



IIS Alumni

Newsletter 2009





This has been a momentous year in the academic activities of the IIS. We published the final two books, including *The Ismailis: An Illustrated History*, to commemorate Mawlana Hazar Imam's Golden Jubilee. Another

milestone in our publications, now numbering some 60 titles, was the initiation of the *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, a 16-volume set with numerous articles on Shi'i Islam. The IIS is now firmly established as the foremost academic institution in the West focusing on Shi'i and Ismaili Studies, drawing on the largest single collection of manuscripts in the field held at our library. The IIS continued to serve the Jamat in a variety of other ways as well. Our Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) and GPISH remain on track and we now annually

sponsor more than 50 STEP and GPISH students, providing an ongoing additional pool of human resources in terms of the IIS alumni, currently numbering more than 250. Remaining engaged with our alumni continues to represent a major priority of the IIS. Mawlana Hazar Imam acknowledged and reiterated these achievements and our priorities, when he met, in July 2008, with the faculty and staff of the IIS.

After a decade of service to the IIS, Professor Azim Nanji left to take up another academic post at Stanford University, and I am now the Acting Director of the IIS, a new milestone in my own personal service to this institution dating back to 1988. We have also moved to our new and more spacious premises on Euston Road, where we shall be co-located with ISMC, and where we aim to see more of our alumni both individually and collectively.

Farhad Daftary

The celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of Mawlana Hazar Imam's accession to the Imamate were a major highlight for all of us. It was also an eventful and productive year for the Alumni Relations Unit, as well as for the individual Chapter Groups which have reached out to increasing numbers of alumni across the globe.

The Chapter Groups have had a busy year with elections, annual meetings and other local and regional programmes. The Asian and European Chapters held their annual meetings in Dubai and London, respectively, and the North American Chapter held its annual meeting in Vancouver. We were delighted that so many alumni were able to participate in these events, and hope that participation will continue to increase. In thanking Ruksanah Pirani, Aziz Ali Dad, Shah Hussain, Farhad Mortezaee, Aziz Kabani and Faezeh Mirshahi for all their effort and hard work, we hope that they have had memorable and rewarding experiences.

The Academic Seminar, held in Cairo during October 2008, served as a platform for discussions amongst the alumni and scholars on a theme of contemporary relevance. Entitled *Engaging with a City: Memory, Modernity and Culture in the City Victorious*, the seminar drew on the expertise of scholars such as Bernard O'Kane, Stefano Bianca, Said Sadek and Modjtaba Sadria. Thirty alumni, from several different graduate programmes offered by the IIS, attended the seminar and engaged with the faculty. They were also able to participate in a walking tour of historic Cairo with Dr Shainool Jiwa and a visit to the pyramids in Giza.

In this issue of the *Alumni Newsletter*, we would like to recognise alumni who have been working with ITREBs for the past 25 years: their dedication and

commitment is truly an inspiration. We had asked these alumni, celebrating the Silver Jubilee of their professional engagement with ITREBs, to share the most memorable moments during their journey.

This issue also features recollections of some alumni about their time at the IIS. We are sure that each of you will find a reflection in their memories of your time at the IIS. Their journey provides an insight into where they started and where they are now. We have also taken this opportunity to welcome our new Alumni and wish them the very best as they begin their journey.

During the year, the Alumni Relations Unit at the IIS bid farewell to both Sara Cerfontyne and Nazneen Sachedina. Sara has supported the ARU since its inception and had developed a strong relationship with the alumni body globally. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank them both for all the work they have undertaken, and wish them every success in their future endeavours.

We would also like to convey special thanks to Marjan Esmaili (Class of 2007), the Alumni Relations Unit intern, for her enthusiasm and creativity over the past months. We thank all alumni who sent materials for the newsletter, with special thanks to Aliya Lavji, Rana Aliakbar and Shahin Manji for their support in the preparation and production of this newsletter. In thanking you all for your ongoing support and participation, the Alumni Relations Unit hopes that there will be even greater engagement of the alumni with the IIS: remember, every academic institution needs its alumni. Thank you!

Shellina Karmali
Alumni Relations Unit



**Sultan Abbas,
PAKISTAN**

During his third year at the IIS, Sultan chose to undertake an MSc in Global Politics (Global Civil Society) from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Sultan is currently an intern with the Aga Khan Foundation, UK.



**Marifat Alifbekova,
TAJIKISTAN**

During her third year at the IIS, Marifat chose to undertake an MA in Education (Citizenship, History and Religious Education) at the Institute of Education, University of London. Marifat is currently an intern with the Aga Khan Education Services in Khorog, Tajikistan.



**Sabrina A Bandali,
CANADA**

Class of 2008 Valedictorian
During her third year at the IIS, Sabrina chose to undertake an M.St. in Oriental Studies at the University of Oxford. Sabrina is currently studying at the Faculty of Law, University of Toronto.



**Salima Bandjy,
FRANCE**

During her third year at the IIS, Salima chose to undertake an MSc Education (e-Learning) at the University of Oxford. Salima is completing an internship with the Aga Khan Academics based in Mombasa, Kenya.



**Soraiya Campbell,
CANADA**

During her third year at the IIS, Soraiya chose to undertake a 2-year MA in Dispute Resolution at the University of Pepperdine.



**Zamira Dildorbekova,
TAJIKISTAN**

During her third year at the IIS, Zamira chose to undertake a 2-year MPhil in Development Studies at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.



**Mavjigul Dushanbieva,
TAJIKISTAN**

During her third year at the IIS, Mavjigul chose to undertake an MSc in Social Anthropology at University College London. Mavjigul is interning with the Aga Khan Humanities Project, University of Central Asia, as a Visiting Fellow.



**Furhana Husani,
USA**

During her third year at the IIS, Furhana chose to undertake an MPA, with a concentration on International Energy Management and Policy at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University.



