



IIS Alumni

Newsletter 2011

Message from the Co-Director



The past year has been one of both change and continued accomplishment at the IIS. Many of these changes and developments will have implications for our alumni. As we have become increasingly aware, the pool of IIS alumni continues to grow and expand. We are eager to respond to this growth by efforts to include alumni more actively in IIS programmes and activities.

Among recent changes was the decision by Professor Karim H. Karim to leave his position as Co-Director of the Institute in June 2011 in order to return to teaching and research at Carleton University in Ottawa. Professor Karim will be much missed by staff, students and alumni. We wish him all the best in his future endeavours. A search for his successor is actively underway.

The expansion of the alumni pool was high on the agenda at the meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the Alumni Association held on 16th November 2011 which led to a lively discussion. Various proposals were discussed to meet the growing need for representation and enhanced involvement from the many far-flung alumni groups around the world. These proposals will be pursued and discussed at the local level in coming months.

Among major developments within the IIS was the adoption of a Strategic Plan for the years 2011 to 2025. The Plan has now been accepted by the Board and it will now guide the programmes of the IIS going forward. An overview of the Strategic Plan will be provided to alumni at the annual Chapter Group meetings. Its importance lies in the fact that it will be possible to provide a clear course of action and a carefully constructed road-plan for the next fourteen years and will be of great help to the Institute and its alumni as we face the future.

The Department of Research and Publications continued to publish important new works, including several editions of Ismaili texts and translations. For example, the fifth volume in the Institute's edition and translation of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*—the *Rasa'il of the Ikhwan al-Safa'*—appeared in 2011. This is a major project comprising 17 volumes which aims to make a masterpiece of Arabic literature widely available in readable translations and reliable textual editions. A fourth volume of *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia* will also appear by the end of 2011. This too

is a major publishing project and like the *Epistles* has as its purpose to make outstanding works from the Ismaili and broader Shia heritage available to readers in translations that are at once accurate and accessible.

Five years ago, the IIS Library received a major donation; this was the Hamdani Collection of Ismaili Manuscripts, one of the most important collections of Ismaili manuscripts in private hands. The collection, handed down over the centuries within the Hamdani family, has now been catalogued and a handsome volume, prepared by Professor François de Blois was published by I. B. Tauris in October.

The Institute has launched a series of monthly lectures on ongoing work by our scholars. The series, initially suggested by Professor Karim, has been well attended with excellent presentations on a variety of topics of Ismaili interest and lively question and answer sessions. IIS alumni who live in London or are passing through are most welcome at these lectures which offer an insight into the current work of our scholars and a stimulating overview of some of the treasures of Ismaili culture.

The STEP and GPISH programmes have been extremely successful during the past year. The most recent GPISH graduation was held in October. We continue to attract outstanding students in both programmes. That success is, of course, part of the dynamic growth of our alumni pool.

In 2011, five alumni grants were awarded for research and field work as well as attendance at conferences. These grants have become an important way for alumni to continue their involvement in scholarly activity and to contribute to the larger mission of the IIS. We encourage our alumni to take advantage of these grants as they have in past years.

It is our firm conviction that IIS alumni have a crucial role to play in the future programmes and projects of the Institute. You are a vital part of our endeavours. We are grateful for your enthusiastic support and urge you to become even more actively involved in the work of the Institute. We look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Dr. Farhad Daftary

The celebration of South Africa hosting the World Cup of soccer in 2010, and the hosting this year by South Korea and New Zealand of the World Athletic Championships respectively are events that have brought diverse nations together in competitive spirit. In a different vein, the first half of 2011 saw the European economic and debt crises spread despite earlier bailouts for Greece, Ireland and Portugal. And perhaps, most significantly, this period has seen an unprecedented series of protests and demonstrations across the Middle East and North Africa, the so-called 'Arab Spring', in which social media has played a significant role. These events, whether in Europe or the Middle East, have raised important issues relating to economic models, social cohesion and civil society. Indeed, these issues are relevant to the Jamat and to the alumni as they continue to seek to contribute to the work of the Jamat and Imamat institutions.

We would like to thank all members for participating in the annual Alumni Survey for 2010; we had a record 99% participation! The results of the survey are used to compile our Alumni Status Report which is submitted to the Institute's Board each year. It is our pleasure to share highlights from the report with you:

- Currently, the alumni body is comprised of 300 graduates.
- During 2010, sixteen alumni received various types of awards and grants including fellowships or scholarships. Further, forty-six alumni presented papers and published works.
- As part of the *Alumni Internship Programme*, a majority of recent GPISH graduates have been placed with various AKDN and Jamati institutions.
- In terms of engagement with the wider society, since the beginning of 2010, fifteen alumni have been appointed to various leadership positions of institutions beyond the AKDN and the Jamat.
- The vast majority of IIS graduates (97%) have contributed to Jamati and Imamat institutions, either in a professional or voluntary capacity.
- At present, more than 50% of alumni reside in their countries of origin.

