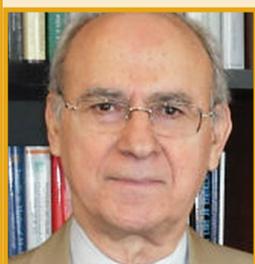




# IIS Alumni

Newsletter 2012

## MESSAGE FROM THE CO-DIRECTOR



The past year marked another milestone of achievements at the IIS. His Highness recently summarised our accomplishments by graciously stating that the IIS has now become a mature institution with a multiplicity of programmatic activities. It is, in fact, no exaggeration to

state that our Institute has a unique character as an academic institution as well as an organisation serving the Ismaili Jamat through a variety of academic and educational programmes. Many of these developments will have significant implications for our alumni, as we continuously strive to increase the participation of our alumni in the IIS' activities.

I am delighted to report that we have now published more than 100 books, including 12 publications in 2012. We published additional volumes in our *Ismaili Texts and Translations Series* and *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity Series*, as well as another volume of our *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, which has now found its place amongst reference encyclopaedias on Islam worldwide. Our academic track record is firmly established. A study of the reception of our publications, carried out in 2012, attests to both the quantitative and qualitative impact of these works, especially those related to Ismaili studies, throughout the academic community and beyond. The indicators measuring the growing impact of our publications included book reviews, library holdings worldwide, sales figures, use of our books in university courses and their citations in other scholarly publications. We have also continued translating our publications selectively into Arabic and Persian, as well as other languages used by the Jamat, with a total of 80 such translations published to date.

While maintaining our efforts in Ismaili studies, we are now increasingly broadening our focus towards Shi'i studies generally, covering all Shi'i communities, on the basis of a 'Strategy for Shi'i Studies' elaborated last year. At the same time, we are allocating resources to accessible publications for the benefit of the Jamat as well as other non-specialist audiences. For this purpose, in 2012, we developed a 'Strategy for Accessible Publications'. Meanwhile, our in-house faculty has expanded as more scholars have joined us on a full-time basis. Amongst these, mention should be made of Professor Carmela Baffioni, the foremost authority on the Ikhwan al-Safa', who has joined the IIS as a Senior Research Fellow.

The activities of the Qur'anic Studies Unit represent another area of accomplishment in our academic activities. Through its publications and academic

workshops, this unit has now received academic recognition as a serious centre of scholarship on Qur'anic studies.

The STEP and GPISH programmes, too, have been extremely successful during the past year. We continue to attract outstanding students to both programmes. The successful review of the IIS by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education was a significant accomplishment in 2012. The IIS was commended with positive judgements in all categories, highlighting a number of best practices which are considered exemplary across the private sector in UK higher education. Furthermore, the IIS was accepted by the UK Border Agency as a Tier 5 Sponsor, which will enable us to bring STEP teachers and other alumni to the IIS for their ongoing development.

In 2012, we restructured the process of developing the Secondary Curriculum modules, with the Department of Academic Research and Publications taking primary carriage for producing the academic narratives, and the Department of Curriculum Studies (DCS) focusing on transforming the academic narratives into student textbooks and teachers' guides for each module. We also have a new Head for DCS, Dr Shiraz Thobani, who is an IIS graduate himself and has been affiliated to that department for many years. Last autumn, we published the secondary module on *Muslim Societies and Civilisations*, which has been well received in the field.

In the past year, some organisational restructuring took place at the IIS. All Jamat-related activities were consolidated in the Department of Community Relations, now headed by Shiraz Kabani. This reorganisation is already yielding positive results, especially in terms of the IIS's relationship with the Jamat and the ITREBs. We also appointed a new Head of Finance and Administration in the person of Salah Mirza, while Steve Lewitt succeeded Dr Amanda Harris as the Head of Human Resources. Finally, Alnoor Merchant, who had served the IIS for many years, resigned from his post as the Head of Library. Professor Eric Ormsby is the current Acting Head of our Library, while the search for a permanent Head depends on discussions with ISMC on the management structure of a merged IIS-ISMC library.