**Sorbon Mavlonazarov,
TAJIKISTAN**

During his third year at the IIS, Sorbon chose to undertake an MSc in Social Anthropology at University College London. Sorbon is currently an intern with The Institute of Ismaili Studies' Central Asian Studies Unit.



**Palla Pallaev,
TAJIKISTAN**

During his third year at the IIS, Palla chose to undertake an MSc in Non-governmental Organisations and Development at the London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London. Palla is currently an intern with the Aga Khan Foundation based in Moscow, Russia.



**Ambreen Saleh,
PAKISTAN**

During her third year at the IIS, Ambreen chose to undertake an MSc in the Political Economy of Development at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Ambreen has joined the First MicroFinance Bank, Pakistan, in a professional capacity.



**Ula Zeir,
SYRIA**

During her third year at the IIS, Ula chose to undertake an MSc in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, University of Edinburgh. Ula is interning with The Institute of Ismaili Studies' Website Unit.



Since their inception, the Chapter Groups of the IIS Alumni Association have worked closely with the Alumni Relations Unit at the IIS to develop and implement strategies to maintain a strong relationship between alumni in their respective regions and the IIS. The role of the elected leadership of the Chapter Groups has been vital in this effort.

On behalf of the IIS and the alumni, we would like to thank the three retiring Chapter Group presidents for their contributions and look forward to their continuing participation.

Each of the retiring presidents has sent a message, which is being shared through this newsletter with the alumni.

**MESSAGE FROM HANIF VIRANI
(PRESIDENT, NORTH AMERICAN CHAPTER
GROUP 2006-2008)**

The Institute's graduate programmes have consistently attracted idealistically driven young Ismaili men and women. As each graduate has gone forth into the world, our idealism has waxed and waned and we have sometimes wavered in our belief whether our dreams and ideals are indeed achievable.

But, our Imam's vision has always remained constant and he continues to build and fulfil our dreams and ideals. The achievements that have been attained are testaments of his successful vision. These range from reviving the status of the nursing profession in Pakistan, resuscitating Islamic architecture and traditions of music in the Muslim world, to building world class universities and developing cutting edge solutions to the problems of development, poverty and ethnic strife.

As alumni, we had the privilege to be part of the 25th anniversary celebrations of the IIS, where we joined hands in the realisation of his vision once again. This encounter positively resulted in a flurry of alumni activity all over the world.

In North America, over the last couple of years, we have established a vibrant Alumni Chapter Group, where local branches have convened conferences to deliberate on issues facing the Muslim world today and, most importantly, we rekindled the bonds of friendship and camaraderie between the nearly one hundred IIS alumni resident in North America.

In recent years, Mawlana Hazar Imam has commented to the IIS leadership that the IIS alumni represent a resource of the greatest importance for the future of the Ismaili Tariqah. Insha-Allah, the alumni will rise to this vision of the Imam and we will continue to maintain strong Alumni Association, which will provide the institutional framework for the alumni to express and magnify their collective contribution.

**MESSAGE FROM NACIM PAK-SHIRAZ
(PRESIDENT, EUROPEAN CHAPTER GROUP
2007-2008)**

My term as President of the European Chapter Group began in 2007. I was very passionate in facilitating ways in which members of the Chapter Group could collectively contribute to their own development, to our institutions, to the Jamat itself and society as a whole.

One of the greatest challenges during my term of office was bringing together such a diverse group of people from various generational, cultural, educational and professional backgrounds. Together with Shah Hussain, the Secretary of the European Chapter Group at the time, we tried to determine the interests of our group and find ways of addressing them in a suitable manner.

Our members were all bold, dynamic and ambitious; they were all very clear as to which direction in which they wanted the Chapter Group to grow. The general consensus was that the Chapter Group needed to be properly



recognised as a vibrant and viable body that could meaningfully contribute to the Jamat and its institutions. However, there was a strong sense within the group that this recognition extended only to the IIS, as the wider jamat and many other institutions were not even aware of the Chapter Group's existence. Bridging this gap will require a long-term strategy and concerted efforts by all parties.

Nevertheless, the Chapter Group has proposed a number of projects and activities to fulfil this goal. Some of these suggestions included conducting social activities, an academic forum, cultural events and many other such bridge-building conversations with Jamati institutions.

While we were in office, the Chapter Group implemented a number of activities that are captured in the Chapter Group report. However, as alumni, we continue to face long-term challenges and much remains to be done. But, what we can do is continue to build upon the foundations laid by our predecessors and pave the path for further opportunities for those who come to serve after us.

**MESSAGE FROM RAHMAT GHASSMI
(PRESIDENT, ASIAN CHAPTER GROUP
2006-2008)**

I had the wonderful opportunity and privilege to serve as the first President of the Asian Chapter Group for two consecutive terms. With the onset of my office, together with the Hon. Secretary, Farzana Karim Haji, I saw this post as an exciting challenge. The establishment of the IIS Alumni Association was a new initiative and as the first President of the Asian Chapter Group, with no precedents and no benchmarks, I was very apprehensive of its long term sustainability. Many questions arose in my mind, such as: "Would the Alumni see the benefit of having this body? Would the IIS continue to support its growth and progress?"

The first and the greatest challenge for us was to establish and sustain regular contact with the alumni who were spread over 14 countries, including Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan (including the Northern Areas of Pakistan), Korea, Hong Kong, China, Sudan, India, Russia, Dubai, Syria, Iran, Tanzania and Kenya. Some of these alumni were not accessible by e-mail or phone. However, two years down the road, not only did we manage to establish contact, but we managed to also bring together all the Alumni to participate at the Annual Meetings which were held in Mombasa and Dubai.

The meetings turned out to be intellectually and socially stimulating and, following discussions, we found that we all had one common goal, that is, to be active participants in fulfilling our duties to the Imam, its institutions and the Jamat.

Contrary to our initial apprehensions, the alumni have presented a very positive view of the Chapter Groups. Furthermore, the Chapter Groups have received tremendous support from the IIS in all aspects – morally, financially and intellectually. I would like to make a special mention of the staff of the Alumni Relations office at the IIS, who work very hard to assist us in all our programmes.

