IIS ALUMNI

2024

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From
The Director

Dear Alumni,

It feels like only yesterday when I first wrote to our alumni body, newly in post. I celebrated my first anniversary with IIS soon after the turn of the New Year, having spent much of my first year here connecting with our staff and students. I've enjoyed getting to know the amazing folks who work and study at IIS and to better understand the ins and outs of the wide range of activities and programmes we are involved in. I am also impressed by the programming our various geographical alumni associations arranged, having virtually attended a few featured presentations.

I am thankful to report that I am on the road to recovery after a health incident that took place at the beginning of November last year. I am so grateful for the outpouring of support that I received from around the world.

We recently had the opportunity to connect with Prince Rahim and Princess Zahra as part of our annual budget meeting. We were able to share with them all the wonderful work in which IIS was engaged in 2023 and our ambitious plans for 2024. They were both appreciative of the energy that goes into the work at IIS, and Prince Rahim expressed his gratitude for this work. Princess Zahra encouraged us to do more to address the contemporary issues young adults face.

Last year, we began the mammoth task of developing a refreshed Strategic Plan, which we hope to complete later this year. The plan will see IIS through the next decade and focus on four strategic areas: research & scholarship, teaching & learning, heritage stewardship, and institutional capacity. There will be an emphasis on making IIS materials more accessible to the Jamat, and I look forward to collaborating creatively with alumni on these initiatives.

You may recall that I announced the first AKC Graduate Student Conference in my last message. I am pleased to say that this conference has become part of IIS' recurrent programmatic schedule after a successful inaugural event.

Last year, we were fortunate to engage with our valued donor community, and thanks to their generous contributions, we've successfully secured programmatic funding to sustain our efforts for the next several years.

I have complete confidence in the incredible work we strive to deliver at IIS. Nevertheless, one important lesson I've learned this year is that we have not been as effective in including, co-creating, and sharing our achievements with our key stakeholders, including alumni. My hope for 2024 is to witness a revitalised effort in communication at IIS.

We are undeniably a community here at IIS, drawing strength from our dedicated staff, students and alumni. I look forward to our alumni body's collaboration with IIS across diverse global contexts as we work together to strive to fulfil Mawlana Hazar Imam's expectations of the Institute. I am confident that the knowledge you acquired during your time at IIS shines through in everything you undertake.

Professor Zayn Kassam
Director of The Institute of Ismaili Studies

From
The Alumni Relations Coordinator

Dear Alumni,

I am pleased to present the 2024 edition of the IIS Alumni Annual Magazine. On behalf of the IIS Alumni Relations Unit (ARU), it's my pleasure to welcome all new alumni to the IIS Alumni Association. You are now part of a global network of IIS graduates united by a shared commitment to excellence, service, the pursuit of knowledge and the values instilled in us by the Institute. As you are about to embark on a new chapter in your life, it's essential to recognise that you serve as the ambassadors of the Institute and that your affiliation and relationship with IIS are lifelong.

2023 was a particularly exciting year as we inaugurated the highly anticipated Alumni Recognition Award to celebrate the remarkable achievements of IIS Alumni who embody the spirit of excellence and service. Throughout the nomination process, we were overwhelmed by the exceptional calibre of the candidates put forward. I extend my gratitude to everyone who participated in the process. Your engagement and enthusiasm played a crucial role in the success of this initiative.

The leadership of the chapter groups worked hard and did an excellent job organising alumni engagement events. This included two hybrid and one online Annual General Meeting in 2023. In addition, several meet-and-greet sessions were organised across various cities globally. Moving forward, we intend to increase the frequency of regional meet-and-greets to enable alumni in different locations to come together more regularly and enhance the sense of community.

I am also pleased to see the growing enthusiasm for the Alumni Research Grant programme. In 2023, eight research grants were awarded, marking a significant increase from previous years. These included two for conference presentations, five for online courses, and one for field-based research. Additionally, three internships were created for GPISH 2023 graduates.

The success of all our initiatives relies heavily on your active involvement. I encourage you to stay connected with IIS and with each other, attend events organised by chapter groups, volunteer your time and talent, and share your ideas and suggestions on how we can better serve the alumni community.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude to all alumni who have contributed to the 2024 alumni magazine. This edition highlights the diverse activities, updates, and fantastic work IIS graduates do in various fields, positively impacting their communities and beyond.

Please reach out to us at alumni@iis.ac.uk with feedback.

With best wishes,

Imran J. Khan
Alumni Relations Coordinator
The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Meet The Chapter Leadership

Asian Chapter Group

As chapter leaders, we aim to organise local meetups where alumni can gather to share their experiences and insights. Throughout the year, we established partnerships with institutions to foster growth and learning opportunities for alumni. Furthermore, we seek to enhance digital communication channels, allowing alumni to engage in discussions and offer guidance across various platforms. We also aim to empower fellow alumni by appointing country anchors from each region to assist us during our term. Finally, we will ensure our alumni stay informed with the latest updates, job alerts, and engagement activities.

Zehra Shallwani
GPISH 2019
President

Suleiman Pirani
STEP 2021
Secretary

European Chapter Group

Our aspirations for the European Chapter Group draw on our desire to strengthen bridges between the IIS and its alumni. We aim to promote meaningful dialogue, exchange of ideas, and intellectual and professional collaborations amongst alumni based across the UK and Europe. This will be achieved through diverse opportunities, events, and meetups in hybrid settings.

Abdul Wahid
GPISH 2021
President

Zohra Gabrani
STEP 2017
Secretary

North American Chapter Group

Our aspiration for the North American Chapter Group is to foster a cohesive community of IIS alumni dedicated to addressing global challenges. This year, we aim to convene gatherings where members can engage in meaningful discussions and educational initiatives. By focusing on issues ranging from conflicts in the Middle East to climate change, we seek to enhance awareness and understanding among our alumni. Through these efforts, we hope to not only broaden our knowledge but also inspire collective action towards positive change in our communities and beyond.

