

IIS/AKU-ISMC

September 2024

Graduate Conference

CHALLENGES IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES



The Institute of Ismaili Studies



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

(International) in the United Kingdom

Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations



Challenges in Muslim Societies

IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference

September 2024



Victoria Hall, Kings Cross. © John Sturrock



The Institute of Ismaili Studies



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Recognised by the United Kingdom
Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations

AGA KHAN CENTRE

10 Handyside Street, London N1C 4DN

www.iis.ac.uk



Welcome

Welcome to the second IIS and AKU-ISMC Graduate Student Conference. When we held the inaugural programme last year, we were thrilled to see the high quality of presentations and the positive impact that the conference had on both the IIS and AKU-ISMC communities. It provided a wonderful opportunity for collaboration between students, faculty, and staff at the two institutions, and it was well attended in-person and online. And of course, the musical programme that followed was inspiring as it showcased the talents of our students and alumni. We are delighted to be hosting the conference again this year at the beautiful Aga Khan Centre.

This year's theme is "Challenges in Muslim Societies". These challenges fall into several categories including: political instability, economic, social, cultural, educational, human rights, equality and environmental, to name just a few. This year's conference will showcase thirteen bright minds exploring the diverse and complex challenges faced by Muslim communities globally. The forum will provide an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and opinions. It is our hope that participants will be enriched by the experience.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the organising team, Nabila Esmail, Noor Mansour and Zeinab Nikookar, for all their efforts in making this event possible.

Thank you to all attendees, in person and online: we look forward to your engagement in today's discussions.



Professor
ZAYN KASSAM
Director, IIS



DR
SHAHZAD BASHIR
Dean, AKU-ISMC



Welcome

Welcome to the Second Annual IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference. Following the success of our inaugural event, we are thrilled to bring together a diverse group of emerging scholars once again from The Institute of Ismaili Studies and Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations.

This year's theme, "Challenges in Muslim Societies," reflects our commitment to addressing the complex and evolving issues faced by Muslim communities around the world. Our conference features 13 insightful presentations that explore critical topics such as gender, identity, media, and history, offering a multidisciplinary approach to understanding challenges in those contexts.

The panels will provide a platform for rigorous academic dialogue, highlighting innovative research and fostering an environment of intellectual growth. Our presenters, through their diligent research, contribute significantly to advancing our knowledge and understanding of the nuanced experiences within Muslim societies.

We would like to thank the four members of our selection committee: Dr Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, Professor Jonas Otterbeck, Kiran Shah, and Muhammad Ali, whose dedication ensures the high calibre of presentations at this conference. Their efforts have been instrumental in creating a space where emerging voices can share their valuable insights and engage with broader academic and community audiences. We would also like to thank our preceding conference convenor, Aqil Visram, for his continuous support and guidance through this process. Additionally, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to Professor Jonas Otterbeck for his continued efforts in ensuring his knowledge on presentations could benefit all the presenters.



As we gather in person or virtually, we encourage you to actively participate in the discussions, share your perspectives, and build connections that extend beyond this event. Your presence and engagement are vital to the success of this conference, enriching the dialogue and fostering a collaborative spirit.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to The Institute of Ismaili Studies and Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations for their unwavering support in making this conference possible. Together, let us embrace this opportunity to connect, learn, and celebrate the vibrant and diverse Muslim societies.

We are excited to welcome you and wish that our collective exploration may pave the way for the new insights and possibilities!



**NABILA
ESMAIL**

IIS, STEP



**NOOR
MANSOUR**

IIS, GPISH



**ZEINAB
NIKOOKAR**

AKU-ISMC



Schedule

8:30 – 9:00

Registration and Check In

9:00 – 9:20

Welcoming Remarks by Dr. Shahzad Bashir, Dean, AKU-ISMC

9:20 – 10:35

Panel 1: Identity and Making Space – Dr. Laila Halani

Mashal Gilani (IIS, GPISH 2025): “Navigating Identities: How Do Queer Ismailis in New York Understand their Identity in Relation to the Jamat”

Aqil Visram (IIS, GPISH 2025): “Institutions, Service, and Identity: A History of the Ismailis in Tanzania”