The Alumni body is one without borders and I hope that the coming year will be full of collaboration, participation and engagement with the IIS. Merci!

Shellina Karmali, Alumni Relations Unit

Alumni Relations Unit would like to take this opportunity to welcome new Alumni and wish them the very best as they begin their careers. Congratulations!

GPISH 2010

Nibras Aldibbiat
 Maria Budhwani
 Reema Istanbuli
 Farzad Kadkhoda
 Nisha Keshwani
 Zamira Kurbonbekova
 Aleeza Mitha
 Ghina Othman
 Jaydaa Wardeh
 Maha Yaziji

STEP C1

Fayyaz Ali
 Temur Aydimamadov
 Ahmed Chagani
 Shahana Charania
 Ali Chunara
 Jasmine Dolani
 Saba Ebrahim
 Noorin Fazal
 Marziya Fezakova
 Tasmeeen Fidai
 Mezghan Hakimy
 Shafeena Hirjee

Fatima Kaba
 Shaira Kachra
 Karima Kapadia
 Nargis Keshwani
 Salman Khawaja
 Samreen Khoja
 Iftikhor Kukanboev
 Zulekha Lakhani
 Rizwan Lalani
 Sabrina Lalani
 Rahim Lalji
 Ryan Makhani
 Reshma Panjwani
 Asif Penwala

Zohirbek Piltaboev
 Laila Pirani
 Sabiha Pradhan
 Shameer Prasla
 Nadia Rahim
 Afshan Rajkotwala
 Noorjehan Sajwani
 Eraj Sodatsairov
 Nazira Sodatsayrova
 Shermeen Surani
 Mehreen Tejani
 Rahim Valli
 Farah Virani
 Sheila Virani

GPISH 2011

Shamsiya Chamanova
 Amira Chilvers
 Sahir Dewji
 Omemma Gillani
 Nasreen Hussaini
 Rozina Kanchwala
 Aliyor Marodaseynov
 Sher Baz Khan Ramal
 Imran Shams
 Shadi Sharani
 Parisa Sheralieva
 Zahra Sheriff
 Laila Naz Taj
 Amin Tejani

STEP C2

Saima Abbas
 Aasma A Jaffer
 Asmita Ali
 Laila Allahwala
 Karima A Merchant
 Husna Arif
 Pinkie B Narsidani
 Faiza Damji
 Alim Fakirani
 Fareen Gwadri
 Shahida I Khan

Shezeleen Kanji
 Shirin Karim
 Regina Kirgizbekova
 Seema Lalani
 Muniza Ahmed
 Nawaaz Makhani
 Lutfiya Mamadsafoeva
 Adil Mamodaly
 Shirin M Huda
 Saira Moez
 Mehnaz M Bhayani
 Rizwan Muhammedi
 Sabira N Virani

Kishwar Peiris
 Anisa R Ali
 Azmeena R Ali
 Nadia Remtulla-Chunara
 Sherali Saidoshurov
 Shelina S Jalia
 Naurin S Kheraj
 Zahra Somani
 Shahnoz Valijonbekova
 Dilshad Virani
 Arzina Zaver



North American Chapter Group (NACG) 2011

From 24th – 26th June 2011, alumni from across North America gathered in Montreal for the NACG Annual Meeting. The meeting focused on the theme of *Interfaith Dialogue: Challenges, Skills and Strategies* and featured sessions on the concepts and models of interfaith dialogue as well as the ethical considerations involved. It included presentations by alumni on their own work related to interfaith dialogue and a panel discussion on the differences between “interfaith” and “intra-faith” dialogue in Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities. Speakers at the meeting included Professor Patrice Brodeur, (Canada Research Chair on Islam, Pluralism and Globalization at



the University of Montreal), Dr Hussein Rashid (Board Member, ITREB USA; Adjunct Professor, Hofstra University), the Reverend Dr Karen Hamilton (General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches), Dr Nargis Virani (WTEP 1983, Assistant Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the New School), and Dr Barry Levy (Former Dean of Religious Studies, McGill University).

European Chapter Group (ECG) 2011

The European Chapter Group of the IIS Alumni Association met for its annual meeting in Paris, France, in May 2011. The theme selected by the Chapter Group for its meeting was *Literature and Art: Expressions and Impact*, which explored how art and literature can serve as an important channel to a deeper understanding of societies. The meeting





included a tour of the Paris Mosque and a visit to Musée Guimet to view an exhibition entitled *India's Fabled City: The Art of the Courtly Lucknow*. Speakers at the event included Ms Shams Jaffer (Senior Manager of Staffing for the Aga Khan Development Network) and Hafiz Karmali (Theatre Director). The highlight of the meeting was a Keynote Address by Dr Aziz Esmail in which he shared further reflections on art and literature as well as his thoughts on the role and future contributions of the IIS alumni body.

