations with the daily realities faced by millions of people worldwide. He viewed human beings as the greatest asset, providing them with the agency to determine their own destinies, a principle apparent in every project he set up for their betterment.

His Highness Prince Karim al-Hussaini Aga Khan IV accomplished all of this with consummate skill and dexterity, purely by virtue of his willingness to listen to the beneficiaries' ideas about what they considered a happy life. Using this as a yardstick, he made them principal partners in their own well-being, a strategy that proved to be the most reliable measure of success. As a prince of development, he understood the aspirations of each one of his subjects and, by making them his partners, he unleashed their greatest potential to improve their quality of life.





PART ONE

Strategic Plan

Producing, Preserving, and Propagating Scholarship for a Changing World

At the heart of the work of The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) is the conviction that knowledge that is thoughtfully produced, carefully preserved, and widely shared enriches individuals and communities alike. With the new Strategic Plan for 2025–2035, The Institute has articulated a clear vision for the decade ahead that honours this conviction while responding creatively to the needs of our time.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
Rehana M. Virani

AUTHOR

Dr Fatima Dhanani



PHOTOGRAPH

Professor Zayn Kassam in conversation about the IIS Strategic Plan with Karina Govindji.
Credit: Rehana M. Virani.

GPISH Students in Victoria Hall.
Credit: Rehana M. Virani.

His Highness Aga Khan IV meeting with IIS staff and leadership during his visit to the IIS in 1981.
Credit: Ismaili Special Collections Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

IIS has grounded its Strategic Plan in a comprehensive environmental scan that examined global forces shaping scholarship and the needs of the Ismaili community, including climate change, digital transformation, mental health, migration, and ethical questions in fields such as biomedicine.

The scan showed that while people across the globe are more connected, in their societies they face old and new stresses brought on by political crises, forced displacement, and rapid cultural change, as well as the devastating effects of climate change. The scan and feedback from its stakeholders highlighted the need for IIS to situate its work within these wider realities, so that its research, teaching, and outreach remain rooted in evidence-based research while speaking directly to the pressing issues of our time.

Producing knowledge continues to be the foundation of The Institute's mission. Over the coming decade, IIS will expand research in areas of Qur'anic Studies, Ismaili thought, Shi'i intellectual traditions, and regional histories, including new series of publications to enhance understanding of Ismaili communities in South Asia and Central Asia. New critical editions and translations are planned for texts in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Gujarati, and Pamiri languages, making key sources accessible to scholars and other interested readers. More attention will also be paid to eras where we have less research coverage, and contemporary times. Work is already underway on our multi-volume Qur'anic commentary series that brings together linguistic analysis, historical context, and diverse interpretive voices; our Ikhwan al-Safa series, our Encyclopaedia Islamica volumes, and the forthcoming Concise Encyclopaedia of Ismailism.

Preserving knowledge remains a key priority. IIS stewards one of the world's most important collections of Ismaili and Shi'i manuscripts, rare texts, and oral histories. The Ismaili Special Collections Unit has preserved more than 3,000 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, and Indic languages. IIS also continues to expand its Oral History Project, which has recorded hundreds of interviews with elders from diverse regions, ensuring that lived experiences are preserved and shared. The Ismaili Heritage Project has identified and documented more than 1,600 historical Ismaili sites across 56 countries, strengthening the record of the community's cultural and architectural heritage that shape our collective identity.

Propagating knowledge is where the work of IIS reaches learners most directly. The Strategic Plan prioritises exploring pathways for IIS eventually to become its own degree-awarding institution, while strengthening its core academic programmes such as the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) and the Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP). Human Resource Development for the Jamat will continue through the training of wa'ezeen, Continued Professional Development for STEP graduates teaching in the field and Academic Directors of Bait ul-Ilm programmes, and induction programmes for newly appointed office bearers.

Lifelong learning will also expand with increased publications for non-specialist audiences, new hybrid online courses, podcasts, and short video series that bring scholarship to broader audiences. Curriculum work will continue, with a re-visioned Pre-School and Primary curriculum, while work with ITREBs on early childhood education is underway. The final modules of the secondary curriculum are also being worked on. Adult education frameworks are being tested to ensure that learners of all ages encounter their tradition as a living, ethical, and intellectually vibrant heritage.

Across all three of the above-mentioned areas, the Strategic Plan enables collaboration, by breaking down silos, and enhancing relevance across departments, with AKDN partners, with Ismaili Community institutions, and with global academic peers.

As IIS looks toward the next decade, this Strategic Plan invites scholars and students in relevant fields, alumni, donors, and friends to join in a shared endeavour to ensure that knowledge continues to be produced with integrity, preserved with care, and shared with purpose.

PHOTOGRAPH

STEP students in Victoria Hall Garden.

Image credit: Rehana M. Virani.









PART TWO

An Oasis Of Knowledge

IIS at Global Encounters Festival 2025

When The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) team arrived in Dubai for the Global Encounters Festival (GEF) 2025, it felt a bit like finding an oasis in the desert — a place of reflection, connection, and shared curiosity amid the buzz of a gathering of Ismailis from all over the world. From 20 to 28 July, the AKDN Pavilion at the Dubai World Trade Centre became our home away from home, with thousands of visitors from the global Ismaili community passing through. The festival's vibrant setting offered a special moment for IIS not just to showcase its work, but to share it in conversation — to meet, learn, and be inspired together.

PHOTOGRAPH

Dr Farhad Daftary and His Excellency
Dr Khaled Al Dhaheri at Ismaili Centre Dubai.
Credit: The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

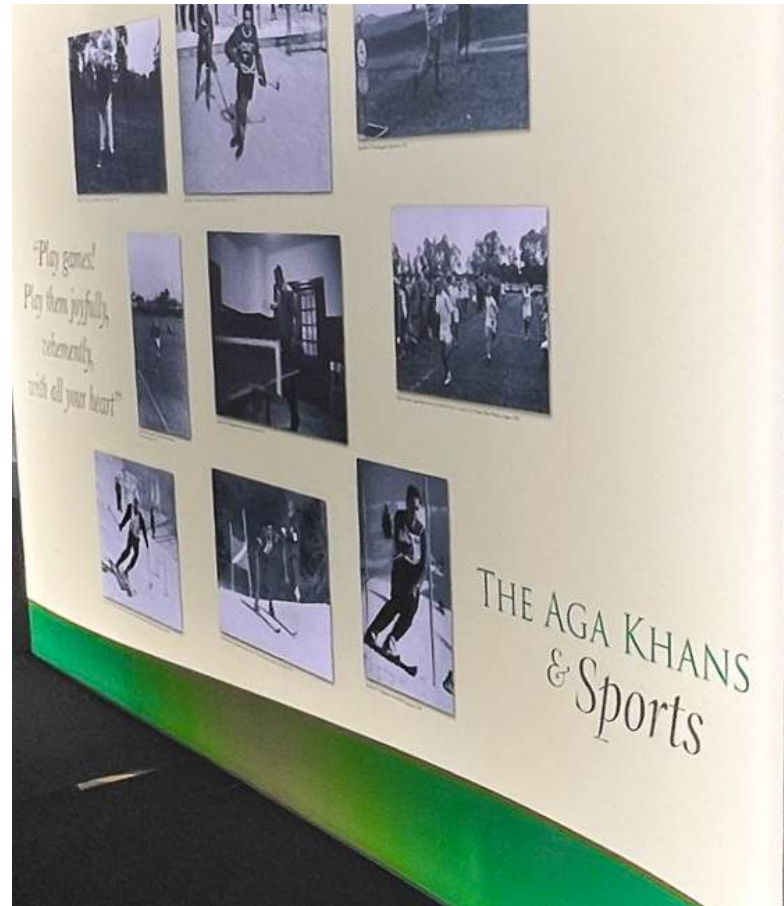
AUTHOR

Selina Kassam Ramji

Information Overload — and the Human Touch

Anyone who has browsed the IIS website knows that there is a wealth of material on history, heritage, Muslim contributions to knowledge, and more — deep dives into scholarship, meticulous research, and rich archives. But at GEF, the challenge was to transform all of that into something you could literally walk into, touch and explore. Our interactive booth featured digital content on Muslim Contributions to Science and Ismaili Heritage Sites, along with short films like *Summits of Courage*, and engaging activities for visitors of all ages.