Furthermore, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Farzana for all her hard work and the terrific support she gave me and the Chapter Group throughout our term in office. I would also like to thank all the Alumni of the Asian Chapter Group for the wonderful cooperation and encouragement that they gave us.

Today I can look back and reflect with a sense of confidence that the Asian Chapter Group has taken the long stride in fulfilling its mandate and, with the enthusiasm and goodwill generated amongst its members, this body will achieve greater heights as we look towards the future – this is my hope and prayer.

Asian Chapter Group

The Asian Chapter Group is as diverse as the region. One of the foremost priorities of the Chapter Group is to bring together this diverse group of alumni on a single platform so that a permanent base for interaction can be provided.

Our focus is on:

- Harnessing expertise of IIS alumni to disseminate relevant knowledge and research to the Jamat.
- Facilitating professional and volunteer involvement of IIS alumni with AKDN and Jamati institutions.
- Arranging presentations, lectures and briefings to students about the IIS and its mandate.
- Keeping the alumni of the chapter aware of all relevant research and developments.

Chapter Group Annual Meeting: The annual meeting was held in April 2008 in Dubai. The session began with an overview of the previous year's activities followed by a discussion regarding issues pertaining to the role of the Alumni Association and how it can add value to the alumni's personal and professional development. Significant emphasis was laid on developing contacts with institutions so that the alumni could find ways to contribute to the Jamat and Imamat institutions according to their educational training and experience.

Activities: Besides delivering professional services in their respective institutions, the alumni of the Asian Chapter Group have been involved in various volunteer services throughout the year. Members of the Chapter Group have held meetings with students, delivered presentations about various IIS programmes, and participated in various seminars and workshops. In addition, the group members were actively involved in the planning and management of a number of activities and events during Golden Jubilee Year.

European Chapter Group

The elections of office bearers for the European Chapter Group were held in May 2008, where Shah Hussain and Faezeh Mirshahi were elected as President and Secretary, respectively.

A focus group meeting was held in August 2008 where discussions focussed on the following themes:

- Activities of the Chapter Group.
- Bridge building with Jamati institutions and their structure.
- Nature and management of the Chapter Group.

Many new ideas for expanding the scope of activities within the Chapter Group were put forward, including alumni contribution to capacity building within Jamati institutions.

Alumni Film Club: The European Chapter Group announced the formation of its Film Club in November 2008. The aim of the Film Club is to bring together IIS students, staff and alumni to watch films, which would then provide a forum for intellectual discussions. Apart from film screenings, the club will also organise visits to theatres and cinemas in London.

Visit to the British Museum: In May 2009, the European Chapter Group will organise a visit to The British Museum to view an exhibition entitled "*Shah Abbas: The Remaking of Iran*", preceded by a talk on the exhibition by Dr Fahmida Suleman, an IIS alumnus, who assisted with the curating of this exhibition at the British Museum.

Chapter Group Annual Meeting: The European Chapter Group held its two day annual meeting at University of Westminster in London in April 2008. Thirty four alumni attended the meeting. The first day of the meeting started with a keynote lecture by Karen Armstrong entitled "*Lessons from Islamic History*" followed by screening of a film co-written by an alumnus, Miriam Ali de-Unzaga, entitled, "*A Road to Mecca: The Journey of Muhammad Asad*".



Nimet Renner, from the Social Welfare Department at Aiglemont was another guest speaker. Ms Renner explained the organisational structure of the Aga Khan Education Services and discussed the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Other Activities: Many members of the European Chapter Group took part in the "Meet and Greet Scheme" organised by the Department of Graduate Studies for newly enrolled students at the IIS. Alumni of the European Chapter Group have also assisted with the GPISH awareness campaign for 2009 and delivered presentations in various Jamatkhanas throughout the United Kingdom.

North American Chapter Group

Currently, the North American Chapter Group has a membership of about 100 alumni based in the USA and Canada. Many are involved in important intellectual and academic endeavours, both within and beyond the Jamat. Amongst the alumni, there is a diverse calibre of professionals, including university professors, AKDN staff, school teachers, corporate employees, doctoral students, and staff of Jamati institutions, to name a few.

To further build upon the foundations laid by the NACG in 2006 and 2007, the retiring Chapter Group leadership convened a think tank in Vancouver in May 2008 to brainstorm ways to engage and facilitate alumni involvement. Several interesting ideas emerged from the deliberations which were taken into consideration in designing the way forward for 2008/2009.

Annual Meeting : The 2008 Annual Meeting , *Bridge Building: Ummah and Beyond*, was designed to explore and enhance opportunities for alumni, so that they can participate more fully within institutional settings as well as in the larger Ummah. Professor Azim Nanji, former director of the IIS, and Dr. Mahmoud Eboo, President of the Ismaili Council for USA, did a remarkable job in deepening the understanding

of alumni on this theme. The Chapter Group leadership will interface with Jamati institutions to explore possibilities of alumni involvement in their bridge building efforts with other communities in 2009.

Focus Group discussion: Certain segments of the alumni have had very low level of participation in Chapter Group activities. Target focus group meetings are planned with these groups in 2009 in order to understand what sort of Chapter Group activities and goals they perceive as worthy of attracting their active involvement.

Mentoring and Transition: Various professions require an 'internship' model to smoothly transition recent graduates into professional or volunteer work. The Chapter Group will work with Jamati Institutions to comfortably transition alumni into service opportunities within the Jamat. ITREBs are also coordinating various refresher and training programmes, which can facilitate a smooth transition for alumni.

Local Branch Activities: The Chapter Group leadership continues to focus on three main objectives:

- Continuing Education for alumni
- Institutional service
- Peer support/alumni bonding

Local Branches of the Chapter Group continue to meet regularly to facilitate continuing education of the alumni. Various activities are coordinated at these meetings such as discussions on various IIS reading packs and participation of alumni in special lectures by distinguished professors. These meetings also aim to enhance the bond amongst the alumni and to create a peer support structure.

