

28 September 2026

IIS Conference

MUSLIM LIVES IN TRANSITION:

Continuity and Change in
Contemporary Times



The Institute of Ismaili Studies



Detail from the Third Discourse of Nasir al-Din Tusi's *Akhlaq-e Nasiri*, depicting a gathering of scholars engaged in discussion and exchange — themes of knowledge-sharing and communal dialogue that echo this year's conference.

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AKM288.15, *An Argument in a Courtyard*, Folio from the *Ethics of Nasir (Akhlaq-e Nasiri)* by Nasir al-Din Tusi

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Organising Committee

Name of organising group
Department of Education

Names of organisers
Elnaz Basiri (IIS, GPISH)
Shan Ali (IIS, STEP)

Muslim Lives in Transition:

Continuity and Change in Contemporary Times

IIS Graduate Conference

28 September 2026



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

www.iis.ac.uk

AGA KHAN CENTRE

10 Handyside Street, London N1C 4DN

Welcome

Welcome to the IIS Annual Graduate Conference. We are pleased to carry forward the success of previous years by bringing together a distinguished and diverse group of emerging scholars from The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

This year's theme, "Muslim Lives in Transition: Continuity and Change in Contemporary Times", reflects the profound transformations shaping Muslim societies and communities across the world. Contemporary life is increasingly influenced by a range of interconnected forces, including technological advances, migration, environmental change, shifting social and political landscapes, and new forms of communication and knowledge production. As individuals and societies respond to these developments and navigate new and often uncertain circumstances, their lives are continuously being shaped and reshaped.

The theme provides an important lens through which to explore how diverse Muslim individuals, communities, and societies negotiate these processes of transition. As new developments and forces shape everyday life, traditions, customs, values, identities, and ways of relating to one another, important questions emerge: What remains constant, and what evolves? How are inherited traditions and values preserved, reinterpreted, or transformed? And how do Muslim societies negotiate their identities, ethical frameworks, and religious commitments amid rapid change and uncertainty?

These questions lie at the heart of this year's conference. Through critical engagement with diverse contexts and experiences, our participants explore the complex relationship between continuity and transformation and examine how Muslim lives are shaped by both enduring inheritances and the changing realities of the contemporary world.



Our conference features 15 insightful presentations which will offer fresh perspectives across a range of subthemes:

Education, Curriculum and the Formation of Muslim Identity

Gender, Cultural Memory and Tradition in Times of Social Change

Diaspora, Belonging and the Negotiation of Identity

Ritual, Devotion and the Transformation of Inherited Traditions

Religious Knowledge, Ethics and Muslim Education in the Digital Age

Welcome

We are highly grateful to Professor Mohammed Raskeh, Dr David Bennett, Dr Abdul Wahid Khan, Muhammad Ali, Nassim Mohammadpour, and Sahil Himani for their meaningful contributions to this year's conference and for helping us cultivate this space for intellectual engagement among emerging scholars.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Dr Shiraz Kabani and the Department of Communications for their unwavering support with the conference arrangements, as well as for their invaluable assistance with logistical coordination, which has helped ensure the smooth planning of the event. We would also like to acknowledge the efforts of preceding conference conveners, Ali Muhammad Mansoor Pirani, Minhas Ali, and Salimah Hameed, for their constant advice, support and encouragement. Our appreciation also goes to Rizwan Karim for his enduring commitment in mentoring presenters and enriching the quality of their work.

We sincerely hope that these conversations set alongside intellectual exchange, meaningful discussions and the collaborative spirit of the conference will foster new perspectives, deepen our collective understanding, and inspire further research and dialogue beyond the conference.

Convenors:



Elnaz Basiri

IIS, GPISH 2027



Shan Ali

IIS, STEP 2027



Schedule

Monday, 28th September 2026

8.45 - 8.50

Opening Remarks by Director

Professor Zayn Kassam

8.50 - 9.00

Welcome

Dr Daryoush Mohammad Poor

9.00 - 10.15

Panel 1: Education, Curriculum and the Formation of Muslim Identity.

Chair: Dr Aliyyah Dattoo

Navigating Dual Religious Frameworks: Religious Education as a Site of Identity Continuity and Change for Ismaili Youth in Syria.