It was delightful to see people's eyes light up as they explored these themes — young and old discovering stories they might never have encountered, asking questions and connecting over shared history. In a world where information can be overwhelming, these personal interactions reminded us that knowledge isn't just digital or textual — it's lived, felt, and shared face-to-face. Thousands stopped by over the week, and those conversations were often the best part of the experience.



PHOTOGRAPH

IIS Staff at Global Encounters Festival in Dubai: Selina Kassam Ramji, Naushin Premji, Fatima Dhanani, Shellina Karmali, Alnoor Merchant, Naguib Kheraj, Fayaz Alibhai, Moez Rajwani and Imran Khan.

Image credit: The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.

THE AGA KHANS and golf, soccer, tennis



Aga Khan III playing golf in Toronto, August 1913



Aga Khan IV playing tennis, East Africa, 1961



Aga Khan IV in a soccer game between Harvard University and MIT, Harvard, Mass., October 1938



Aga Khan IV with water polo team at Harvard University, 1938

"Therefore I shall speak to my heirs of the vital importance of exercise. And since to take joy in your activities is one of the secrets of health, I should counsel them to play games. ... Knowing something of tennis and a little golf, I can advise them to play these games. Knowing very little of cricket except as a spectator, I must be content to cheer them joyfully, whenever they play."

"I was born right-handed, I had to be taught to write with my left hand."



Connecting the Past, Nurturing the Present, Shaping the Future

What made our presence at the Festival truly memorable was how it brought together the many threads of IIS work. One standout was The Aga Khans and Sports, an exhibition that explored how His Highnesses Aga Khan III and Aga Khan IV saw sport as more than physical activity — they saw sport as a way to foster wellbeing, teamwork, discipline, and community joy. This blend of heritage and contemporary relevance resonated with visitors in unexpected ways.

There were also inspiring conversations and panels — like the discussion with Dr Farhad Daftary and Professor Nacim Pak-Shiraz on the evolution of Ismaili studies, and Contours of Continuity and Change, with Dr Fayaz Alibhai, Dr Ulrike Al-Khamis (Aga Khan Museum) and Shiraz Allibhai (Aga Khan Trust for Culture), which explored heritage projects from Mali to India to Syria. These sessions grounded our academic work in stories of identity, resilience and meaning.

One of the most heartwarming encounters was Tradition Meets Tomorrow, a gathering of IIS alumni, supporters, and friends which included a lively and engaging panel discussion featuring renowned Pakistani singer and philanthropist Shahzad Roy alongside seasoned journalist and documentary filmmaker Jazzmin Jiwa. Old classmates met after decades; laughter and warm embraces filled the space. Hearing alumni reflect on how IIS shaped their outlooks — academically and personally — was a beautiful reminder of the lasting impact of shared learning.





Unapologetic Promotion and Gratitude

If you want to relive some of the magic or explore our Festival highlights, the IIS YouTube channel has recordings of some sessions and discussions from the booth and panels. And if you are curious to learn more about the topics we showcased — from Muslim scientific heritage to Ismaili history and identity — we invite you to browse our multimedia and research pages on the IIS website.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who made our presence at GEF 2025 possible — the team who planned content and logistics, the colleagues who hosted visitors with boundless enthusiasm, and all those who stopped by, asked a question, or shared a story. These encounters underscored something simple yet profound: knowledge matters most when it opens hearts as well as minds.



PHOTOGRAPH

His Highness Aga Khan IV representing Great Britain at the World Ski Championships in Chamonix. February 1962.

Image credit: AKDN





PART THREE

Stewards Of The Earth

An Ismaili Perspective on Climate and the Elements

In his book *Is a River Alive?* Robert Macfarlane searches for the answer to this question in the Los Cedros forest in Ecuador. He is accompanied by Giuliana Furciwhi, a mycologist at Harvard University, who is looking for a rare species of fungus. However, the book is not purely about their respective quests. As they trace their way through this 1.5-million-year-old forest, we learn that Giuliana is also dealing with grief over the recent loss of her father. Throughout the journey, Macfarlane gives us glimpses of her struggle with sorrow.

PHOTOGRAPH

Batura Glacier, Gojal, Hunza,
Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.

Credit: Amjad Ali (C) 2022

AUTHOR

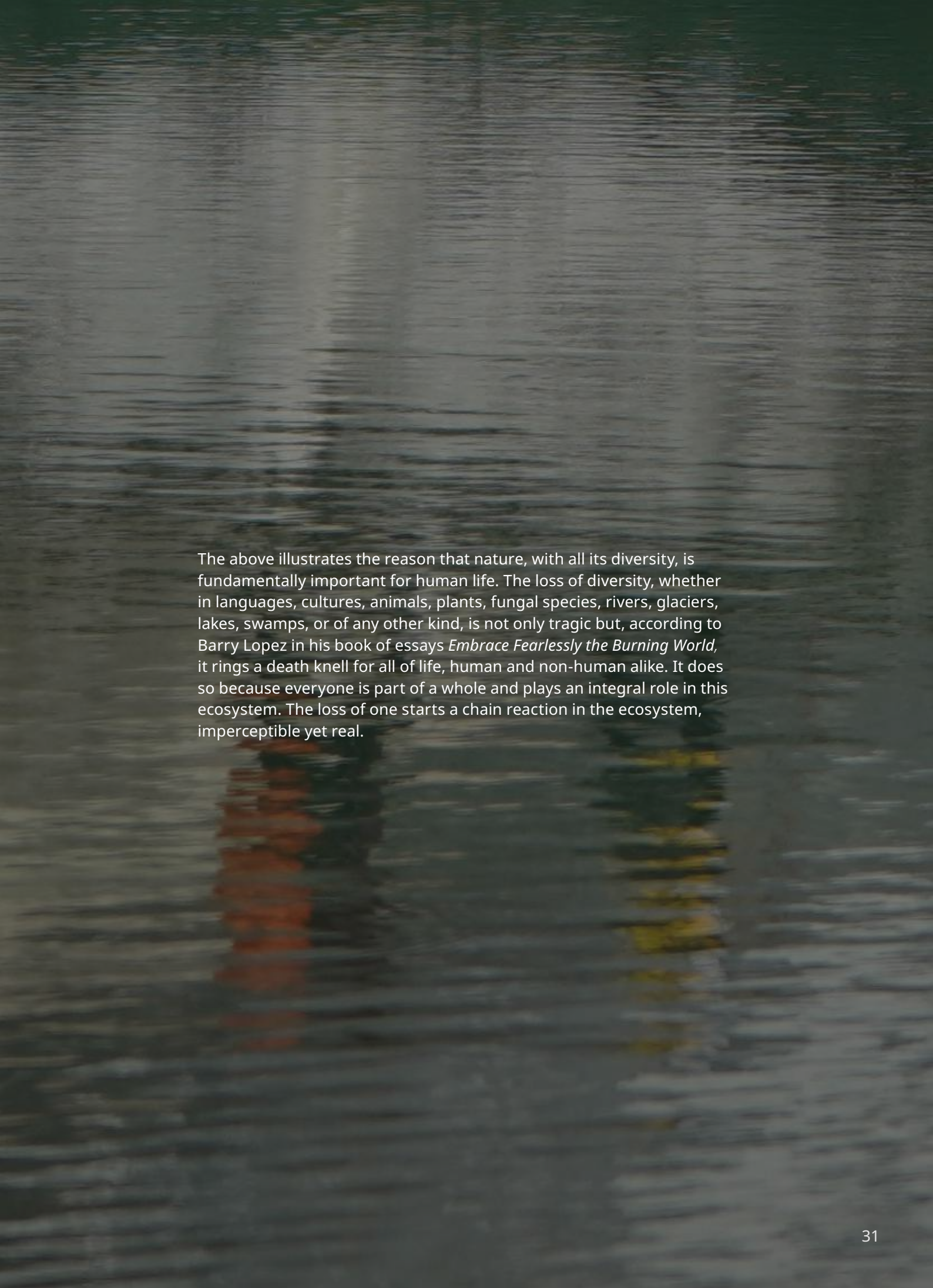
Qudsia Shah

At the end of their journey, however, the forest, river, and all that is contained therein teach her a valuable lesson and help her come to terms with her bereavement:

*Through observing our teachers, the fungi,
we can learn to accept cycles, the end of cycles,
the beginning of others.*

‘What is the word in English?’ says Guliana.
‘*Be ... wilderment?* Yes. The forest and the river
have *be-wilderred* my soul again. I had taken
on heavy task and I needed lightening.’
Her eyes are wet.