During the year, alumni were actively involved with a number of Golden Jubilee related activities, including delivering presentations in Jamatkhanas and at Jamati Education Programmes, supporting the Heritage Discovery Programme, Golden Voyage, Golden Journey, and Jamati Orientation Programmes.



Silver Anniversary of Profession

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Nargis Ghassmi, Rahmat Ghassmi, Bashir Ladha, Hafiz Lakhani, Gholamreza Mirshahi and Shiraz Pirani for their twenty-five years of professional service with ITREBs. Their dedication and commitment to the advancement of knowledge within the Jamat is truly inspirational.

The following quotes from these alumni reflect their passion and commitment to the Jamat. On behalf of everyone at the IIS and all alumni, we congratulate them on reaching this milestone.

HAFIZ LAKHANI:

"Looking back, it seems as if this was destined for me and I was simply following the path determined for me. Working for the jamat and the Imam provides an extraordinary level of inner happiness and satisfaction. I always believed that knowledge, when not shared with others or applied, tends to lose its flavour. Application of knowledge adds to one's conviction and wisdom. I got that opportunity as part of my career. It is always heartening to see the number of lives we have been able to guide and touch as part of our work and that the light of knowledge is being passed on from one to the other."

GHOLAMREZA MIRSHAHI:

"My faith and my commitment to the Jamat and the Imam of the time made my work worthwhile and meaningful. My professional career included working with the Ismaili committee of Mashad and then under ITREB Iran as a lecturer and religion teacher from

1983 to 2008. I dedicated my life to the Iranian Jamat, visiting Ismailis in various villages for 8 - 10 days a month and sharing my knowledge. I enjoyed the times when I would be invited into their homes to discuss religious history and issues. Even today, after 25 years, I am still happy to share my knowledge and experiences with Ismailis all over the world."

BASHIR LADHA:

"Perhaps the most significant contribution of my career was working together with a team to combat challenges, when the Ismaili Constitution increased the numbers of jamats under the jurisdiction of the UK National Council to include South Africa, some European jamats and Ireland. Together, we addressed the needs of a constituency that was geographically dispersed, spoke various languages, originated from different contexts – East Africa, Pakistan and India in the initial stages and Iran, Syria and Central Asia in the 1990s. This challenge is successfully being addressed by developing local HR strategies that suit the local constituencies of the countries. The introduction of programmes, such as the International Waezeen Training Programme (IWTP), has had a positive impact on the religious education of the jamat.

The collaboration between the IIS and ITREB has also positively evolved over this period and areas of partnership are being more sharply defined and the strategies better articulated. The UK Jamat's progress over the last 25 years, including periods of challenges, gives me a sense of optimism and joy, and I look forward to view its further advancement as I move closer to my statutory retirement age."



al Service to Jamati Institutions

SHIRAZ PIRANI:

"Having worked with ITREB India and ITREB USA in various capacities since 1983, I have never once regretted my decision over the last 25 years. I am so grateful to the Imam that this full time profession is also considered a service to the Imam and the Jamat. When facing challenges, one has to revert back to one's religion to seek the ability to respond to problems and look for solutions to get solace in one's life. I wonder if there is any other profession which enables one to apply the knowledge gained in a professional capacity to one's day to day life as much as my profession does. Every day, I find motivation, not because I am duty bound, but because my inspiration and commitment come from the ethics of our faith. Today, when I see my students, it gives me great satisfaction to know that I have contributed to their lives."

RAHMAT GHASSMI:

"The conceptualization and implementation of Al-Ikhwān Camp and the Religious Education Festival are key contributions of my career with ITREB. Over the last 20 years, I have conducted Al-Ikhwān Camps, nationally and internationally, in Congo, Dubai, Malaysia, and Madagascar. These Camps and the R.E. Festival has impacted thousands of students and youth globally. My interest in developing and implementing Camps internationally and my encounter with the volunteers and youth has enriched me with a variety of experiences, which I will treasure for a life-time. Apart from the experience of the 25th anniversary of the IIS and the 2007 IIS graduation, working as a team member to organize the first visit of Mawlana Hazar Imam to Tajikistan has been the highlight of my life!"

NARGIS GHASSMI:

"Working for ITREB has given me the unique opportunity to offer my services, particularly in the religious formation of the youth of our Jamat. I have gained a lot of inner happiness and satisfaction while working for ITREB. The best part has been the affection and respect that the Jamat accords me and my whole family. Being present, as an IIS alumnus, at the 25th anniversary commemorations of the IIS, where we had the opportunity to share a few moments with Mawlana Hazar Imam, and at the 2007 IIS graduation ceremony, in the presence of Prince Rahim, Prince Husayn and Princess Khaliya, have left me with magnificent memories."

MAYHAB AIZOUKI

"Reflecting back on the past 25 years of my career with ITREB, I recall times of challenge and moments of contentment. Through my presentations to the Jamat, I have been able to build bridges between the traditional understanding of faith and the modern perspectives that I gained at the IIS. One of the challenges was reaching out to the Ismaili youth of Syria. We worked on several strategies and developed the Summer Religious Education Programme. This was very successful and was attended by the Jamat from all parts of Syria. Personally, a very fulfilling experience was teaching the module on Reading Arabic Ismaili Original Sources to IIS students who came to Syria on an Arabic immersion course. Publishing *Al-Hudur Al-Muhammadi (The Muhammadan Presence)*, and translating three books, including publications of the IIS, was most fulfilling as it allowed me to reach out to the wider Jamat. Although, I have some sense of satisfaction, there are a multitude of things I would like to achieve, which, Insha-Allah, I hope to accomplish in the years ahead."