Naveed Nanjee
GPISH 2014
President

Anika Kabani
GPISH 2022
Secretary

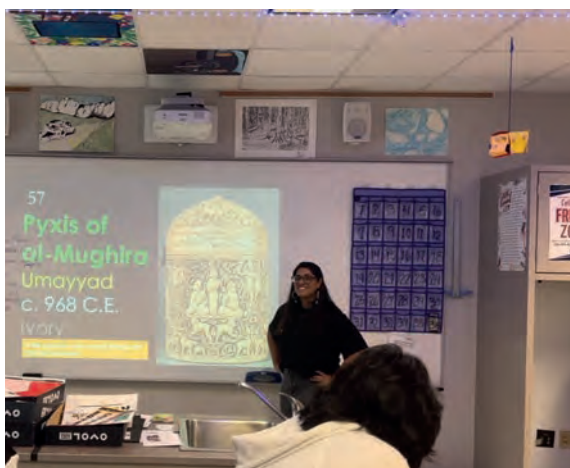# Small Steps to Becoming an Agent of Change in Education

Saleeta Rajwani | STEP 2021

Saleeta Rajwani is a teacher working with ITREB USA. She previously completed the Institute of Ismaili Studies' graduate programme which is known as the Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP).

One of the aspects that drew me to the Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) is the idea that, as teachers, we would be agents of change in the field of education. While I was in London as a graduate student, my colleagues in the programme came from a global context. As a cohort of 29, we represented eight different countries and the beautiful diversity that exists in each of those countries. As we collectively came together in London for our studies, we would learn about the context of education systems each had experienced throughout their lifetimes and would undoubtedly work to improve upon graduation.

Saleeta Rajwani presenting to the students at an *Advanced Placement* class in Texas: Image by Saleeta Rajwani

Our first experience of being these agents of change in the field of education occurred while living in London as graduate students. The University College of London Institute of Education assigned each of us to a secondary school within the greater London area so we could transform our theoretical knowledge into hands-on experience to develop our teaching skills. Many of us graduate students were often excited to support our fellow teachers in expanding their understanding of Islam and its diversity. We would dedicate time to ensure that our lesson plans demonstrated the rich tapestry of Islam rather than speak of Islam as a monolith.

After graduating from the programme, we have each taken our own path to being agents of change in education, focusing on mental health, representation, or curriculum development. My pathway was via the Civic Voices Fellowship Programme, where I enrolled to better understand the public education landscape in Texas. This programme taught me about public education policies, resource allocations, race and equity in education, school board governance, and more. I was also able to form connections with other education advocates, some of whom were teachers in the classroom.

One day, while we were in between sessions, I started talking to one of my fellows in the programme. We both spoke about our

Saleeta conducting a calligraphy workshop themed on Islamic art and architecture: Image by Saleeta Rajwani

professions. Upon learning that I teach about Muslim societies and civilisations, we discussed the representation of Muslims within schools. Being an Advanced Placement Art History Teacher at a local high school, she asked me to come teach her students about Islamic Art.
I agreed and started to brainstorm approaches to best help students understand the intricacies of Islamic art while still being able to address the key objectives of the Advanced Placement exam.

I did a series of four sessions with her Advanced Placement class on Islamic Art. Within the four sessions, I incorporated a variety of pedagogies to maximise students' experiential learning. In the first lesson, students were transported back to pre-Islamic Arabia through sensory storytelling so that they were able to understand the impact of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and Islam on society's social dynamics, culture, economics, and politics.

We then discussed the cultures, beliefs, and values that inspired the art pieces we would study. I then incorporated virtual reality within the sessions. Students examined architectural sites like the Dome of the Rock through virtual reality glasses, allowing them to see the layers of history more meaningfully.

I was also able to bring in objects such as models of Muslim places of worship and items

with calligraphy so that students could observe elements of Islamic art and architecture tangibly. Lastly, we ended our last session with a calligraphy workshop so students could appreciate the skill and craftsmanship required for this art form.

Mine is one example of how, by forging connections with our community through outreach efforts and continuous professional development, we can become better agents of change in education. As educators, we possess a unique ability to translate inspiring ideas into transformative educational experiences for diverse groups of learners, making us effective agents of change in the field of education.

Making new friends and building connections: Image by Saleeta Rajwani

Alumni Research Grant

The Alumni Research Grant (ARG) aims to support the academic and professional development of IIS alumni who wish to present papers, publish their work, or undertake further research following their studies at IIS.

64 Grants
GPISH **41** | STEP **20** | WTEP **3**

Publications
14

Online Courses
14

Conferences
36

Imran **Visram**
GPISH 2020
Grant: Tuition in Indian Devotional Music and Qur'an Recitation

As with all other branches of Islam, the Qur'ān that was revealed in Arabic to the Prophet Muhammad is the most important sacred text for *Satpanth* Ismaili Muslims. In addition to the Qur'ān, the lyrical teachings of the Satpanth *pīrs* preserved as knowledge (*ginān*) literature are also remarkably significant. For Ismaili preservers of the *Satpanth* teachings, these *ginān* song-poems are understood to reveal the esoteric (*bāṭin*) knowledge of the Qur'ān in the idiom of Indian devotionalism (*bhakti*).

As I pursue my doctorate in theology and pursue study of the Ismaili *gināns*, I have realised the importance of engaging with the scriptural and literary worlds that have shaped the *Satpanth* tradition. Consequently, I am grateful to have received the Alumni Research Grant in 2023, which has supported my tuition in Indian devotional music and Qur'ān recitation. In the music classes, I have been learning how to recite devotional lyrics (*bhajan, kirtan*) that are attributed to different medieval Indian poet-saints—like *Vallabha*, *Surdas*, *Mirabai*, and *Kabir*—who were contemporaries of the early *Satpanth pīrs*. Simultaneously, under the guidance of a

trained *ḥāfiẓ* residing in Pakistan, I have been developing my skills in Qur'ān recitation (*qirā'a*) by memorising short *sūras*, *āyas*, and *du'ās*.

Receiving tuition in these areas has been helpful to me as I write up my IIS-sponsored doctoral thesis, which analyses theological themes in the Ismaili *ginān* literature. I have, for example, found striking parallels in the melody and the lyrics of compositions by Kabir and Narsinh Mehta to specific Ismaili *gināns*. I have also been able to situate many stories taught by the *Satpanth Pīrs* within the broader narrative traditions of Hinduism and the Qur'ān.

I am indebted to the Alumni Relations Unit and The Institute of Ismaili Studies as a whole for supporting me to explore the literary worlds of the *Satpanth* Ismaili tradition. The tuition I have received in *bhakti* and Qur'ān recitation will remain helpful in producing my scholarly research and ensuring my pastoral commitment to the Ismaili Jamat.