‘I was cracked and scared when I landed in
Quito. I thought I’d lost the power, that death
had drawn it from me. I felt *heavy* with lifelessness.
But then meeting the forest, the river, you all
– these things filled me up with life again, and
I felt my power return, and I was ready to greet
the *Psilocybes* [a fungus species] when they
were ready to greet me!’ (p+. 106)



The above illustrates the reason that nature, with all its diversity, is fundamentally important for human life. The loss of diversity, whether in languages, cultures, animals, plants, fungal species, rivers, glaciers, lakes, swamps, or of any other kind, is not only tragic but, according to Barry Lopez in his book of essays *Embrace Fearlessly the Burning World*, it rings a death knell for all of life, human and non-human alike. It does so because everyone is part of a whole and plays an integral role in this ecosystem. The loss of one starts a chain reaction in the ecosystem, imperceptible yet real.

The *Elemental* conference, scheduled to take place on 26–27 March 2026 at The Institute of Ismaili Studies should be viewed in this context: of responding to a critical need of our time. Climate change, loss of biodiversity, and the associated threats pose an existential danger to all that we hold dear. Through the lens of Ismaili communities' engagement with literary and artistic expressions, the conference will explore how, in different periods, including our own, Ismailis have engaged and continue to engage with the elements of earth, water, air, fire, and ether in all their physical and metaphorical manifestations – in Ismaili religious poetry (*qasida*, *maddoh*, and *ginan*), written by *pirs* and *da'is*; in philosophical and theological texts, folklore, and indigenous knowledge which they have inherited from previous knowledge systems; and in modern poetical, visual, and analytical expressions. This conference on the elements is a first attempt to formally and systematically encourage research on our past and present understanding of an 'Ismaili' perspective on the elements in particular, and what it means to be stewards of the earth more broadly.

Beyond the conference, there is a growing sense of urgency among staff, faculty, and students to address the threat of climate change and environmental degradation, while staying within the institutional mandate of research, publication, teaching and curriculum development. In recent years, there has been a significant advancement in exploring these themes at The Institute. Some of the more noteworthy initiatives include the formation of a Climate Change and Sustainability Working Group that was tasked with, among other things, developing a comprehensive strategy for addressing climate change, environmental sustainability, and related issues for the IIS. This initiative has now moved to the Director's Office. A series of climate change and environmental films, followed by discussion, was shown periodically at the Aga Khan Library. We have held a couple of talks on environmental issues at the Aga Khan Centre, as well as online—these latter organized by IIS Alumni. Staff have contributed blogposts on what they are doing for environmental remediation, and a circulating book library encourages reuse. Many staff are cycling to work.

At the secondary level, numerous units within the curriculum, particularly those in the modules on *Muslim Devotional and Ethical Literature*, *Ethical Pathways to Human Development*, and *The Qur'an and Its Interpretations*, already engage students in instruction and dialogue on environmental care and climate change. These discussions explore how ecological concerns intersect with the lived experiences of communities across diverse contemporary contexts.

Faculty actively integrate these themes, with a particular focus on Muslim environmental ethics. Another pedagogical approach, especially when teaching modules on colonialism, adopts both a retrospective and forward-looking lens: examining the historical roots of climate change in the extractive logics of colonialism while also highlighting how present-day neoliberal capitalist systems continue to perpetuate extractive and environmentally damaging practices.

These are just a few examples of the many ways in which The Institute, remaining within its mandate of teaching, research, and publications, is committed to addressing one of the most pressing challenges of our time: the threat of climate change and environmental degradation.

Qudsia Shah



PHOTOGRAPH

The *Basmala* in the *Sini* Style of Calligraphy

Courtesy the late Majid and Roshan Virani and family.

PART FOUR

IIS Launches Living Islam

Muslim Expressions of Faith by Ali Asani

At a recent book event in Toronto, readers gathered to discuss Professor Ali Asani's *Living Islam: Muslim Expressions of Faith*. The conversation provided a useful entry point into the book's main argument: Islam is not a single, fixed template; it is lived, interpreted, and expressed through culture, history, and everyday experience.

Asani challenges two common ways of thinking. The first reduces Islam to a checklist of ‘correct practice’, as if faith can be measured only by rules. The second treats anything Muslims do, whether good or bad, as automatically caused by religion alone. Both approaches oversimplify real lives and ignore context, including class, gender, language, migration, colonial histories, and modern politics.



The book adopts a cultural studies lens, which is appropriate because religion does not exist in a vacuum. It takes shape in specific places and times, and it changes as communities change. Context, however, is not an excuse for injustice; it is a tool for clearer moral judgement, helping people respond with seriousness rather than stereotypes.

A central thread in the book is the Prophet Muhammad, who functions as a shared reference point across diverse Muslim traditions. Yet devotion is not limited to one form. Asani highlights how people encounter faith through poetry, music, calligraphy, storytelling, and ritual. Art becomes a way of approaching what is difficult to put into ordinary words. It can carry memory, emotion, and ethical aspiration in ways that argument alone cannot.

Living Islam is most persuasive when it insists on religious literacy: learning to recognise the diversity of Muslim expression without turning difference into division. For general readers, the payoff is practical. The book helps replace loud, media-driven caricatures with a quieter, more accurate picture of how most Muslims actually live their faith: through relationships, responsibilities, and an ongoing search for meaning.

ALI S. ASANI

**LIVING
ISLAM**
MUSLIM
EXPRESSIONS
OF FAITH

WORLD OF ISLAM



PART FIVE

Stories That Shape Ethical Lives

Exploring Wen-chin Ouyang's
Ethical Living Through Stories:
Encounters with Adab

In a time marked by global crises, declining interest in the humanities, and an abundance of competing narratives online, storytelling remains a powerful way to reflect on how to live well. In a recent conversation, Wen-chin Ouyang, Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature at SOAS University of London, spoke with Dr Hasan al-Khooe, Research Associate at IIS, about the ideas behind her book *Ethical Living Through Stories: Encounters with Adab*.

PHOTOGRAPH
Professor Wen-chin Ouyang

The book emerged from both personal and intellectual crossroads. Written during the COVID-19 pandemic and amid a broader crisis facing modern languages and the humanities, it responds to a central question: how can literature and storytelling demonstrate their value beyond the classroom? Addressed to a general audience, including young adults, the book forms part of the World of Islam series, which seeks to make complex ideas accessible without sacrificing intellectual rigour.

At the heart of Professor Ouyang's work is *adab*, a classical Arabic concept that resists simple translation. Often understood as literature, *adab* also encompasses manners, conduct, and ethical formation. Drawing on Arabic, Chinese, and European narrative traditions, Ouyang highlights well-known stories – from *The Thousand and One Nights* to epics, myths, and modern popular culture – as part of a shared global heritage of ethical reflection. These stories, she argues, were never only entertainment; they are ways of educating individuals and communities about caring for each other, communal and societal responsibility, and informed judgment.

Rather than prescribing behaviour, storytelling allows readers to witness the consequences of action and inaction in a palatable manner. Through narrative, passion is tempered by reflection, and immediate reaction is factored with longer-term impact on family and community. In this sense, stories cultivate discernment rather than obedience.

In an age shaped by misinformation and curated online personas, Professor Ouyang suggests that enduring narratives continue to offer a counterbalance. By returning to stories grounded in love, loyalty, and communal coherence, the humanities remind us that living ethically and enjoying life are not opposing goals but deeply connected ones.



Listen to an author
conversation, with Professor
Ouyang and Hasan al-Khooee.