Asian Chapter Group (ACG) 2011

Over fifty alumni from Africa, India, Pakistan, Syria and Tajikistan gathered in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, for the Asian Chapter Group meeting which was held at the Ismaili Centre. The purpose of the meeting was to allow alumni to learn about the traditions and culture of the Ismailis in Central Asia and to familiarise them with the work of Imamat institutions in the region. Speakers at the event included representatives from the IIS and various AKDN agencies as well as Professor Mamadsho

Ilolov (President, Academy of Sciences and Chairman of ITREC Tajikistan) and Dr Sharofat Mamadambarova (Head, Aga Khan Humanities Project, University of Central Asia and Member of the Ismaili Leaders International Forum). Mr. Hakim Elnazarov (IIS) made a presentation on IIS-sponsored research on the Traditions and Heritage of the Ismailis of Badakhshan. This was followed by a presentation from Yodgur Faizov (CEO, Aga Khan Foundation) on the work of AKDN in Tajikistan. A panel consisting of Ozodkhon Davlatshoev (Regional Manager, AKFED), Brampton Mundy (CEO, First MicroFinance Bank), Sharofat Mamadambarova (Head, AKHP/ UCA) and Mr Karim Mustafa (EO, FOCUS) took questions from alumni.

Alumni also had the opportunity to visit a traditional Pamiri House in the Botanical Gardens and the Museums of Antiquities and Ethnography. The Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Committee (ITREC) for Tajikistan also organised a cultural performance and exhibition at the Ismaili Centre for the alumni group. A highlight of this Chapter Group meeting was having Dr Daftary's presence.



Teachers in the Field

Jasmine Dolani, India

The Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) is a unique programme that utilises the historical and civilisational approach towards imparting religious education to youth. The programme has instilled skills useful in both my professional and personal life. STEP has also provided me with an international platform for interacting with my colleagues from different parts of the world – we can share our classroom teaching and experiences.

As a teacher, I have evolved and at the same time as a learner I have been exposed to many different approaches and perspectives on the study of religion and the practices among its followers. Primarily, as a teacher, I have enjoyed working closely with the students while implementing the *Ethics and Development Module*. The two units which I completed teaching strengthened my relationship with the students and we feel a responsibility of creating a greater impact within society with our actions. It has convinced me that the IIS secondary curriculum is gradually bringing about a change in attitude amongst the youth when looking at the challenges and opportunities life offers them.

Saba Ebrahim, USA

I have been a STEP teacher in Houston, Texas, for two years as both a 7th and 8th grade teacher and now a 9th and 10th grade teacher. Having taught in a secular school for a few years prior to becoming a STEP teacher, I inevitably compare the two experiences.

Due to the keen interest from students, whose curiosity reminds me of the questions I had about my faith when I was of their age, the experience is a spirited walk down memory lane whilst re-learning the lessons which have paved my road. As inspirational as my experience has been, there have been challenges, such as those that accompany a pilot programme. When I began, the institutions and the parents were getting accustomed to STEP teachers and trying to understand the professional religious education system.

It has been a growing up process in the classroom and out of the classroom. It has also been a learning experience – learning about my roots, my faith, and the way I respond to uncertainty and challenges. I recommend it to anyone wanting to perpetuate the vision of a better tomorrow for our future generations. I remain grateful for this learning experience, and I hope others can experience the level of exponential growth that I have experienced both professionally and personally.



Asif-Aly Penwala, Canada

“It’s like you [the teachers] were learning with us.” This is a quote from a student who was explaining their experience of the semester. If only they knew that I was feeling the same thing.

Over the last two years, my learning curve as an educator has been extremely steep and filled with challenging and rewarding experiences that I have shared with my colleagues and my students. I can confidently say that I have grown as an educator and as a community leader and I am confident that my development will continue throughout my career. Our work is very demanding, yet I thoroughly enjoy almost every aspect of it and I am looking forward to the lessons and experiences of the coming years. Surely, anyone whose passion and career are one and the same knows this feeling.

Zohir Piltaboev, Tajikistan

For me personally, STEP has been a great opportunity in terms of teaching, learning and leadership. Through teaching I can enable students and the wider Jamat to understand that Islam is not limited to one area or location, but it encompasses a number of great world civilisations, which in various periods of history have played a significant role in the social, economic, political, cultural and ethical development of humankind.

Lesson planning, conducting lessons, post-class reflections and organising meetings and workshops with parents, students, teachers, volunteers and officials on various levels are all great opportunities for learning about the Jamat as a whole and local people in particular.