Reham Hwajjeh (STEP 2025)

Respecting the Body, Nurturing the Self

Sahil Himani (STEP 2026)

Historical Empathy and the Aga Khan Case of 1866: Teaching Evolution of Ismaili Identity through the IIS *Connecting Worlds* Module.

Aalmeen Daredia (STEP 2026)

10.15 - 10.30

Health Break and Networking



10.30 - 11.45

Panel 2: Gender, Cultural Memory and Tradition in Times of Social Change.

Chair: Dr Karen Bauer

***Duur Korik* (Homemaking): The Role and Agency of Women in the Reconstruction of 'Home' and Household Decision-Making Processes in the Aftermath of Climate-Induced Migration in Upper Chitral.**

Ameeqa Qureshi (GPISH 2027)

Negotiating Tradition in the Age of Consumption: Marriage Practices as a Case Study of Indigenous Identity Negotiation in Upper Chitral.

Javeria Khan (STEP 2027)

The Shaista Narrative: Competing Memories of Honour, Love and Gendered Violence in Burushaski-Speaking Hunza.

Aleena Amin (STEP 2026)

11.45 – 12.00

Health Break and Networking

Schedule

Monday, 28th September 2026

12.00 - 13.15

Panel 3: Diaspora, Belonging and the Negotiation of Identity.

Chair: Dr Yahia Baiza

Encountering Iran through Instagram: Emotional Experience and the Negotiation of National Identity among second-generation Iranians in London.

Elnaz Basiri (GPISH 2027)

The Power of Storytelling in Stand-Up Comedy.

Maya Dayoub (GPISH 2026)

The Diaspora Within: Cultural Persistence, Hybridity and Intra-Communal Belonging among Northern Pakistani Ismailis in Karachi.

Urooj Baig (GPISH 2027)

13.15 - 14.30

Lunch Break and Networking

14.30 - 15.45

Panel 4: Ritual, Devotion and the Transformation of Inherited Traditions.

Chair: Dr Alex Henley

Listen to This: Re-staging Ritual Aesthetics between *Chirāgh-e Rawshan* and the Queer Techno Rave.

Junnade Ali (GPISH Cohort 31)

Monetary Giving in the Ismaili Tradition: A Case Study of Young Ismailis in Nairobi

Ahad Tharani (GPISH 2027)

Listening Across Transitions: Qawwali, Spiritual Experience and the Continuity of Devotion in Contemporary Pakistan.

Salima Hameed (STEP 2026)



15.45 - 16.00

Health Break and Networking

16.00 - 17.15

Panel 5: Religious Knowledge, Ethics and Muslim Education in the Digital Age.

Chair: Dr Aslisho Qurboniev

Seeing Continuity through Change: Generative AI and the Enduring Purposes of Muslim Education.

Shabnam Barkat Ali (STEP 2024)

Before Verification: Generative AI, Blasphemy Allegations and the Risk of Extrajudicial Harm.

Asifa Fida (GPISH 2027)

Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching the Theme of Self-Knowing in Sufi Literature: Deepening Reflective Practice among Secondary Students.

Abida Nasreen (STEP 2026)

17.15 - 17.30

Thank You

Dr Gurdofarid Miskinzoda

17.30 – 18.45

Canapés/Refreshments and Networking

Abstracts and Bios

Navigating Dual Religious Frameworks: Religious Education as a Site of Identity Continuity and Change for Ismaili Youth in Syria

Reham Hwajjeh

In contemporary times, conflict, shifting political authorities and globalisation have placed Muslim communities in significant transitions. This paper examines how minority communities respond to these transformations in terms of education, focusing on the Nizari Ismaili community in Salamiyya, Syria. Amid structural pressures and localised tensions from the ongoing Syrian conflict, Ismaili youth face a unique ‘dual exposure’ to two distinct Religious Education (RE) systems. They simultaneously attend public secondary schools that teach the state’s Sunni-oriented Tarbiyya Diniyya Islamiyya and private, community-run Bait-ul Ilm classes following the transnational, pluralistic Institute of Ismaili Studies Secondary Curriculum (IIS SC).