LAILA R. LOKHANDWALLA (CLASS OF 1983)

One of my most memorable moments at the IIS was Mawlana Hazar Imam's visit to the Institute in September 1981. I was part of IIS' first human resource development initiative: The Waezeen and Teacher Education Programme. During his visit, Mawlana Hazar Imam made a commitment to all students that he will personally present the graduation certificates. That commitment was fulfilled in July 1983, on the same day as the Silver Jubilee Darbar in London, at a ceremony held at University of London. The ceremony was a truly unforgettable occasion and the cadre of some 25 young educators was now ready to serve the worldwide community.

A real heart-warming memory was the strong bond that formed between the students, even though we came from various cultural backgrounds and walks of life. Several students ended up choosing their spouses from amongst their classmates! Hence, by the time we parted in 1983, we were like one close-knit family. We keep in contact with each other even today.

During the Golden Jubilee year, we could not help but recall our graduation during the Silver Jubilee commemorations. Exactly 25 years ago, we embarked on a remarkable journey that gave us a new direction and a defined purpose – a humbling and truly precious opportunity of a lifetime.

MIR BAIZ KHAN (CLASS OF 1983)

From the moment I heard about the creation of The Institute of Ismaili Studies' first International Human Resource Development programme in London, the news excited me to my core, swirling my ambitions in only one direction.

Being from Chitral in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, arriving in London felt like a dream. It was exciting to be introduced to the intellectual heritage of Islam in general and particularly to the extensive Ismaili literature that was available to us. For me one of the most valuable elements of the programme at IIS was to be able to develop my linguistic skills in Arabic.

Our group consisted of thirty participants from various parts of the world, a reminder of the *Simmurgh*, the group of thirty birds seeking their destiny in Farid al-Din Attar's fable about their mystical journey.

I still vividly recall the day when, while studying at the IIS, we were informed that Mawlana Hazar Imam would like to meet with the students. I remember the words of the Imam when he addressed us: "*The Institute is young and it will meet the needs of the Jamat as it grows.*" He added: "*Work hard and enjoy yourselves.*"

Humbled by the sheer experience, the events of that day have influenced all my professional

decisions in the years that followed. Today, as I write this, I can see in front of me the IIS emblem on more than fifty books – a testimony of the scholarship that has flowed from the Imam's vision.

NADIA AMIN REHMANI: (CLASS OF 1983)

My journey began when I left my small village in India and arrived in Hyderabad to study Islamic Studies at Osmania University. This was an enormous step for me to take as I was the first female in my family to gain higher education. Little did I know then that this was just the start of my long educational journey. My dream of studying in London became a reality as I was accepted on the Waezeen and Teacher Education Programme. This was an unbelievable experience, not only for my family but also for the entire village.

My 3 ½ years of study at the IIS are particularly memorable in terms of learning new methods, accepting diversity and engaging with my group meaningfully, all while I was searching for my own identity, building my confidence and seeking empowerment. In the process of this engagement, I also found my soul mate, with whom I cherish every moment of my life.

After my graduation, I joined ITREB India (then known as the Ismailia Association of India) and later ITREB Pakistan, where my role involved designing and conducting teacher education programmes. Subsequently, I completed my MA in School Effectiveness and School Improvement from University of London's Institute of Education in 2000.

In October 2003, during the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the IIS, graduates were asked to contribute in a number of areas by Mawlana Hazar Imam and I chose Secondary Education. So, I joined the MA programme of The Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC) in London. I hope this will create further opportunities for me to contribute to various Imam and Jamati institutions globally.

NARGIS VIRANI: (CLASS OF 1983)

The Golden Jubilee of Mawlana Hazar Imam has been a truly commemorative year for Ismailis globally. However, this special year was even more memorable for me and the Class of 1983 as it marked the Silver Jubilee of our graduation as the first ever group to complete a Graduate Programme at the IIS.

Today, global accessibility is taken for granted as many Ismailis joyously journeyed around the world to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. Twenty five years ago, many of us were meeting our Ismaili brothers and sisters from other parts of the world for the first time. And throughout our 3 ½ years, we animatedly, sincerely, and self-righteously discussed and

debated a myriad of issues – issues that are best kept in our collective memories rather than on paper!

My first encounter with Arabic was at the IIS and I literally 'fell in love' with it! Having served with ITREB Canada for four years, I eventually got my MA and PhD from Harvard University in 1999. My dissertation was on Jalal al-Din Rumi's multilingual poems in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Greek, and Armenian.

I lectured at the University of British Columbia before accepting a tenure-track position at Washington University in St. Louis as an Assistant Professor of Arabic between 2000-2006. Currently, I am teaching at the New School University in New York as Assistant Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies. My encounter with Arabic continues even today!

RAHIM RAJAN (CLASS OF 1997)

I arrived at the IIS in the autumn of 1994 consumed by questions and doubts about life and the world we live in. I had come to London from Rwanda where genocide and war had erupted. I was still very much in a state of shock, trying to calibrate my world view and so-called 'book knowledge' of the world with the experiences and images from the war.

The IIS provided a welcome refuge and intellectual haven. Bringing together the world's leading scholars coupled with a dynamic, interdisciplinary curriculum, we were exposed to ideas and learning that many of us had desired, but never quite received in prior educational experiences. There was always some chasm or gap between the traditional narrative of European Enlightenment and Western civilization and the history and cultures of Muslim peoples. At the IIS, we were encouraged to debate, think, question, and understand the intricacies and nuances of how Islam emerged as a major world faith, and how Muslim societies around the world were reconciling tradition with modernity. My Master's thesis at University of Cambridge surveyed the history of ethical writing and thought in Islamic civilisations and analyzed a treatise on ethics written by Ahmed Naraqī - an 18th century Shi'i jurist-philosopher.

Today, I live in New York City and assist in managing two online non-profit digital libraries and research platforms – JSTOR and Aluka. I lead the collection building efforts of Aluka's digital library about Africa as well as JSTOR's archive of important intellectual materials from different parts of the world. Since 1994, I have never forgotten the importance of knowledge creation or the impact that education and learning can have on an individual or society.