Altaf **Somani**
STEP 2021
Grant: Online Course in Theory of Knowledge
University of Oxford

The IIS Alumni Research grant allowed me to engage in a two-month online course in Theory of Knowledge, offered by the University of Oxford. The course covered themes such as the problem of scepticism, the various debates regarding how best to understand what knowledge is, and the critical issues regarding the sources of knowledge. The guided readings, AV resources, and discussions on the themes mentioned above enabled me to develop my own position on topics such as the value of knowledge, rationality, justification, epistemic virtue, methods of deduction and induction, perception, limitations of memory and testimony, as well as truth and objectivity.

The coursework also helped me engage with the main issues in the theory of knowledge and developed my philosophical understanding of the epistemological foundations underlying human learning and enquiry.

The course has helped me develop frameworks and assessment rubrics for my lessons that guide my students in evaluating information critically, encouraging them to question assumptions, and providing them with the tools to develop their problem-solving skills.

Additionally, it helped me better grasp philosophical positions and signposted me to resources concerning the nature of knowledge and God. These resources have been valuable in teaching topics related to faith. I believe that the insights and knowledge gained from the course will empower me to discover more effective solutions to my questions and continually enhance my teaching methods.

Ganjina **Shamirova**
STEP 2017
Grant: Conference Presentation at the Asian Conference
on Asian Studies

After graduating from The Institute of Ismaili Studies STEP programme and doing my thesis on youth civic engagement, I was keen to be engaged in research. I was uncertain where to start until I was fortunate enough to find out about the conference opportunities and the IIS Alumni Research Grant, which supported me financially to present my work at the Asian Conference on Asian Studies (ACAS2023) and later to publish my work with The International Academic Forum (IAFOR).

Delivering a presentation on 'Teaching the Notion of Civil Society Through Classroom: How Can Teachers in Tajikistan Use the Ethical Pathways to Human Development Module to Instil the Notion of Civil Society Amongst Secondary Students?' was an excellent opportunity for me to illustrate how some Western paradigms challenge and pose cultural barriers in the context of Central Asia and what opportunities there are for educators to teach about them.

Even though the conference was held online, it was a significant learning experience for me. I learned how scholars worldwide present their work on Asian Studies topics. It allowed me to interact with leaders and experts in the field and learn from their expertise. Also, it gave me a chance to ask questions, exchange ideas, and establish valuable relationships with influential individuals.

Anika **Kabani**
GPISH 2022
Grant: Field Research in Migration and Diaspora Studies
University of Oxford

As a recipient of the Alumni Research Grant, I am conducting doctoral fieldwork in New York City from September 2023 to September 2024. My research delves into the construction of the ideal Muslim subject within the United States, focusing on individuals with precarious immigration statuses, such as asylum seekers.

Informed by anthropological, legal, and sociological literature, my hypothesis suggests that vulnerable immigrants strategically adopt ideal subjectivities to navigate the asylum-seeking process, aligning themselves with prevailing American notions of 'ideal' Islam. This strategic manoeuvring is driven by the imperative to conform to expectations set forth by the US immigration system, influencing how these individuals perceive themselves within society.

Central to my inquiry are questions regarding the promotion of specific interpretations of Islam by the immigration apparatus, the ramifications of government surveillance on faith, and the resulting creation of an idealised 'Muslim persona' as a strategic necessity.

Through an exploration of negotiation dynamics between state actors, legal advocates, and Muslim asylum seekers, I seek to unravel the influences shaping identities and experiences within the US immigration system.

I employ a dual approach to address these inquiries comprehensively, analysing relevant immigration case law and conducting ethnographic investigations of asylum seekers' lived experiences in New York City. By scrutinising legal frameworks alongside real-world manifestations of these policies, I aim to shed light on the nuances of ideal American Islam within the humanitarian immigration regime.

Furthermore, my research probes the interplay between Islam and American secularism, examining how Muslims negotiate secular spaces and engage with diverse interpretations of their faith. By unpacking the influence of American secularism on Muslim life, I aspire to contribute to broader discussions on the regulation of religion through secular governance and its impact on marginalised communities.

Marjan **Esmail**
GPISH 2007
Grant: Online Course in Creative Writing

I work for ITREB Iran, and a central part of my job involves content development. With support from the Alumni Relations Unit, I attended a creative writing course to improve my writing skills. Attending this creative writing course has genuinely transformed my approach to content development. The invaluable skills and

techniques I have gained have significantly enhanced the quality and creativity of my work.

One of the most impactful aspects of the course was learning how to effectively use language to evoke emotions and create compelling narratives. This has allowed me to infuse my

content with depth and resonance, captivating my audience and leaving a lasting impression.

Additionally, the course gave me a deeper understanding of storytelling and character development, greatly enriching my craft of content. I can now create more engaging and relatable characters in my work, making the content more appealing and memorable to the audience.

Moreover, the course honed my ability to think outside the box and approach content development with a fresh perspective. I am now more adept at generating innovative ideas and exploring unconventional angles, resulting in original and thought-provoking content.

Attending the creative writing course has been a game-changer for me as a content developer. It has expanded my skill set and ignited a newfound passion for creating compelling and impactful content. I am incredibly grateful for the invaluable knowledge and inspiration I have gained, which continues to shape and elevate my work to new heights.

Nausheen **Hoosein**
STEP 2014
Grant: Field-Based Course in Architecture and Heritage Studies

Thanks to the generous support of the IIS Alumni Research Grant, I had the unique opportunity to take part in a field-based course in Córdoba, Spain, in June 2023. Art, Architecture, and Archaeology of Early Islamic Córdoba is a five-day immersive course exploring Islamic al-Andalus's material culture and built environment alongside considering how digital technologies can make Islamic art and history accessible to wider audiences. Led by Dr Glaire Anderson (Digital Lab for Islamic Visual Culture & Collections, University of Edinburgh) and other academics, students had the opportunity to visit key sites and collections from the Umayyad period.

The course began with a tour of the historic urban centre and remains from the Islamic period, including city walls, mosques, baths, minarets, and homes, all while considering how Córdoba's ancient Roman, late Antique, medieval Islamic, and later Christian histories are intertwined. On the second day, we visited the Islamic galleries of the Museo Arqueológico de Córdoba. We learned about material culture's

social, economic, and cultural significance to medieval Islamic society. On day three, we visited the Great Mosque of Córdoba, focusing on its complex history, spanning centuries of expansions, interventions, removals, and spoliation. Finally, the course concluded with a visit to the ruins of the tenth-century palace city of Madinat al-Zahra and the on-site museum.