WEN-CHIN OUYANG

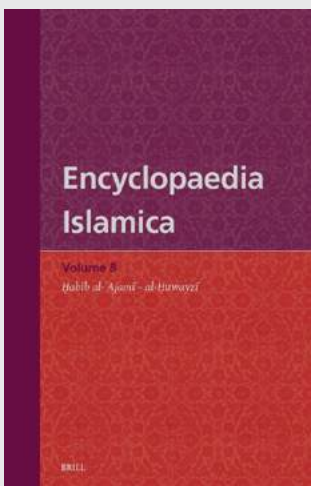
**ETHICAL
LIVING
THROUGH
STORIES**
ENCOUNTERS
WITH ADAB

WORLD OF ISLAM



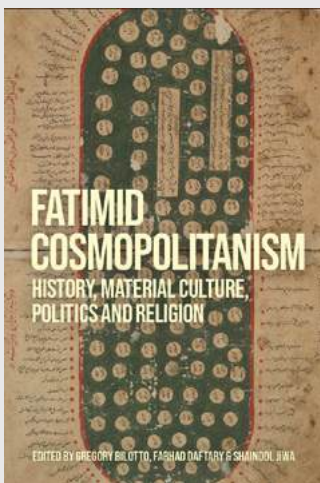
Ethical Living through Stories: Encounters with Adab

Author: Wen-chin Ouyang, 2025.



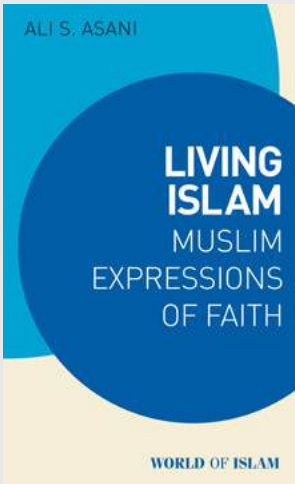
Encyclopaedia Islamica: Volume 8

Editor-in-Chief: Farhad Daftary, 2025.



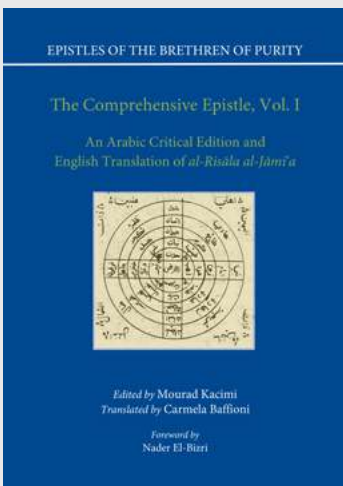
Fatimid Cosmopolitanism: History, Material Culture, Politics and Religion

Edited by: Gregory Bilotto, Farhad Daftary
& Shainool Jiwa, 2025.



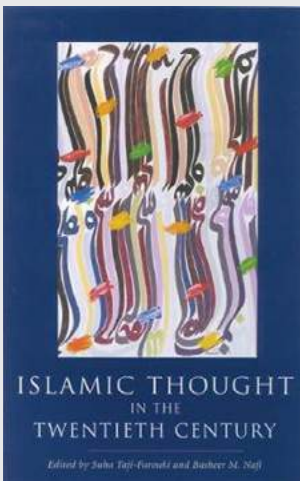
Living Islam: Muslim Expressions of Faith

Author: Ali Asani, 2025.



The Comprehensive Epistle, Vol. I: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of *al-Risala al-Jami'a*

Edited by: Mourad Kacimi, and translated by: Carmela Baffioni, 2025.

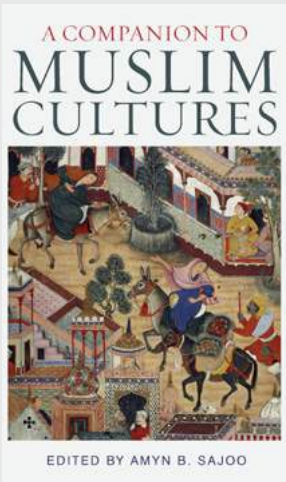


Open Access

Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century

Edited by: Suha Taji-Farouki, Basheer M. Nafi, 2004
(and published in Open Access, 2025)

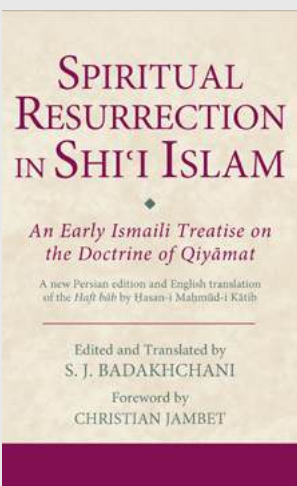
Publications



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A Companion to Muslim Cultures

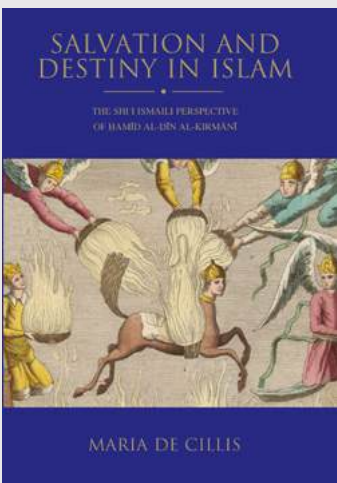
Edited by: Amyn B. Sajoo, 2011
(and published in Open Access, 2025).



Open Access

Spiritual Resurrection in Shi'i Islam: An Early Ismaili Treatise on the Doctrine of Qiyāmat: A new Persian edition and English translation of the Haft bāb by Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib

Edited by: S. J. Badakhchani, 2017
(and published in Open Access, 2025).



Open Access

Salvation and Destiny in Islam: The Shi'i Ismaili Perspective of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī

Author: Maria De Cillis, 2018 (and published in Open Access, 2025).



Persian language

Sīrat al-ḥājib:
Pazhūhishī matn-shināsānah dar
risāla-yi Ismā‘ilī-yi (bi inḍimām-i taṣḥīḥ
wa tarjuma-hi nuskhah-yi khaṭṭī)

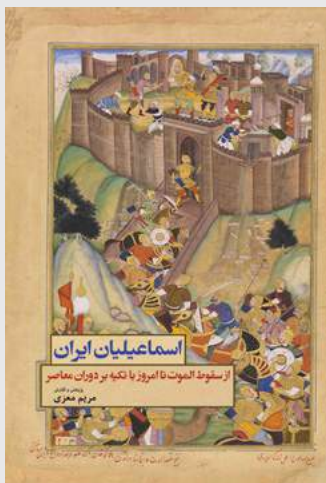
Edited by: Ali Babaei Siab, 2025.



Persian language

**Kulliyāt-i Mīrzā Ḥusayn, b. Ya‘qūb
Shāh Patrawī**

Edited by: Karim Javan, Hasan-‘Ali Jalili Muqaddam, 2025.



Persian language

Ismā‘iliyān-i Īrān:
az suqūṭ-i Alamūt tā imrūz bā tikiyya
bar dawrān-i mu‘āṣir

Author: Maryam Moezzi, 2025.

Publications



Published with the support of the IIS

De la lettre à l'esprit / From the Letter to the Spirit:

Travaux en hommage à Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi / Studies in Honour of Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi

Edited by: Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, Mathieu Terrier. Brepols, 2025.