SELINA KASSAM RAMJI (CLASS OF 1997)

It is hard to believe that 14 years have passed since I first walked through the doors of the IIS. My first

real encounter with the IIS has to be when we sat in the boardroom, Dr Daftary at the head and the 13 of us seated around him. Here, in turn, we introduced ourselves: to say that I was blown away by the calibre of the colleagues surrounding me would be an understatement!

The following two years passed like the blink of an eye and we were then off to different universities to complete our various Masters' programmes. I read for my MA in Islamic Cultures and Societies at SOAS in London. Upon completing my studies, I joined FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance USA and relocated to Washington DC. I moved back to London in 2000 and began working for the IIS in 2001 as the Resource Development and Communications Officer.

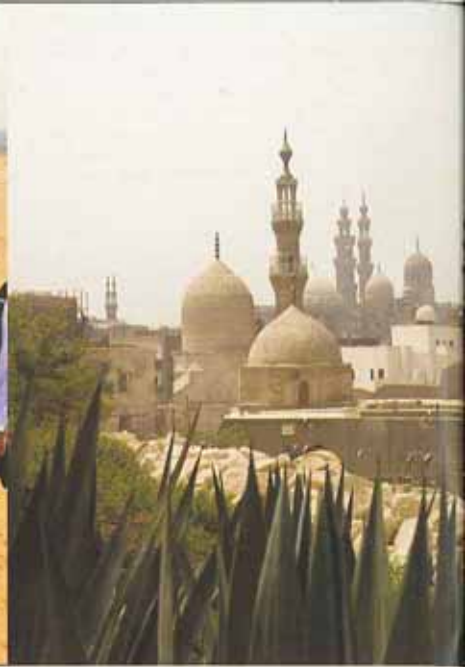
During the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the IIS, I moved into a full-time role in Alumni Relations. Currently, I am the Education Coordinator in the Department of Community Relations at the IIS. Hence, IIS has been a home to me for the past 14 years - one which welcomed me as a student and continues to nurture me as a professional.

KARIM H KARIM (CLASS OF 1984)

It takes some effort to think back to 1982-83, the academic year during which I studied at the IIS. I had been keenly following developments since the idea of an academic centre devoted to Ismaili Studies was first announced, following the 1975 Paris Conference. That was also the year I began undergraduate work in Islamic Studies at Columbia University in New York.

Much excitement attended the initiation of the first academic programme in Islamic Studies at the IIS. Seven of us from five countries were enrolled. There was already a much larger group of students studying in a Waezeen and Teacher Education Programme. Even though the IIS had been in existence for less than five years, the commitment to the quality of education was unmistakable. The faculty was of the highest rank. Professor Wilferd Madelung who had recently moved to Oxford University, came to teach at the Institute. Dr. Dariush Shayegan travelled from the IIS' now-discontinued Paris branch. Professor Abbas Hamdani was visiting from the University of Wisconsin. Hamid Haji was also on the faculty. Professor Herman Landolt from McGill University was involved in administering the programme. We received credit towards an MA in Islamic Studies awarded by McGill, where we took additional courses and wrote a thesis.

In light of the concern regarding depictions of Muslims in the media, I later pursued a PhD program in Communication Studies at McGill. That eventually led me to my current position as the director of Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication in Ottawa. I spent Spring 2004 at the IIS as a Senior Research Fellow.



The 2008 annual academic seminar for IIS alumni was held on 9-12 October in Cairo. The seminar, entitled *Engaging with a City: Memory, Modernity and Culture in the City Victorious*, was attended by 30 alumni from different graduate programmes over the past 25 years. Over the course of three days, scholars from AKTC, AKU-ISMC and the American University in Cairo shared with the alumni their perspectives on historic and modern Cairo. In addition, there were several opportunities for the alumni to experience the city itself.

In his opening remarks welcoming the alumni and speakers, Mr Shiraz Kabani, Head of Operations, Finance and Development, elaborated on the importance the IIS attaches to its alumni, stressing the need for the alumni body to engage more actively with the IIS.

In his presentation, 'The development of Cairo into a Muslim City: Key Tensions and Issues', Professor Bernard O'Kane of the American University in Cairo took the participants through a visual journey of Cairo, which provided an appropriate historic backdrop for the subsequent presentations. The question-and-answer session, led by Sehreen Noor Ali and Hussein Hirji, brought up a myriad of art-historical questions and led to a lively discussion on the present status of architectural renovations being undertaken in historic Cairo.

The afternoon session began with a fascinating insight into the work of the Aga Khan Trust for

Culture in Cairo and further afield. In his presentation, 'Historic Cairo between Tradition and Modernity: The Case of Darb al-Ahmar', Dr. Stefano Bianca, former Director of the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme (HCP), provided an overview of the HCP, with particular emphasis on AKTC's work in Cairo. Using the Al Azhar Park and Darb al-Ahmar projects as case studies, Dr. Bianca highlighted the approach of AKTC to restoration. He noted that AKTC restoration projects do not treat the built environment in isolation, but seek to improve the social and economic fabric of the communities involved, as well as "giving back the city its history." Following the question-and-answer session, led by Dr Nargis Virani and Ambreen Saleh, Dr Bianca led the alumni on a guided tour of Al Azhar Park and the Darb al-Ahmar. This allowed the participants not only to view some of the restoration work being undertaken by the AKTC along the Ayyubid walls of Cairo, but also to engage with the Cairene community first-hand in Al Azhar Park. The evening came to a conclusion with a sumptuous meal at the citadel restaurant as the sun descended beyond the Muqattam hills.

On the second day, the morning session was led by Dr Said Sadek of the American University in Cairo. His presentation was entitled 'Globalisation and Local Cultures: Impact and Challenges in Modern Cairo' and explored the nature of globalisation as well as its relationship with and



influence upon the economic, social and cultural life of Cairo. He also explored the role of the media and of civic society institutions in fostering an evolving sense of Egyptian identity. The question-and-answer session, led by Dr Laila Halani and Hussain Jasani, brought to the surface divergent views on the impact of globalisation upon cities in the Muslim world.