As a PhD student of Islamic art and architecture focusing on the material culture of al-Andalus, I found this opportunity immensely valuable. While I have previously visited these heritage sites and collections in Córdoba as part of my own field research, this course allowed me to gain insights from leading historians and archaeologists and to discuss opportunities of providing greater access to Islamic art history to the broader public through education, public engagement, and immersive digital technology.

The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) North American Chapter Group (NACG) held its first-ever hybrid Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Houston, bringing together a diverse range of speakers and alumni who shared their expertise and experiences.

Professor Zayn Kassam commenced the AGM by presenting her vision as the new director of the IIS. Riaz Rhemtulla, the STEP Liaison Manager, delivered a captivating presentation titled 'Rabt: The Liminal Spaces between Refined Boundaries,' shedding light on the interconnectedness of dance and spirituality.

Dr Shiraz Kabani, Head of the Department of Community Relations at IIS, provided updates on the latest developments and initiatives from the Institute, emphasising the importance of community engagement and collaboration. Dr Fayyaz Vellani, a lecturer in Critical Writing from the University of Pennsylvania, not only presented his new novel, 'Tea with Ms Tanzania', but also conducted a creative writing workshop, inspiring attendees to explore their own literary talents.

Dr Ali Asani, a distinguished professor from

Annual General Meeting
North American Chapter

ISLAM AND POPULAR CULTURE

Harvard University, delved into the fascinating topic of 'Art and Faith.' Dr Zahra Jamal, formerly the Associate Director of Community Engagement at Rice University's Boniuk Institute, captivated the audience with her presentation on 'Muslims and their Impacts on US History, Society, and Culture,' shedding light on the rich contributions of Muslims to American society.

In addition to the esteemed speakers, alumni of IIS showcased their own research and experiences. Ryan Makhani, Rozina Kanchwala, Tanya Panjwani, and Pyarali Keshwani shared their impressive work on enabling change, climate justice, storytelling through film, and the issues of authorship, highlighting the talents of graduates from IIS.

The AGM also featured a banquet dinner, where attendees were treated to performances by Dr Vellani and GPISH Alum Irfan Sheen, creating a vibrant and musically immersive experience.

The event concluded with an exclusive tour of the upcoming Ismaili Center Houston, offering alumni a glimpse into the latest developments of the centre. The IIS NACG AGM served as a platform for intellectual exchange, artistic expression, and community building. The presentations, workshops, and performances showcased the richness and diversity of the IIS Alumni community's contributions to academia and society.

The European Chapter Group of the IIS Alumni Association held their 2023 Annual General Meeting (AGM) on the theme of 'Migration, Refugees and Muslim Diaspora.' Dubbed "Itisaal", a term symbolising connection and harmony, the two-day event occurred on August 19–20. It was attended by several alumni from across the UK and EU.

Day one started with a keynote address by Tahir Zaman from the University of Sussex, who spoke about the Islamic concept of Jiwar and its relevance to the pressing issues facing asylum seekers and refugees. A session on the response of FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance to refugee settlement in the UK and EU by Rahila Muhibi followed. The day also featured alumni presentations, allowing IIS graduates Murid Shah, Ula Zeir, and Fatima Jiwani to present and share their research with a broader audience.

Day two opened with a keynote address delivered by Dr Mohamad Keshavjee and a panel discussion on "Migration, Refugees and the New Ismaili Diaspora." The panel presented views from diverse socio-demographic contexts. It consisted of Dr Taushif Kara, Arafat Jamal, Dr Farhad
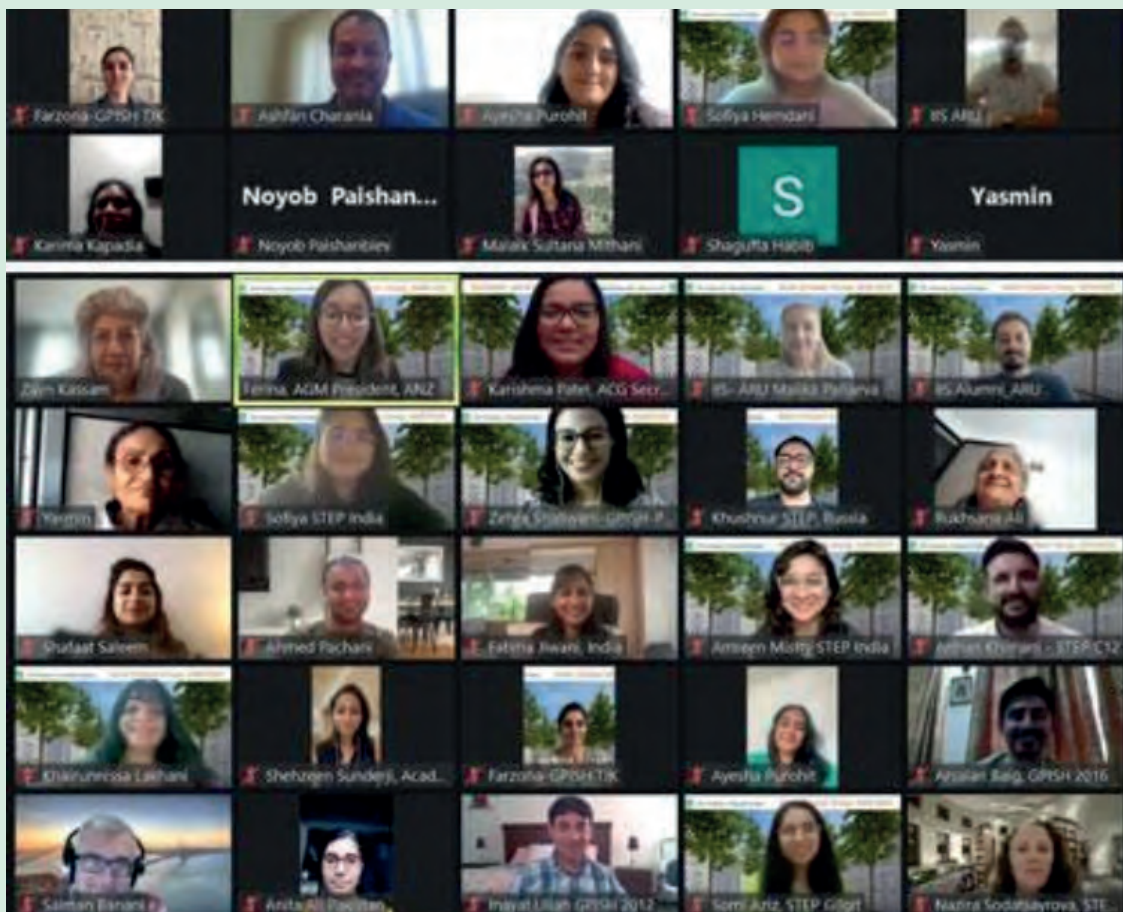
Annual General Meeting
European Chapter