Employing Comparative Curriculum Analysis (CCA) and qualitative document analysis, this study investigates how these parallel curricula address foundational Islamic tenets—specifically Tawḥīd, Nabuwa, Imāmah – and the pedagogical approaches they employ to make faith relevant to modern life. Findings reveal a stark ideological and pedagogical divergence. Whereas the state curriculum implements a standardised, majoritarian framework to reinforce national cohesion, the transnational IIS curriculum promotes an inquiry-based, interdisciplinary, and civilisational methodology intended to foster critical global citizenship.

This dual exposure generates a complex dynamic of continuity and change. It creates temporary cognitive dissonance regarding religious authority and symbols, but it ultimately equips minority students with the epistemic flexibility, resilience, and hybrid identities required to navigate modern societal disruptions.



REHAM HWAJJEH is a STEP Educator who holds a Master's degree from The Institute of Ismaili Studies, completed through the Secondary Teacher Education Programme. Currently, she specialises in teaching secondary students and is passionate about applying the IIS curriculum effectively in the Syrian context through understanding the needs of students there. At this conference, Reham looks forward to sharing her insights on 'Religious Education as a Site of Identity Continuity and Change for Ismaili Youth in Syria'.

Respecting the Body, Nurturing the Self

Sahil Himani

Ismaili adolescents in Gujarat are growing up in a world where social media, peer pressure and cultural expectations strongly influence how they think about their bodies. Many young people experience body dissatisfaction because of beauty standards, comparison with others and comments from family and friends. While Islam offers a respectful and dignified understanding of the human body, this topic receives little attention in religious education. This study explores how the IIS Secondary Curriculum addresses adolescents' understanding of the body. It examines whether the curriculum helps students connect Islamic teachings with the real-life challenges they face today.

The research uses document analysis of the *Quran and Its Interpretations* and *Faith and Practice* curriculum modules. It is guided by curriculum theories from Pinar, Aoki and Eisner, together with Islamic scholarship from al-Ghazali, Kugle and Bashir. The findings suggest that although the body is an important part of Islamic thought, it is largely absent from the curriculum, making the body a form of null curriculum. As a result, students may not receive the guidance they need to understand body image, dignity and identity from an Islamic perspective. Rather than recommending major curriculum changes, the study argues that STEP teachers can address this gap by creating meaningful classroom dialogue connecting Islamic teachings with everyday experiences.



SAHIL HIMANI is an MA candidate in Muslim Societies and Civilisation at SOAS, University of London, and a postgraduate student in Reflective Practice and Teaching at UCL Institute of Education. Originally from Gujarat, India, his research examines how the IIS Secondary Curriculum addresses issues related to body image and understanding among Ismaili adolescents. His research argues that viewing the curriculum as a ‘dialogue’ or, following Pinar’s approach, as a ‘complicated conversation’ can bring attention to issues that the written curriculum currently leaves unaddressed. As a STEP student teacher, he brings practitioner experience to questions of Islamic religious education, adolescent development and curriculum design in the Gujarat context.

*Historical Empathy and the 1866 Aga Khan Case:
Teaching the Evolution of Ismaili Identity through the
IIS Connecting Worlds Module*

Aalmeen Daredia

This study examines how teachers can use the 1866 Aga Khan case sections within the *Connecting Worlds* module to support students' understanding of Ismaili identity formation in the modern period. Drawing on a tripartite framework synthesising Tajfel's social identity theory with Hall's and Sila-Khan's conceptions of identity as historical process, the study analyses the 1866 Aga Khan case as a pivotal moment that transformed Khoja communal organisation, cultural codes and history, reorienting the community from a self-governing, religiously syncretic caste toward a centralised, Islamicised, transnational Shi'i Imami Ismaili community. It then evaluates how the *Connecting Worlds* curriculum currently engages with this material and proposes historical empathy as a pedagogical approach suited to teaching identity as an evolving, contested process rather than a fixed fact. The dissertation argues that grounding classroom treatment of the Aga Khan case in this historical and theoretical context enables a more critical, historically-situated understanding of Ismaili identity among students.