The process of globalisation requires all STEP teachers to be leaders in order to lead the younger members of the Jamat to recognise pluralism as a strength and simultaneously preserve their religious and cultural identity.

Nadia Rahim, Pakistan

I have been a part of the STEP venture for more than three years and it has been a roller coaster ride of learning experiences. Whether I have had to take on many different roles at once, or change the lens via which I view things, or meet numerous people in different capacities and learn how to work with them, the experiences have challenged me and above all made me reach out to the community in so many different ways. I still feel overwhelmed and in awe of how this programme has changed not only how I view the world around me but also how others view me as a person.

As someone who has been teaching the IIS secondary curriculum module on Muslim literature for over a year, I would symbolise STEP as a cross between the journey of *Attar's 30 birds* and *Alice in Wonderland*. While a sense of wonder, awe, excitement, confusion, fear, commitment, love and togetherness has been a constant part of my life for the past three years, the most important thing has been the transformation I have felt and still feel myself going through. Although I would not be able to answer a caterpillar who appears and asks me who I am right now, what I will be able to say is that I am glad about my transformation as an individual who has been part of the STEP experience.



Education and Faith Communities: Issues and Responses

The 2010 IIS Alumni Academic Seminar was held at the Ismaili Centre, Dubai, from 4th – 6th December 2010. Thirty-five alumni from Asia, Europe and North America, gathered to debate and discuss the theme of *Education and Faith Communities: Issues and Responses*. Sessions ranged from the philosophic to the practical, focusing on how religious education is understood, and the role that it can play in the larger society. The topic was particularly pertinent as this was the first annual Academic Seminar that included graduates of the Institute's Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) as well as other IIS alumni working as educators around the world.

Professor John Hull delivered the first session reflecting on the relationship between Christian theology and religious education. In particular, he drew parallels between different teaching processes and applied Christian theology. In his view, religious education should not be approached through an exposition of theological (Christian or otherwise) principles alone; rather it should be approached through a critical examination of the actual context in which education takes place so as to avoid becoming only a process of indoctrination. He further argued that if teachers of religious education are first and foremost educators, they must be open to the possibility that their students may or may not accept what they are taught. In order for religious education to be of use in the modern world, it must encourage faith in the context of known and understood alternatives.

Dr Anil Khamis (WTEP 1992) discussed religious education in the context of developing countries, particularly focusing on the case study of Somalia and the Dar al-Qur'an school model. Dr Khamis introduced the debate between two different understandings of the purpose of schools and religious education: schools as sites to learn how to be in society and schools as sites of insulation from society until children are intellectually equipped.

On the second day, Professor Liam Gearon discussed

the interrelation of religion, politics and education in his paper on "State Policies on Religion in Education and the Position of Faith Communities". Professor Gearon's provocative thesis was that liberal democracies risk veering towards autocracy by attempting to control culture. Tracing philosophies of education from the Enlightenment onward, Professor Gearon used historical analysis to discuss how contemporary secular liberal democracies are inheritors of both the enlightenment tradition and totalitarian experiences. Although in the past civics education ignored the role of religion in society, today teaching religion has become understood as a national security issue. In his view, state policies today neglect liberal democracy's self-critique, and instead increasingly use religion for political purposes. Today's "counter-terrorism classroom" requires students to participate in an autocratic disavowal of discourse beyond the foundational terms of citizenship, democracy and human rights. This framework is therefore no less totalising than the structures of theologies that it seeks to replace.

In the final session, Dr Abdulkader Tayob considered the relationship between ethics, moral reasoning and religious education. Dr Tayob began from the context of Apartheid South Africa, discussing various Muslim responses to ethical questions in the modern world. After the end of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, the redefinition of politics in Muslim societies became the intellectual ground for new ideas about identity, state, change, gender, etc. Particularly focusing on human rights and Islamic law, Dr Tayob concluded that the texts of the Islamic tradition are relevant resources, even if they do not contain answers to contemporary questions per se. Furthermore, the desire to "correct" negative portrayals of Islam is wrapped up in very modern notions of identity that should be interrogated rather than simply accepted.

Discussions on both days were facilitated by Dr Shiraz Thobani (IoE 1982), IIS Research Associate, and Dr Farouk Mitha (WTEP 1986), the then Academic Course Director for STEP. Both of them, in collaboration with Dr Farid Panjwani of AKU-ISMC (GPISH 1997), also contributed to the conceptualisation of the academic seminar.



A Reflection from the 2010 Alumni Academic Seminar on Education and Faith Communities

Zehra Lalji, Class of 2009

At the IIS Alumni Academic Seminar in Dubai, the ethical distinctions made between *Education and Indoctrination* by Professor John Hull were rather thought provoking. He proposed that ethically, education and indoctrination are polar opposites of each other. Education is concerned with *maturing* learners into critical openness, whereas indoctrination is concerned with *subduing* them to controversial doctrines. Learners could equally be instructed, trained and socialised to serve either ethical position.