During 2012, five alumni grants were awarded for research and field work as well as attendance at conferences. These grants enable our alumni to maintain their involvement in scholarly activities and to contribute to the wider mission of the IIS. It is our firm conviction that IIS alumni have a key role to play in our programmatic activities, and we urge you, our dear alumni, to become even more actively involved. At the IIS, we look forward to working with you in the coming year.

**Dr. Farhad Daftary**

In 2012, after 244 years, the famous Encyclopaedia Britannica has stopped its print edition and decided to go online, recently launching a digital version of its weighty reference work. After a much shorter span of seven years of the print version, welcome to the first online edition of the Alumni Newsletter.

In many respects, 2012 mirrored 2011. While the Olympics and Paralympics Games in London generated huge global interest and competitive spirit, the Olympic torch did not extinguish realities confronting individuals and communities worldwide. For too many, the economic despair and financial misery worsened and social tensions deepened. And, in this context, our thoughts are with fellow alumni and friends in diverse localities where there has been strife – Afghanistan, Syria, and Tajikistan – to name a few.

Once again, we would like to thank all members for participating in the annual Alumni Survey for 2012; we had 98% 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 below:

- Currently, the alumni body comprises 383 graduates and, at present, more than 50% of alumni reside in their countries of origin.
- The vast majority of IIS graduates (94%) have contributed to Ismaili community and AKDN institutions, either in a professional or voluntary capacity.
- Twenty-eight alumni have been appointed by His Highness to senior positions within Ismaili community institutions globally, including three as ITREB Chairpersons (India, Far East, and UK).

- Thirty-seven alumni were appointed during 2012 to various leadership positions within the IIS, AKDN and other NGOs in their societies.



- A substantial contribution has been made to academia - thirty-nine alumni presented and/or published papers and three published books.
- Twenty-eight alumni received various types of awards and grants including fellowships or scholarships during 2012.
- Twenty-seven alumni have been involved with TKN assignments during the year in the following countries: Australia, Canada, Congo, Mozambique, New Zealand, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uganda, UK and the USA.
- In response to the question relating to Social Media and its impact on various aspects of societies and communities, twenty-three alumni have presented research in various formats.
- The IIS wanted to identify alumni who have recent experience of youth development programmes (including youth camps) within and beyond the Ismaili community. More than 110 alumni responded that they have been involved with programmatic activities in this field, both within and outside the Ismaili community and AKDN agencies.

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!

**Shellina Karmali, Alumni Relations Coordinator**





### NORTH AMERICAN CHAPTER GROUP

Alumni from across North America met in Chicago for their annual meeting on 24-26 August on the topic of *“Faith and Social Change.”* This year’s meeting attracted a record number of participants, bringing together over 50 alumni from Canada and the United States.

Speakers at the meeting included the Honourable Mobina Jaffer (Senate of Canada), Dr. Aryn Sajoo (Simon Fraser University), Dr Hussein Rashid (Hofstra University), and leaders of the Ismaili community from Canada and USA.

### EUROPEAN CHAPTER GROUP

Alumni from across Europe met in Istanbul for their annual meeting on 7-10 December 2012. The meeting brought together 19 alumni to explore *“Ethics in the Modern World”.*

Speakers at the meeting included Dr Hadi Adanali (Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister of Turkey), Professor Ihsan Fazlioglu (Istanbul Medeniyet University), Dr Laljuba Mirzohasanov (Khorog State University), and Dr Zahide Ay (Konya Necmettin Erbakan University).





### ASIAN CHAPTER GROUP

Over sixty alumni from Hong Kong, India, Kenya, Pakistan, Singapore, Syria, Tajikistan and Tanzania convened in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for the annual meeting of the Asian Chapter Group. The theme for the meeting was *"The Significance of Qur'anic Teachings in the 21st Century"*. Speakers at the meeting included Dr Arif Jamal (GPISH 1997), Professor Bruce Lawrence (Duke University) and Professor Abdullah Saeed (University of Melbourne).



*In 2009, the IIS created an Alumni Research Grant to support alumni who wish to pursue further research, present papers at academic conferences, publish articles, or undertake field studies in areas of relevance to the IIS. Since its creation, grants have been awarded to 10 alumni, some of whom have provided a summary of their activities below:*

#### **Sehreen Noor Ali, Class of 2006**



The Alumni Research Grant enabled me to participate in the 2010 Concordia Forum in Granada, Spain. Through discourse and collaboration, the annual conference aims to build a network of innovative leaders devoted to promoting socially progressive change. The Forum enables global Muslim leaders to create

opportunities and engender solutions for social change in communities at the local, regional and transnational levels.