ALMEEN DAREDIA is a STEP 2026 student with a Bachelor's degree in Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering. His academic interests centre on modern Ismaili history and its influence on the self-understanding of Ismaili students. He explores how different pedagogical frameworks, particularly experiential learning and historical empathy, can support students in engaging more deeply with their faith and identity. He is interested in developing approaches to religious education that enable students to connect historical knowledge with their own experiences and contemporary contexts.

Duur Korik (Homemaking): The Role and Agency of Women in the Reconstruction of 'Home' and Household Decision-Making Processes in the Aftermath of Climate-Induced Migration in Upper Chitral

Ameeqa Qureshi

What does *duur korik* (homemaking) mean when the land that has sustained it becomes unsafe, and memory remains attached to a place that can no longer be inhabited? This study examines climate-induced migration as an increasingly recurrent and consequential form of transition in contemporary Muslim life, taking the relocation of families from Brep to Khotanlasht in Upper Chitral as its central case.

This qualitative ethnographic study responds to a significant gap in scholarship on the role of women in the aftermath of climate displacement in northern Pakistan. Existing work has examined disaster risk and institutional response, but seldom focuses on the pivotal domestic and social labour through which women actively make transition survivable for the community.

This research combines semi-structured and key informant interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. It brings feminist political ecology into dialogue with Marxist feminist social reproduction theory, politics of placemaking, anthropology of home and traditional ecological knowledge. The study posits that the 'household as ethical infrastructure' is the 'solution' women's labour produces to rebuild ethical and communal life after migration, the 'problem.' It concludes that women actively remake 'home,' emerging as powerful agents of continuity amid change.



AMEEQA QURESHI is a third-year GPISH student currently studying for an MSc in International Migration and Public Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She holds a BSc in Global Humanitarian Studies from University College London and has worked across refugee resettlement and climate mobility projects with organisations including the AKDN, British Red Cross, and UN International Organisation for Migration. Supported by the UK Government Turing Fund and Global Experience Bursary, she has also undertaken research work with Ismaili Afghan migrants through Aga Khan Foundation Canada. Her current research focuses on the nuanced experiences and pivotal social labour of women in pastoral faith communities whose lives are shaped by environmental hazards and asymmetric household power structures.

Negotiating Tradition in the Age of Consumption: Marriage Practices as a Case Study of Indigenous Identity Negotiation in Upper Chitral

Javeria Khan

Marriage ceremonies in Upper Chitral have historically functioned not only as family events but also as spaces for transmitting communal memory, cultural values, and local identity. Scholarship on indigenous cultures in South Asia highlights how globalisation reshapes cultural practices through preservation, adaptation and transformation (Ghosh, 2011). Yet these processes remain underexplored particularly in relation to marriage practices in Upper Chitral. Drawing on qualitative interviews with members of the older generation (aged 70 and above), whose lived experiences provide insights into changes over time, alongside observations of contemporary weddings, this paper examines transformations in dress, music, games, rituals, aesthetics and expenditure. It asks how families negotiate inherited traditions alongside new expectations of visibility, status, and respectability shaped by media, globalisation and consumer culture. The study explores how existing indigenous practices can provide a foundation for sustaining cultural identity while adapting to changing social realities. By focusing on Upper Chitral, this study contributes to wider discussions of Muslim lives in transition by examining how communities negotiate cultural continuity, indigenous identity and change in contemporary times.



JAVERIA KHAN is an English Studies graduate from the National University of Modern Languages Pakistan, with a background in teaching, and community engagement. Her interests include cultural revitalisation, indigenous identity, education and the ways communities negotiate tradition and change. She has worked in educational and youth-development settings in Pakistan and is currently a STEP trainee teacher. Her research interests centre on indigenous identities, cultural practices, curriculum development and contemporary social change.

The Shaista Narrative: Competing Memories of Honour, Love and Gendered Violence in Burushaski-Speaking Hunza

Aleena Amin

In 1870, Mir Ghazan Khan I, ruler of the Hunza Valley in northern Pakistan, executed a man named Qalandar. This event is locally remembered through the Shaista narrative, named for the woman whose lament for Qalandar preserves an alternative account of his death. This qualitative case study asks how contemporary retellings of that event circulate through an elite Persian-language written history, available in English translation, a Burushaski sung lament, and Burushaski oral narratives. It focuses on how these retellings discuss honour, love, and patriarchal violence in Hunza's Burushaski-speaking community.