In addition to understanding critical openness as a *value*, I think it is useful to also consider it as a process characterised by selection. The ability to select is natural to us as human beings and vital to our growth and survival. Our body inherently *lets in* and *keeps out* the various elements it is exposed to. For instance, from the millions of micro-organisms in a given environment, the body *selects* the beneficial and *rejects* the harmful. Critical selection thus helps create a semi-permeable membrane as if it were around us, enabling us to flourish. The same is true for our cognitive well-being. So, just as a weak physical immunity is damaging to our physical health, weak cognitive immunity is unfavourable for our mental health.

In our everyday lives, we are surrounded by ideas, ideologies and intentions that could be of enabling and beneficial value to our minds, or disabling and detrimental. Unless we have harnessed the capacity for critical selection and the sensitivity to observe the enabling and disabling aspects of often the same idea, for instance seeing arrogance in excellence or pride in

generosity, all sorts of intentions can sink into our minds unconsciously and control us without our knowledge. It is perhaps in the sharpening of this mental ability for selection where education can make a difference.

It is worth considering what an education programme that fosters critical minds would look like, and whether critical thinking is a value over and above all other values and ethical principles or whether it is foundational to

the process of education. However, it is also worth considering whether the values of compassion and generosity can be learnt by critical thinking alone. Ultimately, we must resolve for ourselves whether religious faith is the polar-opposite of critical thinking or the two can come together in one's spiritual well-being, and more so, how does one discern in one's heart and mind whether or not one has already been indoctrinated.



Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters

by Omid Safi.

New York, HarperOne, 2009

Review by Dr Mir Baiz Khan, Class of 1983

In his review of *Memories of Muhammad*, Carl Ernst succinctly captures its essence: “Islam today is a hotly disputed term, denounced by Christian extremists, rejected by Eurocentric neo-colonialists, and abused by Islamic ideologues. Where will its future lie? Read this volume to find out.” The *Journal of American Academy of Religion* suggests: “It can readily serve both as a foundation and as an inspiration for future studies.”

The book is simple in language, lucid in articulation, frank with narratives and authentic with historical facts. It recounts in objective fashion tragedies in Muslim history as they occurred juxtaposing them with the lofty values that the Prophet and his family (*ahl al-bayt*) embody. These universal values are what Omid Safi calls “memories of the Prophet,” which Muslims have kept alive through diverse expressions of devotion.

In the introduction, Safi explores what he calls the “Muhammad problem,” in which he unveils how the Prophet has been attacked by people over the course of 1,300 years. Their acts of violence against him have been rooted either in religious bigotry or in political dogma.

The society in which Prophet Muhammad was born and the manner in which he influenced it with personal values of honesty, trustworthiness and

compassion, distinguishing himself from everyone else, are dealt with in the first chapter. The second chapter covers Prophet Muhammad’s retreat to a cave on the ‘Mountain of Light’ for meditation, his first experience of the Divine revelation, the assurance that he received from his beloved wife Khadija, and the suffering that he personally and his family had to endure.

The third and fourth chapters focus on the Prophet’s life as it unfolded, in particular, his experience with the Divine in the form of *Mi‘raj* described as “the astonishing capability of humanity,” to enter into “the mystical experience with God.” The *Mi‘raj*, Safi puts it, “is the full promise of what it means to be human: we can ascend to a height and a level of intimacy with God that angels dare not attempt.”

In chapter six, Safi explains how Muslims have had a devotional connection to the Prophet in different ways. He believes expressions of devotion to Prophet Muhammad take multifarious forms, and his memory is not limited to the collections of his sayings or devotional prayers. In Safi’s view, the Prophet’s memory encompasses all facets of the Islamic civilisation — intellectual, spiritual, artistic and social.

Reading *Memories of Muhammad* is like walking beside the Prophet; it is not a book on theology though it contains scriptural references. The experience of reading it is as if one is actually there with the Prophet to witness every episode of his life, and experience not just the life he lived physically but also the rich metaphysical layer of his existence that continues to unfold. Both scholars and general readers who are interested in Islam will find this book illuminating and inspirational.

Un Prophète

a film by Jacques Audiard, 2009

Review by Jamil Jaffer, Class of 2004

How does one select a film to review? Rather than review a formulaic Hollywood film, I instead decided to search for a film with greater substance; a film that didn’t depict the Manhattan skyline at sunset, the latest fashion trends or numerous scenes of improbable and gratuitous action. My starting point was identifying the nominees for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 2009 Golden Globe Awards. I visited my local library and scanned the options: *The White Ribbon*, *The Maid*, *A Prophet*, *Baaria*, and *Broken Embraces*, and selected the title that stood out most for me.