The thirty participants who attended spent time building bonds of trust and discussing global challenges, such as extremism, and issues related to community leadership and transatlantic collaboration. The US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton's Special Representative to Muslim Communities, Farah Pandith, also attended the meeting and spoke to the group. Most importantly, we mapped a plan of action that would allow the group to work together on joint projects in such a way as to leverage our individual experiences and create change in the broader Ummah.

#### **Dr Miriam Alí-de-Unzaga, Class of 2000**

As an independent scholar, the Alumni Research Grant enabled me to present the following papers at two international conferences:

##### *Andalusi and Fatimid Textiles: Three Case Studies*

The International Medieval Congress held at the University of Leeds, UK, in July 2010

In medieval societies textiles were expressions of status. They were used in political, cultural and religious contexts, and as currency. Fatimid and Andalusi textiles constitute significant evidence vital to understanding medieval culture. My paper contextualised the motifs of some important pieces in order to problematise how motifs moved between contexts and to illustrate how textiles acted as transcultural objects despite religious and political rivalries.

##### *Andalusi Textiles: Transcultural Objects and Cross-dressing in the Iberian Peninsula*

World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies held in Barcelona, Spain, in July 2010

Today, approximately 600 textiles produced in al-Andalus remain in Spain. The study of the biographies of each piece yields edifying information that allows us to better understand that the operating *Islamicate* mode was more complex than the image presented by modern historiography. In fact, data seems to indicate that the use of these valuable textiles by the Iberian North had to do less with ethnic or religious rivalry and more with a visual articulation of authority and status.

#### **Dr Anil Khamis, Class of 1992**

In 2009-10, I visited Puntland, the historically semi-autonomous region of Somalia. Somalia, located on the Horn of Africa, is bordered by Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya. Virtually the whole population is Muslim with a Sufi background.

Garowe, the capital, is situated in a hot, arid valley in the middle of Puntland; Bosaso and Gaalkacyo are the other two main towns. Garowe is situated in a hot, arid valley and its outskirts are strewn with camels and the tents of refugees or displaced persons which are emblazoned with UNHRC (United Nations Human Rights Council) logos. After a tense civil conflict in 2007, Somalia presently has a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) that is a coalition of different parties.

Islam was spread from the seventh to the ninth centuries along the East African coast, from Somalia to Mozambique, by maritime traders. It was in the fourteenth century that Ibn Battuta visited Somalia and mentioned Puntland or Buntland. Punt refers to 'the land of spices'; it was so-called after the fragrant plants that grow in the region.

The purpose of my engagement with Puntland is an Action Research study investigating the potential to provide quality education in the region. Historically, education is provided via *dugsi* that are available universally. *Dugsi* education, comparable to madrasas, aim to make children, from the age of three years onwards, into 'good Muslims'. After *fajr* prayers, children attend *dugsi* from 5 am for a couple of hours.





### **Dr Zuhail Avzalshoeva, Class of 2005**

The Alumni Research Grant allowed me to attend the International Summer School on ‘Law and Culture’ at Osnabruck University in Germany.

The focus of my research is in the area of women’s studies; in particular, I am investigating the rise of violence against women, and exploring how and if justice is dealt. Participating in the Summer School provided me with an excellent platform to have discussions with others, to network and to present my work in an environment in which I could receive valuable feedback.

By looking into the societal and cultural factors that shape and influence attitudes towards violence against women, I believe that the trends of violence and the best ways of handling such cases can be determined. While adhering to the idea that adequate laws are important in the elimination of violence against women, I also believe that laws do not exist in isolation, and in order to ensure their implementation, cultural norms ought to be taken into account.

### **Dr Karim Gillani, Class of 2003**

The Alumni Research Grant contributed to my attendance at the 54th Annual Conference of the Society for Ethnomusicology in Mexico City entitled ‘Borderless Ethnomusicologies’. Scholars, students, musicians and researchers travel from around the globe to participate in and share their expertise at this conference. I presented an academic paper on *New Sufi Trends in the Popular Music of India and Pakistan*.