The study analyses five sources, including Qudratullah Beg's history, laments archived on YouTube and Facebook, and oral accounts from community elders. It uses Vladimir Propp's method of analysing narrative structure, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogics, and Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory. Together, these approaches show how a private oral story develops into a public digital archive. The study identifies two different ways of remembering the event. The official, male-authored record describes the Qalandar's death as legal punishment for political slander and largely excludes women's experiences. In contrast, the lament tradition centres the female voice, presenting death as an example of patriarchal violence that was justified through religious language. The study argues that this unofficial version of history is important because it provides another perspective on the past. It can help students to understand that historical events may be remembered differently and can encourage them to examine historical accounts critically.



ALEENA AMIN recently completed her MA in Muslim Societies and Civilisations at SOAS, University of London. She also holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching and Reflective Practice from UCL, where, during her Field Teaching Practice, she developed a folktale-based pedagogical intervention for STEP students in Gilgit, Pakistan. Her research interests encompass oral tradition, gender, and the politics of memory, with her current work focusing on ‘The Shaista Narrative: Competing Memories of Honour, Love and Gendered Violence in Burushaski-Speaking Hunza’. How do contemporary retellings of the Shaista narrative remember the event differently, and what do these differences reveal about the moral registers through which honour, love and gendered violence are voiced, contested and protected in the Burushaski-speaking Hunza community?

Encountering Iran through Instagram: Emotional Experience and the Negotiation of National Identity among second-generation Iranians in London

Elnaz Basiri

How do second-generation Iranians in London experience political events in Iran through Instagram, and what do these encounters mean for their sense of Iranian identity? Focusing on the large-scale protests and political violence of 8–9 January 2026, this paper examines how digitally mediated encounters with homeland events can become emotionally and personally significant across geographical distance. Drawing on diaspora studies, social identity and group-based emotion, cognitive appraisal, and the concept of affective publics, the study explores how participants interpret Instagram content, the emotions they associate with these encounters, and how they connect such experiences to questions of belonging. Based on semi-structured interviews and Instagram content elicitation, the analysis considers emotions including anger, grief, fear, helplessness, guilt, pride and solidarity. Rather than assuming that political emotion necessarily strengthens national identification, the paper examines a range of responses, including attachment, ambivalence, distancing and renewed responsibility. It argues that second-generation Iranian identity is continually negotiated through the interaction of inherited belonging, political emotion and digitally mediated encounters with Iran.



ELNAZ BASIRI is a third-year GPISH student and an MSc Organisational Psychiatry and Psychology candidate at King's College London. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Clinical Psychology from Iran and has several years of professional experience in psychology and education, including work with the State Welfare Organisation in Iran and the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London. Building on her interdisciplinary interests in psychology, identity, culture and human behaviour, her current research explores emotional experience, digital media and national identity among second-generation Iranians in London.

The Power of Storytelling in Stand-Up Comedy.

Maya Dayoub

Using an audio-visual methodology, this paper explores how stand-up comedy functions as a storytelling practice, through which Arabic speakers and individuals from Arabic-speaking countries in London articulate their experiences of migration, belonging, and identity. The study investigates how performances take shape, what influences them, and how political, economic, and social conditions inform the narratives comedians choose to present. Although stand-up comedy is often viewed primarily as entertainment, within diasporic contexts it becomes a subtle mode of expression that reveals nuances of belonging and everyday negotiation.

The short comedic acts function as autoethnographic vignettes, shaped by deliberate decisions about what to say, why, and in which social moment, while remaining responsive to audience reception. To capture this process, the research employs semi-structured interviews and sustained engagement with comedians throughout preparation, rehearsal, and performance. The audio-visual methodology documents these creative trajectories, foregrounding the embodied, affective, and narrative dimensions of comedic storytelling. While I focus in depth on three participants, the study uncovers similar notions across the voices of Arab comedians in an interconnected community abroad.