Forthcoming Publications

On Magic, Part II: An Arabic critical edition and English translation of Epistle 52b of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (Brethren of Purity)

Edited and translated by Janne Mattila, Godefroid de Callataÿ, Sébastien Moureau and Bruno Halflants

Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts Housed at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, Vol. 1

Karim Javan

Contemporary Trends in Sharī'a

Hadi Enayat and Mohamed M. Keshavjee

Keys to the Arcana Vol. II

Translated by Toby Mayer

Islamic Traditions in 'Greater Khurāsān'

Edited by Dagikhudo Dagiev

The Banquet of the Brethren: An Ismaili Guide to Spiritual Hermeneutics. Part 2: A Persian Critical Edition of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Khwān al-Ikhwān

Edited by Rahim Gholami

Encyclopaedia of the Ismailis

Edited by Farhad Daftary

19 February 2025

Nizārī Ismailis and Spiritual Resurrection

Department of Academic Research and Publications

Dr Daryoush Mohammad Poor

Naushin Premji

Julia Kolb

Florence Sharp

20-22 May 2025

Devotion to the Prophet's Family in Islamic Thought and Practice

Shi'i Studies Unit

Dr George Warner

Dr Maria De Cillis

Nigina Mirbozkhonova

Naushin Premji

22-23 September 2025

Ginān Studies Conference

South Asian Studies Unit

In collaboration with

the Association for the Study of Ginans, and

The School of History, Religions and Philosophies at
SOAS

Hussain Jasani

Naushin Premji

Salma Habib

26 September 2025

Imagined Futures: Thought, Art and Ethics in Muslim Societies

Minhas Ali (IIS, STEP)

Salimah Hameed (IIS, STEP)

Ali Muhammad Mansoor Pirani (IIS, GPISH)

10-11 November 2025

Ismailis and Empire: Politics, Religion and Culture, ca. 1800 to Present

Ismaili Special Collections Unit

Dr Wafi Momin

Dr Amaan Merali

Naureen Ali

Muhammad Ali

Rizwan Karim

Conferences



AGA KHAN CENTRE
GALLERY

Canticle *of the Birds*

5 DECEMBER 2025 - 31 MAY 2026



The *Canticle of the Birds* is a mixed-media exhibition inspired by the Sufi poet Farid al-Din Attar's poetic masterpiece, *Mantiq al-Tayr*, that brings together artists from the UK and beyond with artisans and young people in creative collaboration. It is in collaboration with the King's Foundation School of Traditional Arts, the Royal School of Needlework, Drawing for the Planet, Songbird Survival, King's Cross Academy and Wendy Morrison Design.

A U T H O R

Esen Salma Kaya

This exhibition is kindly supported by the Aga Khan Development Network, Aga Khan Foundation UK, Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations, and The Institute of Ismaili Studies. This exhibition has been made possible by the generous assistance of our project partners and colleagues including Dr Walid Ghali, Shah Hussain, Dr Rahim Gholami, and Russell Harris.

Curated by Esen Salma Kaya, AKC Gallery Curator

Conceived as a curatorial practice that is both deeply considered and quietly humane, *Canticle of the Birds* seeks to hold space for reflection, care, and ethical attentiveness – allowing meaning to emerge through collaboration, patience, and shared responsibility.

We hope you can experience this in person or online at <https://www.agakhancentre.org.uk/gallery/>



منطق الطير



The Conference of the Birds or Speech of the Birds (Persian: منطق الطير, Mantiq al-Tayr, also known as مقامات الطيور Maqamat al-Tuyur; 1177) is a Persian poem by Sufi poet Farid al-Din Attar, commonly known as Attar of Nishapur. It is one of Attar's masterpieces, and it has inspired writers, poets, artists, and historians for centuries.

At its core, the poem employs the allegory of birds embarking on a journey to explore spiritual enlightenment and the search for the Divine. The Hoopoe, a wise and eloquent guide, leads the other birds – each symbolising a distinct human flaw or attachment – on a quest to find the mythical Simurgh, their ideal king. During their journey through seven arduous valleys, many birds drop out of the quest. Only 30 birds manage to endure all the trials and revelations, ultimately realising that the Simurgh is not a separate being but a reflection of their collective selves. The poem's enduring message captures the essence of Sufi philosophy: the journey of self-discovery and the pursuit of divine truth.

These ideas unfold throughout the exhibition as a layered meditation on journey, devotion, and collective becoming. Artists at varying stages of their careers, and from a wide range of cultural contexts, respond to specific moments, images, and metaphors within Attar's linguistically rich and visionary text. Together, their works form a constellation of interpretations that privilege reflection over illustration, resonance over retelling.

The gallery itself becomes an active narrative space. Central to this is a site-specific *haiku* composition, written by Portuguese academic researcher and poet Corina Lozovan, whose practice is informed by a long-standing study of Middle Eastern cultural traditions. The seven walls of the gallery correspond to the poem's seven valleys, from the Valley of Love to the Valley of Unity, mapping a poetic architecture that echoes the birds' inward and outward passage.

مقامات الطيور



Exhibiting artists include Farkhondeh Ahmadzadeh, Veeda Ahmed, Amaan Khalid Aslam, Delfina Bottesini, Samantha Buckley, Jung Byun, Mike Collier, Antje Damm, Aurélie Gérardin, Jenni Hawkins, Richard Henry, Anne Kelly, Amber Khokhar, Corina Lozovan,



Jane Lee McCracken, Michaela McMillan, Annabelle Lucilla, Halleh Mortazavi, Sobia Naz, Kate Pankhurst, Amaranta Peña, Olga Prinku, Louise Saxton, Geoff Sample, Sana Sanjrani, Sangeeta Singh, Kat Thomas, Stephen Turner, Xia Xia, Karim Wadhwani, and Karen Williams.

Alongside the *haiku*, the exhibition encompasses a wide range of media, including classical Persian miniature painting, contemporary animation, crochet, jewellery, ceramics, and a soundscape composed of birdsong from species increasingly absent from the natural environment. While rooted in Attar's spiritual allegory, *Canticle of the Birds* also speaks directly to contemporary ecological concerns, particularly the decline of UK songbird populations and the broader impacts of climate change. The exhibition positions the spiritual and the material not as opposites, but as interdependent realms, inviting audiences of all ages to consider the fragile interconnectedness of life.

In parallel with these concerns, the exhibition draws a connection to French Philosopher Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, presented within a vitrine opened at the chapter on nest, and displayed with accompanying interpretive text and real-life bird's nest on loan from the charity SongBird Survival, the chapter is approached through its attention to the nest as a structure shaped by labour, instinct, fragility, and care. Bachelard writes of nests not as idealised symbols, but as forms made through repetition, patience, and material constraint. Read alongside Attar's *Conference of the Birds*, the nest becomes a quiet counterpoint to the epic journey: not a destination, but a condition of dwelling and gathering, where vulnerability is held and meaning emerges through acts of making, protection, and collective presence.

Sangeeta Singh was commissioned to produce a series of single bird paintings depicting key figures from Attar's poem. Her use of walnut ink, handled with the precision and restraint of drawing, lends the works a quiet intensity that bridges classical representation and contemporary sensibility. Jane Lee McCracken was invited to extend her biro drawings of the nightingale and hoopoe, originally made for the exhibition *Making Paradise*, into a series of ceramic tiles. This expansion introduces additional birds and wildlife, broadening the notion of the 'conference' into a more inclusive gathering of worldly creatures and forms of self-reflection.

PHOTOGRAPH
Jonathan Goldberg.



Emerging artist Stephen Turner, a self-taught illustrator, was invited to create a monochromatic work informed in part by the artist's graphic language akin to the works of Aubrey Beardsley. His composition evokes a theatrical stage set, with stark planes of black and white creating depth and spatial tension. The image of the flock assembling is presented alongside an enlarged vinyl, onto which the original drawing is overlaid. Conceived to incorporate visual illusion, the work embodies a shared curatorial and artistic intention: to allow meaning to emerge through perceptual ambiguity. The exhibition as a whole, embraces such plurality, ensuring a diversity of aesthetic and conceptual entry points.

Canticle of the Birds brings together artists whose practices resonate with Attar's enduring themes of transformation, devotion, and spiritual awakening. While some works engage directly with the poem's allegorical imagery, others respond obliquely, drawing from its ethical and philosophical undercurrents. Across materials and disciplines, the exhibition echoes the birds' collective search for knowledge, humility, and unity.

A rich body of contextual material accompanies the artworks. This includes contributions from the independent charity SongBird Survival, offering practical guidance on how individuals can support the protection of UK songbird species, alongside objects from the Aga Khan Library collection and a facsimile from the Aga Khan Museum. These elements situate the exhibition within broader networks of scholarship, conservation, and cultural stewardship.