Farhan Ali (IIS, GPISH Alumna, Farhad Daftary PhD Scholar): Shifting Places, or How Bodies Expand the Boundaries of Bhattai’s Shrine

10:35 – 11:05

Health Break

11:05 – 12:45

Panel 2: Media and Representation – Prof. Gianluca Parolin

Muhammad Salim (IIS, GPISH Alumna, Farhad Daftary PhD Scholar): “The Role of Social Media in the Politicisation of Religion in Pakistan: Tweeting for the ‘Model Islamic State’”

Armita Reihani (IIS, STEP 2nd year): “Exploring Ethical Ostentation in Islamic Society: A Semiotic Analysis of Asghar Farhadi’s ‘A Hero’”

Baqauddin Baqaa (IIS, STEP 2nd year): “The Impact of Information Communication Technology (ICT) on Young Muslim Minds: Exploring Perceptions and Challenges in a Developing Islamic Context (Afghanistan)”

Fatima Jiwani (IIS, STEP Alumna, PhD Scholar): “The ‘Muslim’ versus the ‘Hindu’: An Analysis of Changing Trends of Portrayal of Muslim Characters in Indian Commercial Movies”



12:45 – 14:00

Lunch

14:00 – 15:40

Panel 3: Oppression and Strife – Dr. Sevgi Adak

Zeinab Nikookar (AKU-ISMC): “Rape and Sexual Violence: An Analysis of International Wars Beyond the Frontlines”

Sofia Leathers (AKU-ISMC): “Vision 2030 and Invisible Violence: Sex Trafficking and International Advocacy in Saudi Arabia”

Fareed Bahader (IIS, GPISH 2026): “What Were the Underlying Motives Driving Aurangzeb’s (1618-1707) Decision to Destroy Temples and Impose Jizya on the Non-Muslims? To What Extent Can These Actions Be Characterised as Those of a Tyrant Enforcing Muslim Dominance, or Rather as Strategic Measures Aimed at Consolidating His Rule and Expanding his Empire?”

Anila Bano (IIS, GPISH 2026): “Sandi and Sende: The Impact of Floods and Landslides in Sandi Yasin”

15:40 – 16:00

Health Break

16:00 – 17:00

Panel 4: Ismaili Intellectual History – Dr. Farhad Daftary

Zeba Khoja (IIS-GPISH 2026): “Distancing Faith from Intellect”

Saeedeh Kardan (IIS-GPISH 2024): “Fading Echoes: Migration and the Decline of the Ḥaqqānī Tradition among Ismailis in South Khurāsān”

17:00 – 17:15

Closing Remarks by Prof. Zayn Kassam, Director, IIS

17:15 – 18:30

Refreshments and Pre-Concert Break

18:30 – 19:20

Concert



**FAREED
BAHADER**

Fareed Bahader is a second-year GPISH student with a bachelor's degree in international relations. He is driven by a profound interest in peace and conflict studies, with a specific focus on the intricate relationship between religion, conflict, and radicalisation. He hopes to contribute to the scholarly discourse on mitigating conflicts and fostering sustainable peace by understanding the underlying religious and socio-political factors.



**ANILA
BANO**

Anila Bano is a second-year GPISH student from Pakistan, with an academic background in biology and psychology. Her research interests lie primarily in the interdisciplinary field of global mental health. She is dedicated to studying mental health and community wellbeing in different contexts, considering the intricacies and strengths of local contexts. She likes fostering intercultural understanding and enjoys creative forms of expression, such as poetry.



**BAQAUDDIN
BAQAA**

Baqauddin Baqaa is currently enrolled in STEP at IIS, having previously attained a bachelor's degree in Arabic Language and Literature from Kabul University and a master's degree in Education and School Improvement from BRAC University in Bangladesh. Baqaa's professional experience as an English language teacher and teacher trainer with Aga Khan Education Services in Afghanistan exemplifies his commitment to leveraging education as an instrument for positive social change. He is demonstrably enthusiastic about the potential of education to cultivate hope and foster peace within developing nations.