An excerpt from a 25-minute film produced for an MA Visual Anthropology dissertation will be screened.



MAYA DAYOUB is an alumna of The Institute of Ismaili Studies (GPISH 2026) and a Master's candidate in Visual Anthropology at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology, University of Manchester. Maya's interest lies in research-based multimedia and ethnographic filmmaking, especially in areas of culture, migration and diaspora, and she enjoys creating engaging sensory pieces that capture embodied ethnographic knowledge.

The Diaspora Within: Cultural Persistence, Hybridity, and Intra-Communal Belonging among Northern Pakistani Ismailis in Karachi

Urooj Baig

Diaspora scholarship on Muslim communities has been organised largely around encounters between Muslim minorities and non-Muslim majority societies; the negotiation of difference within shared religious communities remains comparatively undertheorised. This paper addresses that gap through Northern Pakistani Ismailis who have migrated to Karachi's Karimabad Jurisdiction, an urban communal landscape historically dominated by Khoja Ismailis, where common faith coexists with marked linguistic, cultural, and class distinctions. Using an interpretivist qualitative design, the study compares 14 participants across two generational cohorts and reveals three crucial findings.

First, cultural persistence operates as active, institutionally embedded practice: *Rasm-e Tao*, indigenous musical traditions, and the deliberate maintenance of the Shina and Burushaski languages anchor first-generation identity even as intergenerational transmission weakens. Second, second-generation participants articulate hybridity not as inner conflict but as adaptive, agentive self-fashioning between ancestral heritage and cosmopolitan urban life. Third, belonging remains contested through regional labelling, stereotyping, and subtle exclusion, exposing hierarchies within the community.



UROOJ BAIG is a GPISH student, holding a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from SZABIST, Karachi. Her research interests lie at the intersection of migration and diaspora studies, focusing on how Ismailis from Northern Pakistan navigate displacement, belonging, and memory amid urbanisation. She is particularly interested in how millennial and Gen-Z cohorts rearticulate ancestral traditions within metropolitan contexts, and how mass migration and rapid digitisation shape younger generations' hybrid identities and understandings of community.

Listen To This: Re-staging Ritual Aesthetics between Chirāgh-e Rawshan and the Queer Techno Rave

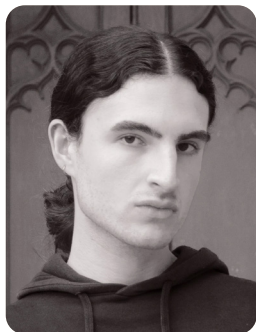
Junnade Ali

How do the sensory disciplines of Muslim ritual persist when the institutions and bodies that once held them are dispersed? This paper approaches continuity and change not through doctrine or form but through ritual aesthetics: the patterned organisation of sound, attention, curation, and intelligibility through which devotional practice becomes socially consequential. It places two analytically comparable sites in dialogue: a *Chirāgh-e Rawshan* ceremony, an Ismaili ritual performed at my grandparents' home in Hunza, and a queer techno rave staged in a Marrickville warehouse in Sydney. Both are semi-private gatherings that sequence collective attention through sound; both depend on a restricted intelligibility- knowing when to respond, what a citation means—that I term 'esotericism without doctrine'.

Drawing on ritual theory (Kapferer, Bell, Schechner), Homi Bhabha's account of meaning as repetition with difference, and queer critique that resists liberal-identitarian framings (hooks, Massad, Puar), the paper argues that the rave re-stages ritual aesthetics not through imitation or appropriation but through diasporic translation and experimentation. Where *Chirāgh-e Rawshan* has been aesthetically stabilised by recent institutional standardisation, the rave sustains similar logics of invocation, curatorial authority, esoteric coherence, and (de)centralisation. Methodologically, the paper combines autoethnography with performance analysis, treating the analytic 'I' as open to revision, rather than authoritative.



The contribution is twofold. It widens the study of Muslim spiritual listening (*samāʿ*) beyond its familiar Mevlevi associations, and it shows how, for queer Muslims in the diaspora, ritual aesthetics may surface in unexpected spaces when inherited ones cannot accommodate certain bodies, desires, or modes of attention. Continuity, on this account, is carried less by fixed form than by transmissible ways of organising perception.