One particularly immersive work combines birdsong with Islamic geometric patterning in a collaborative commission by Mike Collier, Tom Jordan, and ornithologist and environmental sound artist Geoff Sample. Building on previous collaborations and a shared commitment to environmental inquiry, the artists created a work in which sound and image operate as a unified system. Collier researched architectural structures and patterns from mosques across the Islamic world; Sample recorded and manipulated birdsong and environmental sounds; and Jordan sequenced the animated movement to bind visual and auditory rhythms into a cohesive whole.

While some artists were invited more than a year in advance, others joined the exhibition through chance encounters. One such moment led to the inclusion of Anne Kelly, whose work has been displayed at the 2025 Knit & Stitch Show in London. She was subsequently invited to create two textile works to accompany a framed facsimile of *The Congregation of Birds*, on loan from Aga Khan Museum.





The Congregation of Birds, is a single-page drawing produced in India around 1600 using opaque watercolour and gold on paper. The work depicts more than twenty birds – including peacocks, a turkey, mallard ducks, an ostrich, and a flamingo – arranged within a landscape marked by trees, hills, and small architectural forms. Attributed to Mani, a Mughal artist active in royal workshops between 1580 and 1600, the drawing exemplifies his refined draftsmanship and sensitivity to colour.

Two significant works from the Aga Khan Library collection are also presented: an illuminated Qur'an manuscript with Persian translation, and a modern American English-language edition of the Qur'an, both opened at verses recounting the story of the prophet Solomon. These are shown alongside richly illustrated English editions of Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*.

Birds occupy a central symbolic role within the Quran, where they signify divine order, knowledge, and care. Verses describe birds sustained in flight by God alone (Quran 16:79; 67:19), while narratives recount the Prophet Abraham's reflection on resurrection through birds (Quran 2:260) and the Prophet Solomon's ability to understand their language (Quran 27:16). The exhibition weaves these scriptural references together with Attar's poetic vision and contemporary artistic responses.

Distinguished historian and university professor Michael Barry contributes to the exhibition through an essay and an accompanying recorded talk, generously shared courtesy of the King's Foundation School of Traditional Arts. His scholarship brings a lifetime of engagement with Islamic art and cultural history into conversation with the exhibition's themes.

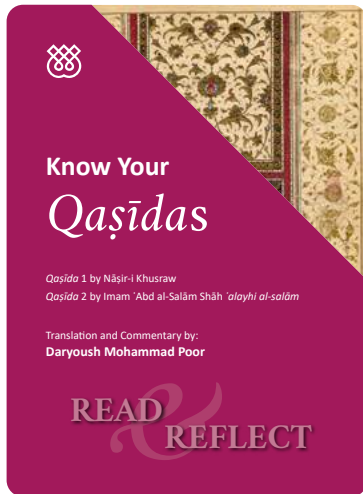


READ
REFLECT



Opening Ismaili Devotional Traditions

Dr Daryoush Mohammad Poor



Learn more about
Read & Reflect on
the IIS website.

Over the past nearly five decades, The Institute of Ismaili Studies has produced publications mostly for specialist academic audiences, alongside educational materials for the children and youth of the Ismaili community. Yet a clear need remained for short, accessible works that speak directly to the questions many Ismailis ask about their faith, history, and lived traditions. In recent years, several new series of publications have been initiated to address this gap, including the *World of Islam* series, the *Living Ismaili Traditions* series, and, most recently, the *Read & Reflect* series.

Developed under The Institute's strategic commitment to widen access to its knowledge resources, the *Read & Reflect* series is designed for general, non-specialist readers and does not replace existing publications.

The first publication in the series, *Read & Reflect: Know Your Qasidas*, introduces readers to the rich devotional poetry of the Ismaili community. *Qasidas* form part of a wider devotional landscape that includes Persian, Arabic, Central Asian, and South Asian traditions. This pilot offering focuses on the Iranian and Central Asian heritage of *qasida* composition, supporting the transmission of these traditions among migrants in English-speaking contexts, while also expanding their reach to Ismailis from other cultural backgrounds.

Each *qasida* is presented in its original language, accompanied by English transliteration to support recitation. Translations are followed by short reflective essays that explain the themes, imagery, and central ideas of the poems. Audio recordings, accessed through QR codes, allow readers to hear and learn correct recitation, linking text, sound, and reflection.

Concise in length and chapbook in format, *Read & Reflect* publications are intended for everyday reading, at home, while travelling, or by the bedside. Future titles will expand to include *qasidas* in Arabic and other languages. In time, the series will offer other topics, each of which will be signalled in the subtitle. Currently under production is *Read and Reflect: Know your Places*.

Together, the *Read & Reflect* series offers a thoughtful, accessible entry point into Ismaili intellectual and devotional life, grounded in scholarship while shaped by the interests and concerns of contemporary readers.

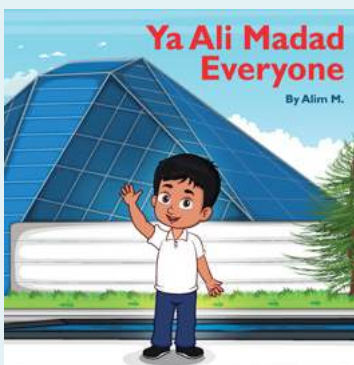
Nurturing Young Minds and Hearts

The IIS Children's Literature Series

In response to the significant need for educational materials that promote the ethics and principles of the Ismaili Muslim *tariqah*, the Department of Education (DoE) at the IIS launched the *Children's Literature Series* in early 2023. It is envisaged that the assortment of learning resources, ranging from stories and games to puzzles, podcasts, and animation scripts, will enrich the primary *Ta'lim* curriculum by widening children's understanding of the faith, culture and the rich diversity of traditions within Ismaili and wider Muslim communities.

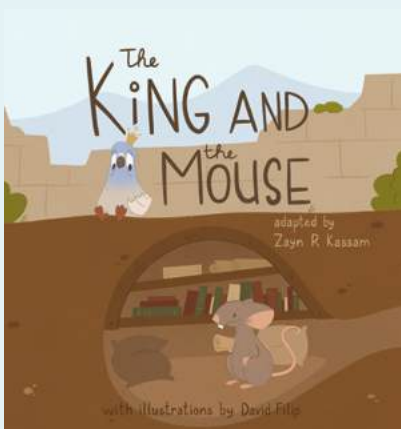
To ensure that each resource meets the highest standards for educational quality, an Educational Projects Review Panel consisting of IIS scholars and educators oversee the entire process to publication. The panel reviews manuscripts received from individual authors, ITREBs, and other institutions. ITREBs often put the manuscripts they have received through their own assessment process and send us their report so that the panel can take it into account. The diversity within this panel makes it uniquely positioned to offer recommendations on values, content and illustrations that are age-appropriate and culturally sensitive, while ensuring that the concepts reflect the civilisational approach and scholarly standards.

To date, the DoE's close collaboration with authors and illustrators has resulted in three well-received publications: *How Can I Tell My Mowla I Love Him?* and *Ya Ali Madad Everyone*, written by individual authors with independently commissioned illustrations; and *The King And The Mouse*, a story adapted from animal fables known in the Perso-Arab world as *Kalila wa Dimna*. Two of these publications are available in wipeable board-book format for younger readers as well as paperback format. A 50-piece board puzzle accompanies *The King and the Mouse*. *Five Feathered Friends*, a highly popular animated series broadcast on Ismaili TV, was also reviewed by the panel and we look forward to collaborating with Ismaili TV to produce these as books.



AUTHOR

Zahra Jiwa



As work continues on the *Children's Literature Series*, an exciting lineup of additional, engaging and inspiring publications is planned for 2026. This includes two new publications - *The Light That Always Shines* and *What Can I Do?* - which are scheduled for release in the near future. If you would like to schedule a book launch please contact simsim@iis.ac.uk

PHOTOGRAPH

Professor Zayn Kassam with her new publication, *The King and the Mouse*, and accompanying puzzle.

Image credit: Rehana M. Virani.

Islam as Faith and Civilisation

The Vision of the IIS Secondary Curriculum

Today, the world is home to approximately two billion Muslims, among whom the Ismailis constitute the second-largest Shi'i community, settled across more than twenty-five countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and Australasia. Like the wider Muslim ummah, the Ismaili community reflects a rich diversity of cultures, languages, and national identities.