MIGRATION REFUGEES AND THE NEW ISMAILI DIASPORA

Mawani, and Dilrabo Khujanazar. Alumni then had the opportunity to participate in an interactive session with the members of the IIS Board of Governors Habib Motani, Rahim Karim, Karina Govindji, and Dr Nadia Eboo Jamal, moderated by GPISH alum and ECG leader Shafaat Saleem. The session was followed by a discussion with Dr Shiraz Kabani on the latest developments at IIS. The day ended with a talk delivered by GPISH graduate Amirali Parpia from AKDN Portugal on navigating a career in international development.

The AGM concluded with a soulful Qawwali performance enjoyed by the IIS staff, students, and members of the Jamaat, marking a fitting end to a successful event. The AGM was a valuable opportunity for IIS alumni to reconnect, network, and learn from each other. It also provided a forum for discussing the critical issues of migration and refugees, exploring how educational institutes like IIS can play a role in addressing these challenges.

Annual General Meeting Asian Chapter Group

Faith in Action: Empowering a Better Tomorrow

The IIS Alumni Asian Chapter Group hosted a virtual Annual General Meeting on 2–3 September, themed "Faith in Action: Empowering a Better Tomorrow". The two-day event featured workshops by Professor Farid Panjwani and Professor James Walters. Both speakers treated alumni with conversations on the importance of religious pluralism and the role of technology in shaping our attitudes.

Additionally, the alumni participated in an interactive virtual guided tour of the Aga Khan Museum, led by Shirin Divanbeigi. The event also included conversations with the IIS Director, Professor Zayn Kassam and the Department of Community Relations Head, Dr Shiraz Kabani. ACG alums Zehra Punjwani and Arman Khimani presented their work at the Alumni Symposium, while Faiza Baig, Maryam Khan, Nadia Karim, Somia Aziz and Arman Khimani showed their performative talents at the AGM's Celebrations and Expressions segment.

IIS Alumni Recognition Award

The IIS Alumni Recognition Award celebrates IIS alumni who have demonstrated a career of exceptional service and leadership.

The inaugural award recipient, Professor Karim H. Karim, has an extensive record of over three decades of scholarship, service, and leadership. His designation as Chancellor's Professor is the highest honour given by Carleton University for scholarship of outstanding merit with substantial international impact, research leadership, and continued active participation in the development of research excellence.

Professor Karim has a worldwide reputation as a leading scholar of media representations of Muslims and diasporic communications. He has had visiting appointments at Harvard, Simon Fraser, and the Aga Khan University. Professor Karim has delivered keynote addresses in several countries, and his critically acclaimed publications have been cited widely. He was the inaugural winner of the Robinson Book Prize and has received media coverage on six continents.

Prof. Karim has served as Director of Carleton's renowned School of Journalism and Communication and its Centre for the Study of Islam, respectively. He was also the Institute of Ismaili Studies' first alumnus to lead it in a directorial capacity. He spearheaded founding initiatives on Accessibility to Digitised Collections and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation as a Senior Policy Officer in the Canadian Government, which endowed him with awards for exceptional public service and for fostering collaboration between ethno-religious communities.

Professor Karim's Message to Alumni

As you may know, our tradition adopted the name "Ismaili" in the early 20th century. Prior to that it was called *Da'wat al-Haqq* — which means Invitation to Truth, Summons to Truth, or Mission of Truth. In India, the *Pirs* named it *Satpanth* — Path of Truth or the True Path. Our aspiration is to have truth manifest in our worldview and actions. It underpins our ethical outlook.

We encounter many challenges throughout our lives. We face success, failure, joy, and frustration. The organisations we work for pressure us to get the job done and we are often tempted to take shortcuts to fulfill expectations. But this is where critical thinking, which you have discussed extensively in your studies, becomes pertinent.

How does one balance the imperative to get the job done, on the one hand, and remain ethical, on the other? His Highness the Aga Khan, Mowlana Hazar Imam, instructed the community's leaders at a gathering in the United States in 1986, that "we will ask the hard questions." Fulfilling your tasks ethically is one of the hard issues that you will face constantly in your career.

Let the truth infuse your words, your music, your art, and your actions as you go ahead to fulfill your potential and promise.

Image: Professor Karim H. Karim at the alumni recognition award ceremony. March 2024. Ismaili Center London. Photo by Rehana Virani

IIS ALUMNI INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

The IIS Alumni Internship Programme was launched in 2006 by the IIS Alumni Relations Unit to facilitate the transition of IIS GPISH graduates from student life to developing professional experience within the Imamat and Jamati institutional network.

Farheen Madad
GPISH 2023

IIS Oral History Project

My interest in working with the IIS Oral History Project (OHP) emerged in 2022 when I first learned about the project. It appealed to me for several reasons and reminded me of a conversation I had with my friends back in 2018 during my undergraduate degree in Pakistan. I remember discussing the fragmented folk stories of Hunza and suggesting their documentation. Luckily, after I graduated from the London School of Economics and Political Science, I was offered an internship through the IIS Alumni Internship Programme as a consultant with the Oral History Project (OHP). My key responsibilities included translating and transcribing the recorded oral history interviews and producing a podcast and an article.

My work with OHP taught me that transcription and translation are critical skills that require excellent comprehension of the intricacies of languages. The expressiveness, emotions, and intonation of the words/phrases are challenging to write. Additionally, I learned new and previously unheard words in my native language, Burushaski.

Furthermore, the available history of the socio-economic transformation in Hunza was documented by non-natives. The OHP set a precedent by allowing natives of Hunza, like myself, to record indigenous narratives of people who recall their experiences in an authentic, jargon-free and unreciprocated manner. From a literary perspective, it is fascinating to see how their narratives overlap and create a shared narrative of lived experiences.