JUNNADE ALI is a practitioner-scholar working at the intersection of Islamicate esotericism, queer politics, and experimental form. Born in Gilgit and formed across Hunza, Sydney, London, and Beirut, their work moves between critical scholarship, digital, sonic, and written art — finding in the creative traditions of Central Asia and the cosmopolitan Muslim world resources that contemporary critical theory has yet to contemplate. They are currently completing the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.

*Monetary Giving in the Ismaili Tradition:
A Case Study of Young Ismailis in Nairobi*

Ahad Tharani

Giving one's resources has always been central to Islamic and Ismaili traditions. Yet among many young Ismailis today, monetary offerings have become a site of questioning, discomfort and negotiation. This dissertation explores how young-adult Ismailis in Kenya understand, practise and negotiate monetary offerings within the Ismaili tradition. It examines how inherited religious practices are challenged and reinterpreted in response to contemporary economic and ethical realities. While giving remains a deeply rooted part of Ismaili ethical life, connected to devotion, generosity, purification, and service, younger Ismailis are increasingly raising questions about transparency, financial pressure and the relationship between monetary giving and spiritual reward. I argue that these questions do not necessarily indicate declining religiosity or a rejection of tradition. Rather, they reveal how young Ismailis attempt to make sense of inherited practices in a globalised, educated and economically driven world. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork in Nairobi, this paper contributes to broader discussions on religious authority, economic change and identity formation. It argues that money provides a useful lens through which to understand both continuity and change in contemporary Muslim life.



AHAD THARANI is a third-year GPISH student and an MA Public Policy candidate at the University of Cambridge. He holds Bachelor's degrees in economics and finance from the University of New South Wales in Australia. Ahad has several years of experience working for the Australian Government in financial regulation, and in the banking industry. Building on his interests in economics and religion, his current project explores how young-adult Ismailis in Kenya understand, practise and negotiate monetary offerings within the Ismaili tradition.

Listening Across Transitions: Qawwali, Spiritual Experience, and the Continuity of Devotion in Contemporary Pakistan

Salimah Hameed

Qawwali has long occupied a central place within South Asian Muslim devotional traditions, where music, poetry, and collective participation create opportunities for spiritual reflection and emotional engagement. While deeply rooted in Sufi practice, Qawwali continues to evolve in response to changing social, cultural, and technological contexts. This paper explores how people experience spirituality through Qawwali and examines how these experiences reflect both continuity and change in contemporary Muslim life.

Drawing on a qualitative and phenomenological approach, the study analyses existing scholarship on Qawwali in Pakistan, focusing on listeners' accounts of spiritual experience alongside studies of live shrine performances, concert settings, and digital platforms such as YouTube and Coke Studio. Rather than treating spirituality as a fixed outcome, the paper argues that spiritual experience is shaped through the interaction of sound, poetic language, rhythm, embodied participation, and performance context.

The findings suggest that the core devotional elements of Qawwali remain remarkably consistent, preserving a centuries-old tradition of remembrance, emotional expression, and connection with the Divine. However, the contexts in which Qawwali is encountered have transformed significantly. Live shrine performances foster collective participation, ritual engagement, and a strong sense of sacred presence, whereas digital media enable more individualised and globally accessible forms of spiritual listening. These changing modes of engagement demonstrate how devotional traditions adapt without losing their religious significance.



By examining Qawwali as both a living tradition and a changing practice, this paper contributes to broader discussions of continuity and transformation in Muslim societies. It highlights how sound and devotional performance continue to shape Muslim spiritual lives while responding to the realities of an increasingly interconnected and digital world.



SALIMAH HAMEED is a STEP 2026 C-17 student. She has completed her Bachelor's degree in business administration from Karachi, Pakistan. Her academic interests include Islamic devotional traditions, spirituality, and religious education. Her MA thesis focuses on Qawwali as a form of Islamic devotional music, exploring the ways in which it fosters spirituality in contemporary Pakistan.