AUTHOR

*Reeshma Charania Akbarally Shah
and Nausheen Hoosein*

The increasing global dispersion and diversity significantly impact how religious education is approached, requiring a curriculum that, to quote Dr Aziz Esmail (former member of the Board of Governors),

“brings the past alive and introduces it into the formation of the (youth). The formation of the youth is also oriented towards a future because we all grow out of the past and we grow towards an open future. The materials anticipate the directions in which the world is evolving and our Jamats (Ismaili Communities) are evolving in that world. In that way, there is a past as well as a future mirrored in the materials and the whole teaching endeavour.”





SECONDARY CURRICULUM

MUSLIM SOCIETIES
AND CIVILISATIONS



STUDENT READER
VOLUME 1

SECONDARY CURRICULUM

ENCOUNTERS IN
MUSLIM HISTORY



STUDENT READER
VOLUME 1

SECONDARY CURRICULUM

MUSLIM DEVOTIONAL
AND ETHICAL LITERATURE



TEACHER'S GUIDE

SECONDARY CURRICULUM

FAITH AND PRACTICE IN
ISLAMIC TRADITIONS



STUDENT READER
VOLUME 1



The Secondary Curriculum introduces Ismaili youth spanning ages 12-18, and other interested members of the community, to a programme of education that explores Islam as both faith and civilisation situated within world history and in contemporary times. It explores themes such as encounters and exchanges, diversity and pluralism, culture and civilisation, faith and practice, and Ismaili Muslim identity in the modern global world. Accordingly, it approaches the study of Islam, including the Ismaili tariqah and its traditions, through civilisational and humanistic lenses.

The civilisational approach promotes the examination of diverse Muslim communities from multiple perspectives. Within this broader framework, the Secondary Curriculum seeks to encourage in Ismaili youth a commitment to their faith and community. The humanistic approach reflects the full range of human endeavours and pursuits that have manifested themselves in Muslim societies via the liberal arts, including literature, science, commerce, law, philosophy, education as well as art and architecture.

By approaching the study of Muslim communities through these lenses, the curriculum seeks to nurture informed, reflective and ethically grounded individuals. In doing so, it not only supports young Ismailis in developing a confident sense of identity and belonging within the modern world but also exemplifies the commitment made by The Institute of Ismaili Studies to creating educational frameworks that are intellectually rigorous, contextually responsive and capable of sustaining meaningful engagement with faith across generations.





IIS Alumni Internship Programme

From Scholarship to Service

“The Jamat and its institutions need young and dynamic women and men like you, who are able to draw on the rich heritage of our past, and on the best educations of the present, to address the challenges of the future.”

His Highness Prince Rahim Aga Khan addressing IIS Graduates, September 2007

In his 2007 address to IIS graduates, Prince Rahim, now His Highness Aga Khan V, emphasised that education carries responsibility as well as privilege. Academic achievement, he suggested, matters most when it is translated into service and constructive action. The IIS Alumni Internship Programme is grounded in this understanding, creating pathways through which learning can be applied and refined in professional and community settings.

Launched in 2006 by the Alumni Relations Unit, the programme was designed to support graduates of the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) as they take their first professional steps beyond The Institute. It bridges the gap between academic learning and professional practice. Through the programme, GPISH graduates learn to apply their knowledge in meaningful ways while staying true to the values and traditions at the heart of their studies.

The programme provides structured internship opportunities, primarily within Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) agencies and Ismaili community institutions, enabling graduates to translate rigorous academic training into practical experience across diverse organisational contexts. Central to the programme is a personalised matching process, based on each graduating student’s academic background, areas of interest, and regional preferences. The ARU works to develop placements that align individual career aspirations with the host institution’s current needs, capacities, and resources. It also creates a bridge between IIS and AKDN institutions, introducing the remarkable strengths and diverse backgrounds of our students to the institutions across the network.





PHOTOGRAPH

Professor Nacim Pak-Shiraz delivers the Commencement Address at the 2025 Graduation for STEP, GPISH, & the Postgraduate Fellowship.
Image credit: Rehana M. Virani.

AUTHOR

Imran Khan

125

TOTAL
INTERNSHIPS

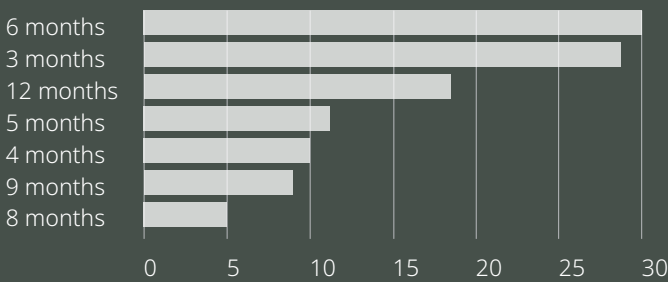
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ORGANISATIONS

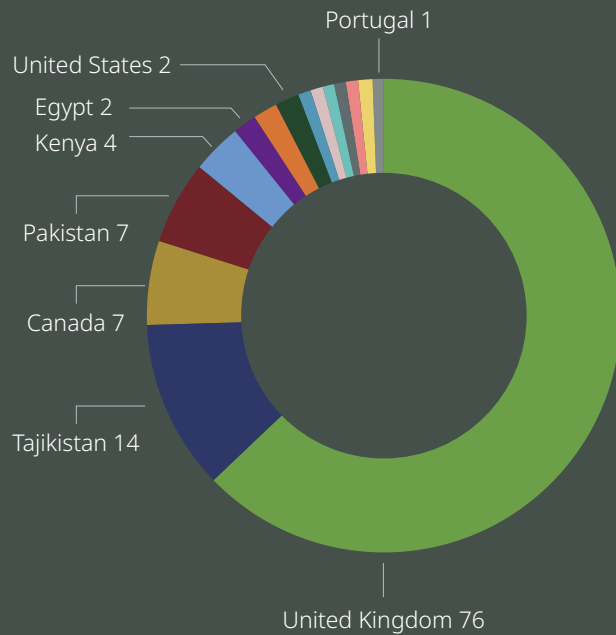
16

COUNTRIES

Duration of Internship



Location



Organisations

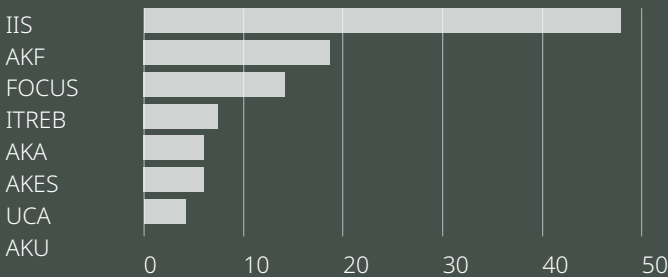


Figure 1: IIS Alumni Internship Programme data as of January 2026

Since its inception, the programme has facilitated 125 internship placements across 26 organisations in 16 countries. Internships have varied in duration to accommodate both institutional needs and alumni circumstances, with six-month and three-month placements emerging as the most common formats. Longer positions of nine to twelve months have provided deeper professional immersion in select cases. A diverse range of host organisations has participated, with placements secured across IIS departments as well as AKDN and Ismaili community institutions, including AKES, AKF, AKU, FOCUS, ITREBs, UCA.

This diversity of organisational and regional engagement highlights the programme's flexibility and responsiveness, enabling graduates to apply their academic training in real-world contexts while contributing meaningfully to institutions working across education, development, culture, and community life. Many internships have become stepping stones for successful careers within the host organisations, while most have led to flourishing careers both within and beyond the network.

GPISH 2025 Internship Placements



Gulguncha Lalbekova

Art, Business and Law, LLM

Queen Mary University of London Internship

With a background in law, culture, and institutional governance, Gulguncha Lalbekova brings a unique skill set to the world of museums and heritage. She holds an LLM in Art, Business and Law from Queen Mary, University of London. Her GPISH dissertation examined questions of art, history, and identity through a case study of the Ismaili Centre in Dubai.