After lunch, a walking tour of historic Cairo and its various architectural treasures was further illuminated by Dr Shainool Jiwa, Head of Community Relations at IIS. Her knowledge of Fatimid history, interspersed with anecdotes from Maqrizi's account of mediaeval Cairo and of the Fatimid processions that traversed the city, vividly brought to life the past and linked it with the present.

The visit to the Pyramids on the third morning provided an opportunity for the alumni not only to explore some of the heritage of pre-Islamic Egypt, but also illustrated how these majestic monuments are close to being subsumed within the ever-expanding city of Cairo itself. The afternoon session commenced with a presentation entitled 'Islamisation and Pluralism: A Case Study of Cairo Past and Present' by Professor Modjtaba Sadria, of the Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations. Through a selection of images of the city, Professor Sadria focused on how Cairo is responding to the challenges of the 21st century, with a focus on how the

cosmopolitan city is becoming segregated between the educated elite and the less-educated working classes. The ensuing question-and-answer session, led by Dr Jan-e-Alam Khaki and Dr Mir Baiz Khan, reflected upon issues ranging from gated communities to poverty.

The final session, moderated by Dr. Jiwa, provided an opportunity for the participants to reflect on the proceedings of the seminar as well as on areas that could be revitalised to ensure that the alumni body plays an active role in not only its own future development, but also in contributing to the IIS as a whole. In his closing remarks, Shiraz Kabani highlighted the need for greater engagement of alumni in the endeavours of the Alumni Association. He encouraged the alumni who participated in this seminar to serve as ambassadors, encouraging their colleagues to take ownership of the alumni-related initiatives sponsored by the IIS.

In his description of Cairo, Nasir Khusraw lists 31 different varieties of fruits and vegetables that were available in the market when he visited the city. While the three days in Cairo may not have allowed participants to taste all these different fruits, it is hoped that the seminar succeeded in creating a multitude of pathways towards engaging with and understanding the socio-economic and cultural processes in a historic city as it pulsates with modernity.

Ambreen Saleh

Rumi: A Spiritual Treasury,
by Juliet Mabey

The thirteenth century Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi needs no introduction. He is one of the most well-known mystical poets of all times. In recent years, his works have been translated into several languages and read by people in cultures and civilisations around the world. *Rumi: A Spiritual Treasury* is a compilation that provides readers with an insight into the Sufi tradition and, at the same time, creates a treasury of daily wisdom and perspective.

Mabey has divided this book into four themes/chapters: 'Touching the Divine', 'The Spiritual World', 'The Sufi Way' and 'Living in Spirit'. Each of these chapters refers to Rumi's *Divan-e-Shams*, the *Masnawi* and his prose work *Fihi ma fihi*. The compilation also includes stories and parables from Rumi's verses to support each theme. To some extent, the quotes tend to be disjointed and, when put into this artificial structure, lose their connection with the source material, as well as some of the power and potency of the original poetry. However, there are passages when the spirit of Sufism shines through clearly:

*"You are my sky, and I am the earth, bewildered:
What makes You constantly flow from my heart?
I am soil with parched lips! Bring kindly water
That will transform this soil into a rose-bed!"*

Some verses emphasize the oneness of all religions and the commonality of the human spirit:

*"Every prophet and every saint has a way,
But all lead to God. All ways are really one"*

Some resound of universal good sense:

*"Little by little, God takes away human beauty;
Little by little, the sapling withers..."*

The book serves as an introduction to Sufism, especially for those who are not aware of the mystical traditions in Islam. For those who are familiar with Islamic mystical literature, it includes a good selection of material. The contents revolve around topics, such as God's attributes, love of God, humility and kindness towards all living beings, and an ongoing journey towards spiritual perfection and union with the One. These topics are supported by simple illustrations. Rather than using illustrations of whirling dervishes, the book, interestingly, provides sketches of vases, animals, birds and musical instruments.

The third section, 'The Sufi Way', for example, which focuses on the lifestyle, thoughts and emotions necessary to join the Sufi way, starts with the quotation:

"The Sufi's book is not of ink and letters; it is nothing but a heart as white as snow" – A reflection of the Sufi emphasis on emotional purity rather than intellectual superiority.

This compilation is a comfortable bed-time read, and, perhaps, a source to turn to on a difficult day, when some perspective and guidance on life is needed.

Farida Juma

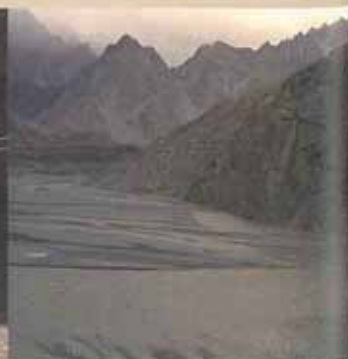
Bridges that Unite, a travelling
exhibition

"Bridges that Unite", an initiative of the Aga Khan Foundation Canada (AKFC), is a travelling interactive exhibition, which displays the unique partnership between Canada and the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in its search for solutions to some of the world's most critical international development issues.

The exhibition uses multi-media techniques to present real-life stories that convey the achievements of AKFC through investments in community development, higher education and preservation of cultural heritage. These success stories clearly show that such investments require commitment and vision towards social change that encompasses generations.

The exhibition provides an insight into how the AKDN is tackling some of the most pressing global challenges of poverty and underdevelopment. The first panel, carrying the message 'Replacing walls that divide with bridges that unite', features a dramatic photo of a bridge in the Northern Areas of Pakistan where Canada and AKDN have been working collaboratively for more than a quarter of a century. Each panel highlights a particular aspect of development, such as health, education and culture. It also pays attention to target countries such as Afghanistan.