**FARHAN
FEROZ ALI**

Farhan Feroz Ali is currently a Farhad Daftary Doctoral Scholar in History of Art and Archaeology at SOAS. He explores what the shrine of the Sindhi Sufi-folk poet Shah Abdul Latif makes possible for both the devotees of the saint and the visitors of this place, by treating the site as a broader South Asian phenomenon and synthesising theories and methodologies across various disciplines. He graduated as a designer in 2015 and worked in the field of architecture before pursuing his MA in Islamic Studies and Humanities from the IIS, followed by an MA in History of Art and Architecture of Islamic Middle East from SOAS.



**MASHAL
GILANI**

Mashal Gilani is a third-year GPISH student and is pursuing an MSc in Digital Humanities at University College London. She holds a Bachelor of Laws from the University of London, after which she conducted socio-legal research and drafted policies for religiously marginalised groups in Pakistan's development sector. Her academic interests focus on the use and application of technology to frame contemporary legal globalisation and global ethics, particularly for marginalised communities, both online and offline.



**FATIMA
JIWANI**

Fatima Jiwani is a Harmony Scholar at the International Federation for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue and is pursuing a professional doctorate in Interfaith Studies at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. She holds a master's in teaching and a master's in Muslim Societies and Civilisations, both from the University of London, and a master's degree in economics from the University of Mumbai. She is also an alumna of three international fellowship programmes: the KAICIID, Dialogue Perspectives, and European Leadership programme. Fatima's research interests include religious and interfaith education. For nearly a decade, she has contributed as a STEP teacher in India.



**SAEEDAH
KARDAN**

Saeedah Kardan is a third-year GPISH student pursuing an MA in Islamic Studies at SOAS. She holds a BA in Jurisprudence and Fundamentals of Islamic Law from the University of Tehran. She is interested in early Islamic history, development of Ismaili thought in the early Islamic period, Qur'anic commentaries, and classical Arabic and Persian literature, with a focus on Ismaili and Sufi texts.



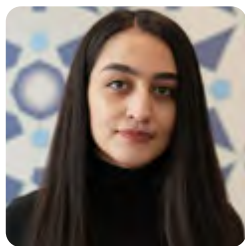
**ZEB
KHOJA**

Zeba Khoja is a second-year GPISH student and has an undergraduate background in health sciences with a specialisation in child development from McMaster University. Her current research interests include religious education of the adult Ismaili community (jamat) and how religious education influences one's perception of faith versus intellect.



**SOFIA
LEATHERS**

Sofia Leathers is an MA student of the Columbia and Aga Khan University dual degree in Islamic Studies and Muslim Cultures. After completing her BA in Arabic Language at Middlebury College, she worked in Morocco in education. Her research interests are Islamic science and philosophy. She has produced an original translation of a sample of a 10th-century, occult-scientific agronomical text. Her current dissertation is on Dhakhīrat al-Iskandar, another Arabic astronomical and alchemical text. Other interests include Middle Eastern politics, gender, history, and music.



**ZEINAB
NIKOOKAR**

Zeinab Nikookar is an MA student in Muslim Cultures at AKU-ISMC. Previously, she completed an MA in English literature at Alzahra University in Tehran, where she specialised in ideology and feminism in literature. Her research interests encompass international relations, gender studies, and security studies. In her conference presentation, she will explore the impact of wars on women, with a focus on how sexual violence can be analysed within the framework of international relations, offering insights that go beyond the frontlines.



**ARMITA
REIHANI**

Armita Reihani is a STEP student, researching the integration of Islamic art into art therapy in order to support students with special educational needs and disabilities and to propose a therapeutic curriculum. She holds an MA in Islamic Art in the field of ceramic and pottery, studying human figures in Islamic art and also working on the function of Kufic script in designing urban elements. Her field research was on art therapy for prisoners which aims to increase their mental and economic resilience. Armita volunteers with Ismaili teenagers in economic and entrepreneurial programmes.



**MUHAMMAD
SALIM**

Muhammad Salim is a PhD student at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, within the Theology and Religious Studies programme, focusing on the impact of mobile apps on the daily socio-religious experiences of the Shia Ismaili Muslim community. He is a recipient of Dr Daftary PhD Scholarship. Salim holds an MSc in Science, Technology and Society from University College London and a BSc in Social Development and Policy with a Minor in Philosophy from Habib University, Karachi, Pakistan. His research interests span Islam in cyberspace, the politicisation of religion in virtual spaces, the philosophy of technology, and medieval Muslim intellectual traditions.