Gulguncha is currently undertaking a four-month internship with the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, where she works as a Legal Intern under the supervision of the Museum's Director of Legal Affairs. Her responsibilities include conducting legal research and ensuring institutional compliance, which involves reviewing contracts, loan agreements, and donor documentation related to the Museum's collections. She also contributes to collection ownership and documentation audits, supporting the Museum's governance and risk management processes.

Through this placement, Gulguncha is gaining specialised experience in cultural heritage law within an international museum setting, developing a practical understanding of how legal frameworks support the stewardship of art and history.

Host Organisation:



Placements



Hassan Ali Shah

*MSc in Development
Administration & Planning*

University College London (UCL) Internship

Hassan Ali Shah's academic training is grounded in questions of development, community institutions, and social impact. Hassan graduated from University College London with an MSc in Development Administration and Planning. His GPISH dissertation explored the social role of Ismaili Jamatkhana and Centres, using Houston as a case study. Hassan is undertaking a five-month, full-time internship with the Central Office of Poverty Elimination (COPE), working remotely. Hassan's role supports the Community Economic Development Programme, where he contributes to rural poverty mapping, value-chain analysis, and the documentation of coordination efforts between National Councils and AKDN agencies across multiple countries. Additionally, he is involved in the Next Generation Initiative, supporting research on youth economic participation and contributing to the development of learning briefs and pilot frameworks.

The internship provides Hassan with hands-on exposure to multi-country development programming, allowing him to translate academic research into programme design and evidence-based approaches to poverty alleviation

Host Organisation:

Centre of Poverty Elimination



Kamal U Din

MA in Early Modern History

King's College London

Kamal U Din completed an MA in Early Modern History at King's College London, with a strong interest in the histories of South and Central Asia. His GPISH dissertation examined experiences of modernity and social change among Ismaili communities in Gilgit-Baltistan. Kamal is undertaking a six-month internship with the Central Asian Studies Unit at IIS. His work focuses on reviewing and analysing historical sources related to Ismaili da'wa in northern Pakistan, drawing on both colonial-era accounts by British officers and explorers, as well as indigenous materials produced by local scholars, poets, and chroniclers. He is also developing a multilingual bibliography and producing preliminary analysis on the historical relationships between pīrs and Ismaili communities in the region. The internship enables Kamal to refine his archival research skills while contributing to scholarship that draws on both local and external historical perspectives.

Internship Organisation:



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Placements



Mashal Gilani

MSc Digital Humanities

University College London

With training in digital humanities and a strong interest in data ethics and community narratives, Mashal Gilani brings a critical and technical perspective to institutional data work. She holds an MSc in Digital Humanities from University College London. Mashal is undertaking a three-month internship with the Department of Education at the IIS, supporting the Alumni Relations Unit with a number of important projects. Her work focuses on conducting an alumni data audit, improving data accuracy across the alumni portal, and strengthening institutional records. She is also contributing to internal processes that support clearer communication and more effective engagement with alumni. The internship offers Mashal practical experience in data management and stakeholder engagement, while contributing directly to the visibility, coherence, and long-term sustainability of the IIS alumni community.

Internship Organisation:



The Institute of Ismaili Studies



Muhammad Ali

M.Phil Sociology

University of Cambridge

Muhammad Ali graduated from the University of Cambridge with an MPhil in Sociology. He has a strong interest in digital culture, community identity, and public scholarship. His GPISH dissertation examined the online identity of the Nizari Ismaili community in Atlanta through The.Ismaili portal. During his internship with the Ismaili Special Collections Unit at IIS, Ali is working on the preservation of oral histories and their digital dissemination. His responsibilities include producing translated transcripts of interviews using AI-assisted tools, developing structured metadata for archival systems, and contributing to the development of an oral history portal. He is also creating public-facing outputs, including a multimedia podcast and written features for the IIS website. The internship enables Muhammad to apply sociological and digital humanities approaches to archival practice, while contributing to the preservation and accessibility of community histories.

Internship Organisation:



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Placements

Opening Doors

Scholarships and Fellowships at the IIS

For many students and researchers, scholarships and fellowships represent far more than financial assistance. They provide the time, confidence and intellectual space needed to pursue advanced study, undertake original research, and participate fully in scholarly life. The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) provides a platform for furthering their knowledge and expertise in topics relevant to the study of Islam that are germane to our specialized interests in Shi'i and Ismaili history, philosophy, and intellectual and material heritage and living traditions. Such support has long been a quiet but essential expression of The Institute's mission: to advance excellence in scholarship, widen access to learning, and nurture the next generation of thinkers working on Muslim societies, histories and cultures.

AUTHOR

Dr Dagikhudo Dagiev



Top row: left to right: Karam Alkatlabe, Otambek Mastibekov, Dagi Dagiev, Guldastasho Alibakhshov, Abdul Wahid Khan, Imran Visram, Aslisho Qurboniev, Muhammad Salim, Omar Ali de Unzaga, Azzam Al Kassir, Maria De Cillis, Nigina Mirbozkhonova.
Bottom row: left to right: Karim Javan, Uzair Ibrahim, Anika Kabani, Murid Shah.



Over the years, IIS has established a range of scholarships and fellowships that support individuals at different stages of their academic journey.

These include opportunities for postgraduate and doctoral studies, as well as fellowships that enable early-career and experienced scholars to contribute to The Institute's research and teaching environment. Collectively, they demonstrate a sustained commitment to intellectual rigour, diversity of perspectives, and the cultivation of scholarship with a global reach — priorities reaffirmed in The Institute's recently published Strategic Plan.



Top: Saad Barcha (GPISH 2025)
Bottom: Azlal Nasir (GPISH 2025)

While each award has its own focus, they are united by a common purpose: enabling talented individuals to concentrate on demanding scholarly work during pivotal moments in their lives. Recipients come from various backgrounds and disciplines, enriching IIS's academic community and strengthening its role as a hub for collaborative and international engagement and research.

The experience of Saad Barcha (GPISH 2025), the latest recipient of the Farhad Daftary Doctoral Scholarship, illustrates this broader impact. Reflecting on his academic journey, Saad has emphasised how the scholarship has enabled him to pursue doctoral research at Oxford with increased focus and confidence, while benefiting from the intellectual environment, mentorship and scholarly networks linked with The Institute. His story mirrors those of many past recipients whose careers have been shaped by the opportunity to full dedicate themselves to research at a crucial stage. Similarly, this year, IIS awarded the Mohammad Arkoun PhD scholarship to Azlal Nasir (GPISH 2025), whose academic interests span the transmission of ideas across cultures, the history of science, and Muslim intellectual traditions. He also presented a very promising research proposal on Muslim intellectuals whose engagements have reshaped our understanding of Islam's relationship to science and natural history.

Recent awards further highlight the range of scholarship IIS aims to support. The Dissertation Writing Scholarship, awarded annually since 2001, helps doctoral candidates in the final and often most demanding phase of their research. The latest recipients, Seddigheh Kardan and Rami Gargour (STEP 2014), work across distinct but related fields — from the intellectual history and esoteric traditions of Ismailism to educational leadership within global school networks. Such work reflects both the depth and variety of contemporary research linked to The Institute's interest, as well as its dedication to supporting scholarship that involves different methodologies, contexts and approaches to communities.

Over the past two years, IIS has awarded six visiting fellowships to scholars working on areas such as the Ismaili Oral Histories Project; modern Arabic literature and language, environment and climate change and their impact on the socio-economic conditions and livelihoods of mountain communities; critically informed approaches to public law, including on equality law and the legacies of empire; and Ismaili philosophy, and its relevance to contemporary Ismaili thought.

Beyond individual outcomes, IIS scholarships and fellowships serve an important institutional purpose. They help sustain specialised fields of study, support emerging scholars, and reinforce The Institute's commitment to inclusive and globally connected scholarship. As IIS looks to the future, this investment in people remains central to its strategic vision — ensuring that scholarship continues to thrive through continuity, renewal and shared intellectual growth.

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Our digital platforms offer timely insights from scholars, researchers, and practitioners, alongside lectures, public programmes, and curated resources that extend the work of the Institute beyond the printed page.



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“... knowledge continues to be
produced with integrity, preserved
with care, and shared with purpose.”



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