A Prophet is not your average film. It is different. It is gripping and filled with suspense, intrigue and

the cultural nuances of a racially and linguistically divided France. The story follows the protagonist, Malik El Djebena, and provides a vignette into his life – or survival – from his first day onwards within *Brécourt* prison. The struggles depicted will have the viewer considering the notions of rehabilitation, re-integration, rule of law, belonging, community, and the potential uplifting effect of a sound education system.

Malik is stoic, purposeful and earnest; his journey is riveting. I cannot help but be reminded of what Hobbes suggests in *Leviathan* as the three causes of conflict in the state of nature – competition, diffidence and glory: “The first maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation”. All three are interwoven in the film’s story and soon become the most important objectives for a better quality of life, both within the prison context and outside. To witness this process unfolding is the genius of the film.

Martyrdom in Islam

by David Cook.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007

Review by Perwaiz Hayat, Class of 1987

Martyrdom in Islam is a timely and important work in the context of the present times. David Cook's earlier work, *Understanding Jihad*, concludes with a chapter on "Radical Islam and Martyrdom." That chapter focused on present-day radical Islam and its mindset leading to martyrdom. However, there was a need to examine martyrdom in a broader sense. The present work of the author is clearly a response to that need.

The work is divided into nine chapters. Chapter one examines the concept of martyrdom in the two other Abrahamic traditions: Judaism and Christianity. Chapter two explores the concept of martyrdom in Islam in the light of the latter two traditions. Here, Cook delineates various types of martyrs: those who were tortured and killed for their faith, those who fought battles and were killed, those who were killed because of their identification within the Muslim community, those who died from plague, etc. Their actions represented the qualities of an ideal martyr: expressing courage and defiance in the face of an enemy, loyalty towards Islam (or one of its expressions) and a pure intention to please God.

The third chapter covers the "Legal definitions, boundaries and rewards of the martyr". It provides an insight into the efforts made by Muslim exegetes of the Qur'an such as Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani (d.996), al-Ghazali (d.1111), al-Qurtubi (d.1272), and Jalal al-Din Suyuti (d.1505). Their goal was to define the martyr as one who fights in the way of Allah, as opposed to one who foolishly throws his life away. This definition was widened by bringing in various other types of non-fighting martyrs, including for instance women who died during childbirth.

The fourth chapter deals with martyrs in the beliefs of various branches of Islam: Sunnism, Shi'ism and Sufism. In the context of Sunni martyrs, Cook cites the examples of the third caliph Uthman b. Affan and the well-known jurist Ahmad b. Hanbal. For Shi'a Islam, the author mentions the martyrdom of Imam 'Ali and gives a short, though precise, account of the event of Karbala where Imam Husayn and his family members sacrificed their lives. For Sufis, the author provides some insight into well-known figures such as Ibrahim b. Adham (d.778), Mansur al-Hallaj (d.922), 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani (d.1131) and Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (d.1191). Another figure, Dara Shukoh (d.1659), has also been included by Carl Ernst in his work *Words of Ecstasy*

in Sufism (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985). A Mughal crown prince, scholar and Qadiri Sufi, Dara was too open to interfaith dialogue with Hindus and for this reason was accused of heresy by his younger brother Aurangzeb and executed. Cook's omission of this martyr to religious tolerance is a minor drawback to an otherwise balanced chapter.

The fifth chapter deals with the warriors and missionaries of medieval Islam. Here he also mentions Sufis who gave their lives in the cause of large-scale conversion to Islam. He refers to martyrs who spread the faith in various regions such as India, Central Asia, Southeast Europe, Spain, West Africa, East Africa, Indonesia and Malaysia.

The sixth chapter focuses on "Martyrs of love and epic heroes." Cook recounts the story of the celebrated Azeri lovers Layla and Majnun. He also adds a list of epic heroes from Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Indonesian-Malay and East African Swahili literature. Cook might well have included references to a similar type of literature from the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, for which the reader can consult Laxman Komal's *Folk Tales of Pakistan* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1976).

The seventh chapter describes the patterns of prognostication, narrative and expiation. The author introduces the symbols of martyrdom and discusses the poetry written in honour of martyrs and martyrdom. The Indian Shi'i verse in honour of the martyrs of Karbala (*marthiya*) would have complemented very well the literature mentioned here.

In the eighth and ninth chapters Cook analyses the present-day situation, contemporary *jihad* literature and martyrdom. He points out, rightly, the conservative and ignorant attitude of modern scholars. In fact it is because of this ignorant attitude that David Cook's contribution is timely and remarkable. He has been successful in showing the diverse opinions on the subject and the various types and kinds of martyrdom in Islam, which have been reduced to a concept of martyrdom that is associated with warriors and suicide bombers only. The book is a welcome addition for those who are interested in learning more about *jihad* and martyrdom.