Seeing Continuity through Change: Generative AI and the Enduring Purposes of Muslim Education

Shabnam Barkat Ali

Generative AI arrived in classrooms dressed as a threat to the educational system. This study explores how the tremor of generative AI makes it urgent to separate the purpose of education from the contemporary system of education, and in the process, mobilise the enduring purpose of Muslim education. It is through my practitioner-reflexive study, using Anderson's analytic autoethnography, that I came to apply educational hermeneutics to the Islamic theological and philosophical concepts that I had been teaching my students as modular content. My struggle with AI moved from questioning my purpose in the classroom, to questioning the purpose of education, to finally finding the purpose's equivalent, Talim, in Islamic theology. What AI revealed through its instant and articulate information is that what we were assessing as Talim was often just transmitted content, not the knowledge that is meant to change how a person lives. AI could not replicate halaqah, where a teacher comes to know each child over months of sitting, listening and being present. And it offered no qudwah: no role modelling, only text to consult. Rather than asking whether education survives AI, this paper argues that it is AI, as change, that has brought to the surface the urgency of continuing Muslim education's enduring purpose.



SHABNAM BARKAT ALI serves as Head of Bait-ul Ilm Bangladesh and has helped pioneer the role of in-house secondary curriculum educator for the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board for Bangladesh. A graduate of the Secondary Teacher Education Programme at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, her work centres on Muslim religious education, curriculum development and teacher education. Her current practitioner research explores how generative AI brings the enduring purposes of education within Muslim educational thought into sharper focus.

Before Verification: Generative AI, Blasphemy Allegations and the Risk of Extrajudicial Harm

Asifa Fida

Blasphemy allegations can produce serious consequences before their truth is established through formal legal processes. Generative artificial intelligence intensifies this risk by enabling ordinary users to create convincing fabricated text, images, audio and video that may falsely attribute blasphemous speech or conduct to an individual. Drawing on literature on blasphemy-related extrajudicial violence, digital misinformation, synthetic media and legal verification, alongside selected real-world cases, this paper examines the period preceding formal adjudication rather than debating particular jurisprudential positions on blasphemy. It conceptualises a “verification gap”: the temporal and epistemic space between the rapid circulation of apparently credible digital evidence and its authoritative authentication, during which individuals or communities may face irreversible harm. The paper argues that existing legal safeguards, while necessary, may operate too late to address harms arising during this interval. It therefore proposes a three-stage Detect-Protect-Verify model: identifying potentially synthetic material, protecting accused individuals and affected communities during evidentiary uncertainty and accelerating forensic authentication. Ultimately, the paper asks how institutions can preserve the time required for legal determination without allowing unverified digital allegations to produce irreversible consequences.



ASIFA FIDA holds a Bachelor's degree in Strategic and Nuclear Studies from the National Defence University, Islamabad. Following graduation, she gained professional experience through internships with the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) and the Human Rights Department of the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan. She has also written and published opinion articles on national and international political issues. She is currently a second-year GPISH student, with particular interests in religion, interfaith dialogue, conflict resolution, peace-building, and international cooperation.

Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching the Theme of Self-Knowing in Sufi Literature: Deepening Reflective Practice among Secondary Students

Abida Nasreen

Self-knowing (*ma'rifat al-nafs*) is a recurring concern in Sufi literature, where knowledge of the self is connected with ethical transformation and knowledge of the Divine. This paper explores how this theme can inform pedagogical approaches that deepen reflective practice in Ismaili Religious Education Centres in Pakistan. It first identifies key educational purposes within Sufi discussions of self-knowing, including inward attention, examination of the ego, and spiritual transformation. Rumi's poem 'Whence Have I Come?' is then used as a case study to show how these purposes might be approached in the classroom. Through mystical hermeneutics, the study examines the poem's questions, progression, and metaphors and considers how they can be translated into age-appropriate pedagogical practices. The analysis is brought into dialogue with Parker Palmer's idea of 'education is an inner journey' and Tobin Hart's contemplative education. The resulting conceptual framework moves through experience, reflection, interpretive questions, and personal responses to the text. The paper argues that continuity with Sufi tradition can be maintained by carrying its concern for inner transformation into pedagogical forms that respond to the changing educational lives of secondary students.



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IIS Graduate Conference

28 September 2026



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