New trends in Sufi music have recently gained widespread popularity on the contemporary Indo-Pakistan music scene. While music has been present amidst the Sufi orders of South Asian Muslims for centuries, the term ‘Sufi’ has proliferated in popular culture only in the past few years. A popular Indian reality TV show, *Sa-Re-Ga-Ma-Pa*, fashions Pakistan’s Mussarat Abbas as a ‘Sufi icon’ while *Amul Star Voice of India* labels India’s Mohammed Toshi’s music as ‘Sufi soul’. In this light I believe it is crucial to ascertain what qualifies the above performers as ‘Sufi singers’. Does the term ‘Sufi’ relate to certain songs, lyrics or styles of music? According to the co-managing director of Tips Music, Rajiv Sogani, ‘Sufi is the hottest-selling thing in the market’. Therefore, recently, many music companies have jumped onto the bandwagon of creating new trends by incorporating ‘Sufi’ sounds into traditionally popular brands of music, hence Sufi Rock, Sufi Khatak, Sufi Khayal and Sufi Euphoria.

My study aims to critically analyse how the term ‘Sufi’ has recently been used by music industries. Arguably, the use of such terminology has minimal relationship to traditional Sufism. The paper also aims to investigate the motivation behind the inclusion of Pakistani singers in the Bollywood industry, and the key religious and

Being a semi-arid region, a significant proportion of the population is nomadic pastoralists and herders. In these harsh and open environments, education is afforded and available, even if only under the meagre shade of a thorn tree. Although formal government and private schools exist, they attract only some 20% of the population, who also attend *dugsi* early in the morning. Formal schools are situated mostly in the towns.

During my initial visit in late September 2010, I worked with local religious scholars (Sheikhs) who oversee *dugsi* education, Ministry of Education officials and teacher educators from institutions of higher education as well as staff from the Norwegian Refugee Council and UNICEF (United Nations International Childrens Fund). After identifying areas that needed further investigation, my visit in early November 2010 focused on learning in *dugsi* and other schools and empirical analysis of the curricula on offer.

These are the first incipient steps in what will be a long journey of educational discovery. Although there is a long way to go to provide quality education to the children of Puntland, I refer to the Chinese saying ‘a journey of five thousand miles begins with a single step’. The Alumni Research Grant, along with other funding from international agencies, is supporting my studies while I am based in Kenya.

socio-political elements that have led to the rapid and immense appreciation of new Sufi trends in the popular music industry of India and Pakistan.

### **Sharaf Oshurbekov, Class of 2005**

The IIS Alumni Research Grant partially assisted me in my project on Ismaili Muslim places of worship in Badakhshan, Tajikistan. The fieldwork experience was a great opportunity for me to visit different regions of Badakhshan and to learn more about local Ismaili religious traditions from various perspectives. I visited the districts of Vakhan, Ishkashim, Shugnan and Rushan, and collected data about local Ismaili places of worship and other religious traditions. As is probably the case with any anthropological fieldwork, my research in Badakhshan forced me to not only re-examine some of my own perceptions of local Ismaili traditions, but also to test and re-evaluate some of the existing theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are commonly used to analyse local religious beliefs.

In collecting stories from the older generation, I was able to make connections between present local religious traditions and past ones, and to identify discrepancies between them; in talking to the younger generation, I was able to infer what the future directions of these traditions might be. The oral data that I collected and the local manuscripts that I read showed me the dynamism of the local religious landscape. Clearly, the dynamism and complexity that I encountered during the fieldwork exposed some of the objectifying and essentialist thought underlying previous scholars'

estimations of this tradition. For example, the literature on the Ismaili places of worship in Badakhshan has mainly represented the associated practices as remnants of 'pre-Islamic' beliefs. Although this is an important observation, as some elements of this belief might come from the pre-Islamic period, in most cases it fails to take local people's perspective into account. As a result it essentialises this tradition and ignores the multivocality of cultural and religious perspectives. The rich stories associated with places of worship in this region, however, show the diversity of this tradition and reveal aspects of local religious attitudes and worldviews.