My work also included writing articles and podcast scripts based on collected oral narratives. This taught me to organise data and conduct a thematic analysis of oral history narratives. Through this, I learned the importance and relevance of each narrative. Inspiration and resilience in each voice transcends generational boundaries and gaps. Being a woman from Hunza, it was difficult for me to disconnect myself emotionally from women's narratives. As we await the release of these

outputs, I want to encourage more students at the IIS to explore these resources once it is available.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the supervision I got from Mr Rizwan Karim, the Oral History Project Coordinator, while I was working on the project. Alongside supporting my remote work, he guided my work in the best ways. I am very grateful to the IIS for providing me with this opportunity through which I gained invaluable experience and career direction in the preservation field, not only of Ismaili communities' experiences and cultures but also of other co-existing faith communities and cultures.

I had the privilege of interning with the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), specifically within the Department of Community Relations. This department is instrumental in building and maintaining global educational programmes and relationships for the Ismaili community. The focus of my internship was split between the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Project and the Alumni Relations Unit, where I engaged in research and alumni interaction.

I was involved in significant tasks during my internship across two main projects. For the FAQ Project, I handled data collection and analysis across multiple global locations, cleaned and processed data, performed content-coding, and helped the team develop comprehensive reports for the IIS Board. This also included creating visual data presentations using PowerBI, which helped simplify complex information for stakeholders. In the Alumni Relations Unit, my role was to help with carrying out the Alumni survey.

Guldast Alibakhshov
GPISH 2023

FAQ Project – IIS DCR

The internship was immensely beneficial in expanding my technical and research skills. I improved my proficiency in data management tools like MS Excel and PowerBI. I learned to handle both qualitative and quantitative data more effectively. My project management and communication skills also grew as I collaborated with a diverse team, which taught me the importance of clarity and organisation in a professional setting. IIS provided a profoundly enriching, supportive and challenging environment.

I was constantly impressed by the team's dedication and the collaborative atmosphere. Working in such a setting also allowed me to gain new perspectives and approaches to my work, enriching my professional experience and personal growth.

Based on my experience, I would suggest that integrating newer analytical tools and regular training could enhance staff and intern productivity. A structured feedback system where interns can receive and give feedback regularly would also be beneficial in improving the internship programme. Furthermore, providing more opportunities for interns to interact with various departments could foster broader professional development and engagement within the Institute.
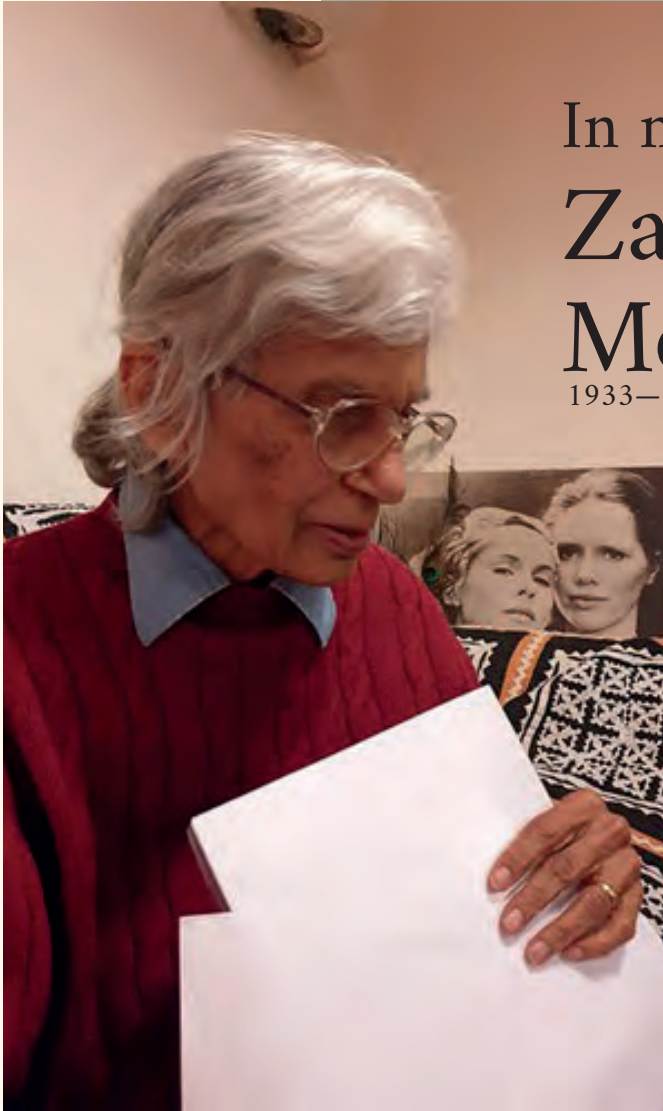
Overall, the internship at IIS was a transformative experience that has greatly influenced my career trajectory. The skills and knowledge I acquired are invaluable and will undoubtedly benefit my professional endeavours in the future.

In memory of
Zawahir Moir
1933—2024

Zawahir Moir was an eminent Ismaili studies scholar who wrote widely on *Satpanth* literature and modern Ismaili history. Mrs Moir passed away peacefully in London, England, on 9 February 2024. Her former students from The Institute of Ismaili Studies fondly remember her and share reflections on her legacy.

In 2014, serendipity introduced me to two remarkable individuals, Zawahir Moir and Martin Moir, during one of their visits to The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS). Zawahir, a beacon of generosity, shared her passion for teaching the Gujarati language and the Khojki script despite these elective modules being discontinued at GPISH earlier that year. Her offer to teach us Gujarati on Fridays illuminated our academic journey, adding vibrancy to our first term on the programme. Accompanied by her husband, Martin, Zawahir fostered an environment where laughter intertwined with learning. I vividly recall her amusing quest for finding Martin "vegetarian shoes"—a moment etched in our memories.

As GPISH burgeoned with activity, our regular classes waned, but our visits to Zawahir's home continued, echoing the tradition of hospitality ingrained in my Wakhi heritage. Zawahir's flat became a sanctuary, her embrace akin to that of a cherished elder. Her boundless affection and unwavering support nurtured us, transcending the boundaries of mentorship to kinship. Martin, too, shared his wealth of knowledge generously. Guiding a friend through GPISH research in India, he steered us toward invaluable resources and connected us with pertinent contacts at the British Library, a gesture emblematic of their altruism.

Zawahir's dedication to teaching endured until her final days, shaping the lives of younger colleagues who continued to benefit from her tutelage. Her legacy as a teacher reverberates through the hearts of those she touched, leaving an irreplaceable void. As I bid farewell, the ache of her absence is tempered by gratitude for the privilege of knowing her. Zawahir's memory will forever inspire us, guiding us through life's ebbs and flows.