To Whom Much is Given, Much is Expected: Research in the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan and Tajikistan

Dr Karim-Aly Kassam, Class of 1992

Twenty-Five Years

1983 was seminal moment in my teenage life, literally weeks after my father's death; His Highness the Aga Khan arrived in Canada to celebrate the Silver Jubilee with his Jamat. Canada was in the grip of an economic recession and the developing world was facing the consequences of structural adjustment policies. Hopelessness and misery spread like a viral infection. Mawlana Hazar Imam not only met with the Jamat but insisted on meeting separately with students. He outlined to them a 25 year vision calling upon his Canadian students to join him in building strong societies founded upon intellectual pluralism, cultural diversity, and socio-economic justice. For a boy who was shaken by loss, this message of social justice was an infusion of life-giving spirit and an exhilarating purpose, which resulted in an unconventional career linking the human ecology of indigenous peoples at high latitude habitats of the circumpolar Arctic with those of the high altitudes of the Pamir Mountains of Central Asia. I had listened attentively and was grateful.

Twenty-five years later, the Golden Jubilee was the time to actualise that hope. Therefore, the Time and

Knowledge Nazrana provided a wonderful opportunity and an interesting challenge. The fundamental questions of the 21st Century such as the value of pluralism, the link between cultural diversity and ecology, and the impact of climate change on food sovereignty were the issues on which I could make a contribution. The Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan and Tajikistan were the relevant setting from which to explore and contribute to these issues as they relate to ethnically diverse Muslim communities. First a five year research plan needed to be developed, funds needed to be raised that ensured academic independence, and support from my academic institution needed to be negotiated so that I could volunteer my time. While it is not possible to describe every element of five years of work, noted here is a summary of some of the key issues.

Intellectual Pluralism

In the complex setting of the Pamir Mountains, characterised by both cultural and ecological diversity and marked by artificial political boundaries, the creative and pragmatic interaction between indigenous and scientific knowledge sustains the best hope for survival. The Panj River has marked the political border for the division of Tajik and Afghan Badakhshan since the late nineteenth century. On the Afghan side of the Pamirs, indigenous knowledge has been the mainstay for survival in the context of great upheaval, whereas on the Tajik side of the divide, this knowledge was largely devalued and overwhelmed by scientific knowledge driven by the Soviet command economy. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the large population movements caused by the civil war in Tajikistan, practical concerns for survival have caused



local knowledge to reassert itself, thereby, engendering an environment for synergies with the research institutions and civil society institutions that are best equipped to contribute through scientific knowledge systems. Research in Central Asia, and specifically in the Pamir Mountains of Badakhshan, needs to be viewed in terms of participation of and collaboration between *communities of social practice* and *communities of inquirers*. *Communities of social practice* include elders, farmers, and pastoralists, who generate as well as use indigenous knowledge, and the civil society institutions that work with them; *communities of inquirers* involve academics in the humanities and the physical, biological, and social sciences who contribute through their expertise. The goal of such research is practical outcomes that will meet the urgent priorities of village communities.

Climatic Variation

The impact of climatic change is significant. This change is largely anthropogenic in origin and concurs with findings of an increase in the volume of glacial melt in the northern hemisphere (including the Pamirs) since the 1970s and is accompanied by a rapid loss in glacial density. The nature of the impact of change differs within a region, depending upon ecological context and altitude. There are signs of increasing water levels in rivers due to snow and glacial melt. Overall, villages at lower elevations report the loss of valuable agricultural land to high water levels and changing river patterns. The villages report increased precipitation in April and May, and the river water also seems colder in the summer months because of glacial melt. Other villages report that increased rainfall is also affecting the physical integrity of structures. Architectural styles and materials in these regions are more suited to snow than to rain. In terms of monthly averages, precipitation levels seem to be the same as before; the difference arises from the intensity of rainfall, which is now concentrated in a few days rather than being spread over a longer period. Villagers also identified increasing problems with avalanches and rockslides due to rains. In some villages, ploughing and sowing begin 15 to 20 days earlier than they did a decade ago, and harvesting also takes place 15 to 20 days earlier. Not all changes are negative. Villages at high elevations, where wheat was rarely harvested because of frost damage, can now regularly harvest wheat. The key feature of these changes is that communities need to rapidly develop mechanisms for adaptation. While these changes are physical they have

biological implications for food and pastoral activities as well as socio-cultural significance in terms of timing of festivals and stress resulting from uncertainty.