During 2009, this exhibition will travel to various locations in eastern Canada, beginning with The Children's Museum of Waterloo Region, in Kitchener, Ontario. For more information visit www.bridgesthatunite.ca



Marjan Esmaili

Where is the Friend's House? by Abbas Kiarostami

In this film by the internationally acclaimed filmmaker, Abbas Kiarostami, Muhammad and Ahmad Reza, two 8 year old boys, are friends and class mates. Ahmad Reza keeps forgetting to bring his homework to class. This has already happened three times and the teacher has warned Ahmad Reza that if he forgets his homework again, he will not be allowed to attend the school any more. That very day, Muhammad realises that he has mistakenly put his friend's notebook in his own school bag. Muhammad, knowing that his friend would not be able to do his homework without the notebook, must find his friend and save him from being expelled from school. The film is a simple story of Muhammad's quest to find his friend who lives in another village. Muhammad cannot convince his mother to allow him to leave the house. Yet, he leaves unnoticed.

Muhammad's repeated struggle, back and forth from his own village in search of his friend's house, reminds one of Attar's *Conference of the Birds*. This beautiful poem describes the journey of a group of birds to meet the great *Si-murgh*. Their quest leads them across several valleys before they realise the meaning of their quest.

Towards the end of the film, Muhammad, in despair, returns home without finding his friend's house. As night falls, he takes out his friend's notebook and completes the homework for him as well. The word 'Friend' used in the title of the film is often interpreted in Persian Sufi literature to mean God or the spiritual master. Muhammad's quest to find his friend's house may be seen as symbolic of the quest of the human soul to return to its origin. Ultimately, Muhammad finds the meaning of his quest within himself. The goal of Muhammad's quest – the friend's house – was, metaphorically speaking, within himself.

Izzat Muneyb

British Orientalist Painting: The Lure of the East, exhibition at Tate Britain

Between 4 June and 31 August 2008, Tate Britain held an exhibition of over 120 orientalist paintings made by British artists spanning a period from 1780 to 1930. This exhibition was a *tour de force*, bringing together paintings, prints and drawings of the Orient – in this context, 'Orient' meant Egypt, Syria and Turkey – some of which had rarely been on display. These artworks were organised according to six major themes: the Orientalist Portrait, Genre and Gender, the Holy City, Mapping the Orient, the Harem and Home, and the Orient in Perspective.

The Orientalist Portrait reflected the aspirations and pretensions of their subjects. There were portraits of writers, painters and travellers, such as, Lord Byron and William Holman Hunt in Oriental costumes. Among these, two that could not be missed were the portraits, juxtaposed, of Colonel T. E. Lawrence, and Emir Feisal, both in eastern headgear, by Augustus John. The fascination with the East was brought out in vibrant colours, with exotic Eastern bazaars, dark domestic interiors, often characterised by *mashrabiyya* (latticework screens in wood) and serene pastoral and desert landscapes.

That almost a fifth of the exhibition was devoted

to harems, shows the predilection and preoccupation of painters of the Victorian/Edwardian period with this ubiquitous feature of the Orient. The representation of religious sites was balanced, comprising Muslim, Christian and Jewish holy sites. However, these paintings – especially 'A Frank Encampment in the Desert of Mount Sinai', showing Lord Palmerston seated with a *hookah* outside a tent (with all the trappings of comfort transported from England to ease the travel) while a tribal chief waited on him – depicted clearly the power-play between the western potentate and the eastern subject, and the political dimension of such an endeavour.

The 150-year timeframe, which spanned the exhibits, was a period of considerable change in the Middle East, with the waxing and waning of the Ottoman Empire. By the end of this period, the British were directly controlling Egypt, Palestine and Iraq. Overall, apart from the maps of this period, the paintings did not seem to correspond to these political changes – the 'Oriental' remained being represented as exotic, traditional, passive, quiescent and an object of study.

While I exulted in details of a rich tapestry of daily life depicted in the paintings of a now bygone age, I could not but conclude that the shadow of Edward Said still lives on!



Farabi on Plato's future

In his treatise on Plato
There's an intriguing suggestion
Should he choose death, or
Is this an outrageous question

Between the city in speech
And the city in deed
Lies the tension where
Stress is guaranteed

Socrates prefers death
To a life of falsity
Given the choice
He decides not to be

The voice is Plato's
The words belong to Farabi
They're found in the writings
He left for posterity

Like Plato, Farabi thinks
Of things human and divine
Like Plato, Farabi allows
For debate and design

Like Plato, Farabi writes
Of princes and governance
Like Plato, Farabi chooses
Words not ordnance

Unlike Plato, Farabi opts
To be without power
No prince's philosopher
Stays out of palace and tower

The choice open to Plato
Surfaces in the footnotes
Other than those
The academy promotes

It questions knowledge
With claims to the universal
But is often limited
At times quite parochial

Experiments in politics are
Conducted in the mind
Playing imagine with logic
Not toying with humankind

Lives graced with choice
Will not choose Syracuse
As for eugenics
Can there be an excuse?

What's different then with
Globalization, slavery
And nuclear ordnance
Endorsing the oil polity

Between the lines
Farabi's telling Plato
Stay with philosophy
Let go the imperial hero

Power never resolves
The two-city stress
It creates one more polity
With lives in distress

The imagination's a world
Searching for infinity
Omniscience may be
In the realm of possibility

The reach for omnipotence
Seeks terrestrial disaster
All lives lose their choice
To the one Grand Master

This knowledge
Was available long ago
With the Chaldeans, from
Where it came to Plato

Farabi's footnotes point
To every ethical voice
Muffled under the weight
Of Plato's deadly choice

Shamas Nanji
WTEP 1986

Setting Sail

The dhow sets sail
At dusk
Quietly, intently
To seek wisdom from the night

What might the dawn speak of the
tomorrows?
Will it say a new day begins amongst the
many that have passed?
Perhaps it may seek to steer the course
with nature's sails
And allow for new paradigms to awash
the shores of time?

It may ask of the spirit
Whisper wisdom
And barakah
For destinations are many
But we only seek that which you desire
That which bears light
Not the travesties of simple existence.

Nurdin Dhanani
WTEP 1987

Acknowledgements :

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