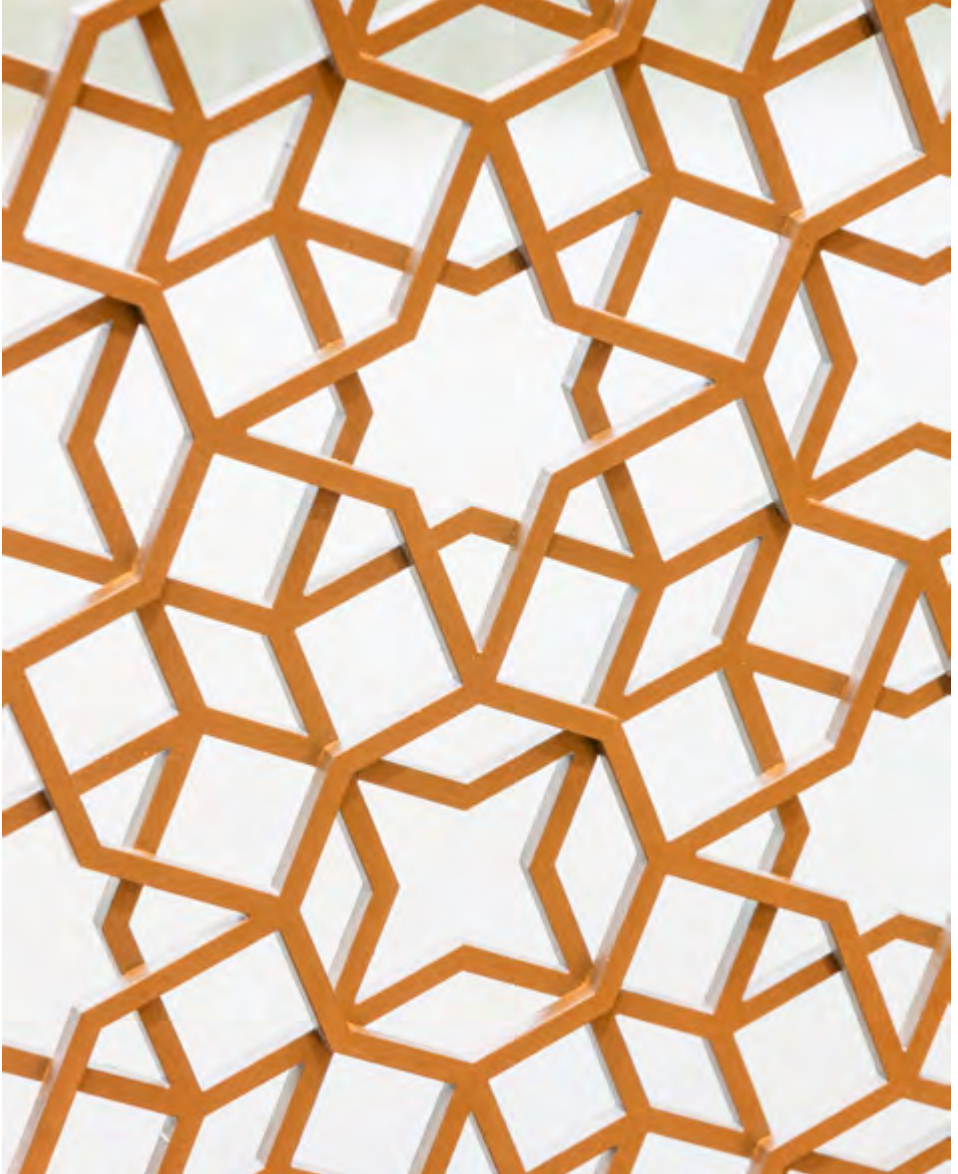


**AQIL
VISRAM**

Aqil Visram is a graduate of GPISH and holds a BA in Islamic Studies and Economics from the University of Toronto (High Distinction). His research focuses on medieval Islamic history and thought, with an emphasis on Ismaili traditions. Aqil has received academic fellowships, scholarships and awards from various governments, universities, and research institutions around the world. At the conference, he will be presenting his MA research on the Ismailis and their institutions in Tanzania.



Challenges in Muslim Societies



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