Medicinal Plants and Health Sovereignty

The notions of health security and health sovereignty are analogous to the discussion of food security and food sovereignty. Unlike food security, which suggests access to food to meet minimum nutritional needs, food sovereignty encompasses the right and ability of individuals and groups to choose their own food based on the socio-cultural and ecological systems they inhabit. The idea of health sovereignty includes the ability to choose medicines that are socio-culturally and ecologically appropriate thereby providing practical, reliable, and contextually relevant health care options. Furthermore, medicinal plants are indicators of indigenous knowledge in the context of political volatility and socio-cultural and ecological change in the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Medicinal plants are the primary health care option in this region of Central Asia. Our research indicates that medicinal plants contribute to health security and sovereignty in a time of economic instability. Villagers identified over 58 cultivated and non-cultivated plants and described 310 distinct uses within 63 categories of treatment and prevention. Presence of knowledge about medicinal plants is directly connected to their use. Knowledge of medicinal plants is not only embedded in people's minds but in their relations within their habitat. This knowledge is critical to the adaptation and resilience of these communities under conditions of socio-cultural and environmental change.

Pluralism and the Ecology of Survival

Does Cain always have to kill Able? The meta-narrative of the farmer in a lethal conflict with nomadic pastoralist does not hold true everywhere, even in war-torn Afghanistan. The various ecological zones of the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan and the cultural diversity contained within this milieu provide an appropriate setting from which to ask, "How can a dynamic concept of pluralism inform adaptation, survival, and resilience in the face of dramatic socio-cultural and environmental change?" Evidence indicates that the understanding of resilience in coupled socio-cultural and ecological systems is enhanced by the concept of pluralism. Facilitative relations between the ethnically diverse Kyrgyz and Wakhi, as well as the Pashtu and Shugni, contribute to their mutual survival



and food sovereignty. The idea of ecological niche is enriched by sensitivity to culture, religion, ethnicity, lifestyle and habitat. The common good is achieved by harnessing ethnic, religious and ecological diversity.

Building Young Scholars

In my research I have tried to work with local institutions and mentor young scholars from the Pamir Mountains. From among the six young scholars I have worked with, I would like to highlight two who not only participated in research in the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan and Tajikistan but were Visiting Fellows at Cornell University. Under special and rare circumstances the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell approved the appointment of Ms Munira Karamkhudoeva, an entomologist with the Pamir Biological Institute, as Visiting Fellow at Cornell University from January to June 2010. Normally a visiting fellow has a PhD or at least a Masters degree. Ms Karamkhudoeva, a research director at the Pamir Biological Institute, who has completed her dissertation but has not defended it, was given special approval. Ms Karamkhudoeva worked on: (i) the role of medicinal plants as food in conserving biodiversity and ensuring food security, and (ii) the impact of insects on food staples resulting from climate change while at Cornell. She also participated in lab experiments related to her field of entomology and specifically the whitefly; thus, advancing her original research on the whitefly and its impact in the Mountainous Regions of Central Asia as well as work on issues of invasive insect species resulting from environmental change. In addition, she interacted widely with faculty and graduate students in the Department Natural Resources and contributed to my research group. Furthermore, Ms Karamkhudoeva undertook English training classes and co-authored an article with my research group on medicinal plants and health sovereignty. Currently, Ms Karamkhudoeva is in the process of defending her thesis with the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Similarly, Mr Bulbulshoev also joined my research team in the Pamirs. Mr Bulbulshoev has a background in the humanities, a graduate degree from the University of St. Petersburg with specialisation in ethno-linguistics, and is a Persian language instructor at the University of Central Asia. While at Cornell from August to December 2010, Mr Bulbulshoev worked with my research group on: Traditional calendars and their relevance for adapting to climate change and lost Shugni words related to environmental change. Furthermore, during his sojourn as Visiting Fellow at Cornell University, Mr Bulbulshoev undertook classes in Human Ecology and Indigenous Ways of Knowing and studied academic English writing and presenting. He is co-authoring an article with my research group on the calendar of the human body which is under review. Mr Bulbulshoev is currently applying for PhD programmes in Linguistic Anthropology to Universities in North America.

A Vocabulary of Agency

While the people of the Pamir face challenges like indigenous peoples of the circumpolar Arctic, these communities have not adopted a vocabulary of victimhood. Instead, they seek meaningful solutions in order to live. The potential for intellectual pluralism based on the diversity of indigenous ecological knowledge and the presence of scientific institutional knowledge is strong, and such knowledge can be put to practical use. While there is a general sense of being besieged by crisis, the critical contribution that these diverse banks of knowledge can make cannot be underestimated. Further research in this area will need to integrate these two human resources through curriculum development at educational institutions such as the University of Central Asia, as well as contributing relevant, ready-to-use information to civil society organisations committed to development and food sovereignty.

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