Nahida Ahmed
SOAS University of London

One of my first memories of Zawahir takes me back to the old IIS building at 210 Euston Road, where she used to come to teach Gujarati and Khojki. At the time, she must have been in her late seventies or early eighties; nonetheless, she travelled regularly via public transport to teach voluntarily. Later, when her family priorities would not allow her to travel as frequently, she opened her house to us so as not to obstruct our learning—so warm and welcoming was her and Martin's place in Hampstead!

She taught patience and kindness by guiding us to master new languages and scripts. The deep and meaningful conversations that we have had with her can indeed be described as moments of privilege! She not only shared her insight into the meanings of different *gināns* but open-heartedly shared nuggets of her wisdom through various anecdotes of her life—all these are memories that we will cherish forever.

Her care and dedication to her students showed she was a great scholar and an exemplary mentor. She has inspired many of us to lead a life where we can encourage and support others. Zawahir has touched the hearts of everyone she worked with and those she mentored—her memories inspire humility and kindness. She will truly be missed.

Semina Halani
Institute of Ismaili Studies

I was excited to learn that Zawahir Moir lived in London when I relocated there in 2017. I reached out to her, and she warmly opened her flat to me and some of my coursemates to teach us the sacred Khojki script. It was not long before I visited her home regularly to ask her questions about her publications on Indian Ismaili literature and learn from her academic career journey.

At that time, I was particularly interested in the publications she had co-authored with Dominique Sila-Khan, which documented the religio-political scene at the burial site of the fifteenth-century Satpanth saint Imam Shah. I was mentored and encouraged in my conversations with Zawahir to pursue my GPISH fieldwork at the same shrine in Gujarat during the summer of 2019. She prepared me for my site visit by sharing her knowledge with a warmth and excitement I will never forget.

Zawahir's vast publication output on Satpanth history and literature has remained influential to many for several decades. It must be noted, however, that the scholarly life she led was also a very personal endeavour for her. She was deeply revered for the words of the *pīrs* she spent her life researching. These teachings guided her daily life and were the virtues she held with her. They revealed this through the softness and openness that informed her professional practice as an educator.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from Zawahir. Her knowledge has been tremendously influential in the direction of my own research, and it will continue to shape studies in Indian Ismailism in the years to come.

Imran Visram
University of Oxford

Farhad Daftary Doctoral Scholarship Programme

The IIS awards Farhad Daftary Doctoral Scholarships each year to suitable candidates interested in pursuing doctoral research on a topic related to the Institute's core research areas. Established in 1997, the IIS Doctoral Scholarship Programme has awarded more than 53 scholarships to date.

Farhan FerozAli
GPISH 2023

Topic: "…at thy door I stay"—Traversing a Poetics of Place at Bhittai's Shrine

Tarried at the threshold of Bhittai's tomb, amid circumfusing chants of the faqirs atop their lilting harmonies, bodies enrapture in their convergence with the divine. This place, the shrine of the Sindhi-folk and Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif (1689–1752), marks both the social and the spiritual centres for bodies—Muslim, Sindhi, Pakistani or otherwise—which gather within its boundaries regularly to sing and dance, bodies which witness the sacred and are being witnessed by it.

Architecture, belief, and ritual seem to come together in service of these bodies: the living are revered through a celebration of the dead in the present life, and the dead intercede for the living in the afterlife; and within this amalgamation are found the many constructions of knowing and being, of embodied practice as a register for accessing truths.

But in writing art-historical accounts of this site, scholars tend to treat all these elements as separate phenomena that coalesce momentarily only to legitimise the existence of the other. Preliminary ethnographic data, on the other hand, suggests that if any single one of these elements is removed, the Divine is removed with it. My aim is thus twofold: first, to integrate the lived experience through and of the dwellers of this place in the broader construction of knowledge—a living archive of meanings; and second, to develop a methodology to study material cultures of the South Asian region, one which foregrounds the people and the cultural consciousness of the region.

To reach these aims, I begin by expanding the boundaries of the site: from a Sindhi-Muslim or Pakistani phenomenon, as the site generally has been looked upon, to the broader South Asian consciousness, foregrounding commonalities and movements both past and present that are erased in and through dominant narratives. In doing so is revealed a fluidity, both of the site and its dwellers as each changes continuously with inter- and intra-contextual engagements.

The predicament of semiological analyses can thus be overcome in studying the work of the site, or what the site makes possible for the bodies it contains, and how this work affects the latter. Next, and in order to understand this work, I study the various positions through which is theorised the concepts of place and being-in-place – cosmological, scientific, anthropological, phenomenological, somatic, and artistic – owing to the fluid nature of the human experience of architecture, and of themselves within architecture.

A Gratifying Journey

How GPISH gave me Building Blocks for Research and Impact in Early Childhood and Ethnocultural Community Development

Naheed Mukhi | GPISH 2017

Naheed is a doctoral student at the University of Toronto and the Pre-Primary/Early Childhood Lead for Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board (ITREB) Canada. Her research interests and work revolve around promoting home culture and home languages through early childhood curricula in both formal and informal educational settings.

In a preschool classroom in Toronto, Canada, walls are lined with greetings from the multiple home languages children speak. During circle time, the early years educator plays an Urdu lullaby that children recognise from bedtime routines at home. For their structured playtime, two children enact an Eritrean coffee ceremony. Fatima, a 3-year-old, confidently shows her classmates how to pour the coffee into little cups donated by her grandmother to the classroom and greets her friend "Salamat", just like Fatima's family does at home.

My name is Naheed Mukhi, and over the last few years, my studies, research, and advocacy work have centred around bringing children's home cultures and home languages to the classroom. From my childhood in Karachi, my immigration to Canada as an undergraduate student, my time at the IIS GPISH programme, and my current work with ITREB Canada, I understand first-hand the potential and importance of looking at diversity as a strength. This is particularly crucial in the context of countries like Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, where massive numbers of immigrants and refugees, mainly from Muslim-majority countries, are arriving on an ongoing basis. As diaspora ethnocultural communities settle in various cities, they bring rich cultures, multiple languages, and lived experiences. However, they are often viewed as a burden on society through a deficit lens (Zschomler, 2019; Yosso & García, 2007). Using the early childhood curriculum as a foundation to inculcate pluralistic attitudes in children at a young age and fostering a positive attitude towards diversity has become my passion.

The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) played a significant role in my embarking on this learning pathway. The first two years of the GPISH programme at the IIS inculcated a love for diversity in Islam, particularly in the broader world.

The civilisational and humanistic approach to Islamic Studies, in which we understood the richness of Muslim contribution, helped me understand the potential of diversity. Courses like *Art, Religion, Literature and Identity in South Asian Muslim Contexts*, *Ismailis in Modern Times*, and *Intellectual Traditions in the History of Muslims* gave me various points of entry through which to learn about, appreciate, and celebrate the strength that each individual and culture has woven into the tapestry of human history.

I am also incredibly grateful that my time in GPISH exposed me to new people and cultures. While learning to make *mansaf* and practising vocalisation of the ingredients in my accented Arabic from our host family in Amman, Jordan, during an Arabic language immersion visit in the summer, I learned how food is an essential marker of identity and mealtimes are great opportunities to learn about and celebrate the richness of one's culture.

At the end of my second year, my GPISH fieldwork took me to the Aga Khan Foundation's Madrasa Early Childhood Programme which operates in three East African countries: Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The Madrasa Programme was established to provide pre-schools for marginalised Muslim communities. During the 1980s and 1990s, many East African countries required an entrance exam for children to get into primary school (Evans & Bartlett, 2008). A majority of Muslim children did not pass the exams and the ones that did, performed poorly in primary schools. The Muslim community, as a result, expressed concern about their children being increasingly marginalised due to limited and blocked access to the primary schooling. When His Highness the Aga Khan IV visited Kenya in 1982, Muslim leaders requested assistance in addressing issues regarding children falling behind in education.

● Families bring artefacts to the classrooms.
Image by Naheed Mukhi

Thus, the Madrasa Programme was established in 1986 to provide quality early years' education to Muslim children from low socio-economic backgrounds. Although initially focused to work with young children from disadvantaged communities, the growth and development of the programme over the years has led to an increase in the enrolment of non-Muslim students. With the increasing proportion of non-Muslim children within the classroom setting, particularly in regions like Uganda and Kenya, there was a need to ensure the comfort and learning of children that affiliate with other faiths. In my qualitative research field work, through classroom observations, document analyses and semi-structured interviews, I noticed that a specific Muslim narrative dominated classroom practice. In some classrooms teachers who were not Muslim were required to teach Islam to all students, regardless of their beliefs. This experience highlighted the danger of privileging one group over others, while ignoring the lived experiences and belief systems of other students.

In my third year in GPISH, I was given an opportunity to study Child Development and Education at the University of Oxford. There, I designed an early years reading intervention programme for my mixed methods research study to cultivate pluralistic attitudes in young children, ultimately leading to social-emotional and literacy development gains. This experience highlighted a scarcity of classroom resources that reflect the diverse cultures and languages of each classroom and how by mere exposure to diverse children's literature, children development in the areas of language and empathy can be positively impacted.

After graduation, I was fortunate that the IIS facilitated an internship with the Department of Jamati Institutions (DJI), where I learned to develop curricula and pedagogies for Early

Childhood Development programmes in Tajikistan, Syria, Afghanistan, and other countries. Using low-cost, no-cost resources, I learned alongside my mentors to celebrate folk songs, home language stories and games from various cultures.

Today, as the Early Childhood Lead for ITREB Canada, I work with community educators (Religious Education Teachers) to harness the diversity in their classroom settings and to help each child feel a true sense of belonging. For example, at the start of each academic year, families are asked to bring a cultural artefact to the classroom that represents their family's history, journeys, and strengths. This becomes a strength-based conversation starter for children and parents to positively see the diversity around them.

As I learn about social justice and anti-racist approaches to curriculum studies in my doctoral studies at the University of Toronto, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be part of GPISH. The programme gave me a foundation to impact the lives of young children in the Canadian early years education context in feeling proud of their family's home culture and language while

● Madrasa Teachers' Curriculum Planning Meeting: Image by Naheed Mukhi

treating others with respect and admiration. I hope that through this work, an often misunderstood and unappreciated population can become transmitters of cultural wealth to future generations and help families anchor themselves as co-creators of knowledge rather than mere consumers.

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NEW IIS GRADUATES

GPISH 2023

Anusha Ali
MA Illustration
University of the Arts London

Guldastasho Alibakhshov
MSc Social Anthropology
London School of Economics

MuridShah Nadir
MSc Globalised Muslim World
University of Edinburgh

Farhan FerozAli
MA History of Art and Architecture
SOAS University of London

Iram Shaista Khan
MSc Environmental Protection and
Management
University of Edinburgh

Sobia Ibrahim
Environment, Politics and Society
University College London

Farheen Madad
MSc Anthropology and Development
Management
London School of Economics

Kasra Shiva
MA Islamic Studies and History
University of Oxford

Aqib Lakhani
Development Studies
SOAS University of London

STEP C14

Ali **Kassem** | Ali **Zair** | Anisa **Sarwary** | Anjiya **Rizwan** |Azizmamad **Shakarmamadov** | Chaugofa **Rizai**| Davlatbakht **Qiyomiddinova** | Fareesa **Soomar** | Friba **Noori** | Habib **Ullah** | Hanifa **Hakimi** | Inaara **Hemraj** | Mahek **Khoja** | Mushtari **Mamaddustova** | Narmin **Premani** | Nasiruddin **Iqbalzada** | Nausheen Ahmad | Nida **Fatima** | Nizamuddin **Habibi** | Rehmat **Hussain**| Romila **Sarwar** | Sabir **Hussain** | Saima **Kamal** | Salina **Bavania** | Shamir **Kurbonov** | Shamsi **Navruzov** | Sidra **Asad** | Suraiya **Amershi** | Syed **Sabbah** | Umed **Nasiloev** | Zakia **Nigar** | Zoya **Mithani** | Nazneen **Lakhani**

ALUMNI BENEFITS

Access to facilities at the Aga Khan Centre, including the Aga Khan Library, London

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Customised Internship Programme sponsored by the IIS for new GPISH graduates

A range of Continuing Professional Development initiatives are in place for STEP graduates, enabling them to enhance their skills and capabilities

Access to funding of up to £1,000 for research, publication of monographs and articles, presenting papers at conferences, and attendance at courses

Access to global job opportunities, conferences and events, as well as the international alumni directory via the IIS Alumni Online Community Portal

Free lifetime membership of the IIS Alumni Association

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Alumni Publications, Papers and Conference Presentations

2023–2024

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