Thus, travelling and staying in various parts of this region enhanced my appreciation of the different perspectives that the people of the region have about their religious tradition. Currently, I am analysing the data and working on an article based on my findings, which I hope to publish soon.



*The Alumni Relations Unit endeavours to organise internships for graduating students with the aim of facilitating their transition from student life to professional careers within the Aga Khan Development Network and institutions of the Ismaili community. The internship programme seeks to enable our graduates to obtain practical experience in fields that are of interest to them and relevant to their education. A few alumni from 2011-12 share their experiences below:*



**Rozina Kanchwala**

My placement with the Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan Fund for the Environment (PSAKFE) in Nairobi, Kenya, allowed me to get involved in three different projects: coordinating the tree planting campaign of the AKDN and the Lions Club, assessing the energy efficiency of the cook stoves that were distributed to tree farmers in the rural areas of Coast Province, and reporting on the corporate social responsibility of the various AKDN

agencies. It allowed me the opportunity to work with a broad range of civil society actors, including local schools, non-governmental organisations, government ministries and research institutes. This placement was meaningful because I was able to see first-hand how projects account for the intersection between the environment and development. I had learnt about this in my degree, the Master of Science in Environment and Sustainable Development, which I had just completed, and it cemented these concepts. This placement lasted six months, from January to July 2012.

**Nibras Aldibbiat**

Like my post-graduate academic journey, my professional one also started at the IIS. I had the opportunity to spend eight months in the Department of Curriculum Studies working as an evaluation intern. My remit was to consolidate the field-testing data on the module ‘Ethical Pathways to Human Development’, conduct qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data and compile country evaluation reports. As much as this mission was exciting it was also challenging. Although I had worked closely with data in my academic studies, this was on a different scale. Massive amount of data had been collected from four countries, namely the USA, the UK, Pakistan and India. Hundreds of pages needed to be summarised and analysed. Each detail mattered, yet the summaries were expected to be short and to the point. I was fortunate to be mentored by an insightful manager, who is also a GPISH alumnus, Nazmin Halani. Nazmin’s experience was invaluable in guiding me through the vast amount of work. Having been supported in this way, I was able to delve deeper into the data collected. At a later stage, I became more involved in other activities of the department, including consolidating the review data of the materials that the department was producing and contacting researchers in the field for further information. On finishing my internship, I have continued to work with the department as an Evaluation Officer. The scope of my responsibilities has expanded and so has my appreciation of my assignments.



**Zahra Sheriff**

My internship, under the supervision of Dr Al-Karim Dattoo, at the Aga Khan University’s Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) in Karachi, provided me with the opportunity to gain relevant work experience in the field of research and education. At the AKU-IED, I worked on the final stages of Dr Dattoo’s research project, ‘Exploring Curricula on Pluralism’. This six-month internship served to guide me through the critical transition period from student to working professional, which can sometimes be difficult. Returning home to Karachi, Pakistan, after having lived and studied in London for three years initially seemed daunting, even though I took comfort in the fact that I was returning to family. However, knowing that I was being facilitated to find work and eventually starting the internship within a month of returning home provided me with a great sense of support, encouragement and relief.



It has now been a few months since I have completed the Alumni Internship – upon reflection, I can sincerely say that this opportunity served as a trampoline in opening multiple doors to endeavours that I can choose to pursue in the future in my career path.

**Laila Naz Taj**

The internship with the FOCUS Europe Foundation provided me with an excellent opportunity to learn about the global communities at risk and also develop administrative, technical and programmatic skills in humanitarian assistance and emergency response.



It also provided me with the opportunity to do field research in Afghanistan, where I studied the impact of the 2011 drought in six provinces of Afghanistan. My background in Islamic Studies equipped me with the right skills to do humanitarian work in a Muslim context. This, in turn, led to a grant from USAID (US Agency for International Development) and also the presentation of a policy paper at the International Disaster and Risk Conference-Global Risk Forum in DAVOS, Switzerland, in August 2012.

I also had the opportunity to write another paper based on a study of food security in Afghan-Badakhshan, which will be published this year in the journal Emergency Nutrition Network (issue no. 44). In addition, I had the opportunity to exchange views on global risks with FOCUS Canada and Tajikistan as well. As a member of the FOCUS Europe national committee, I also assisted in organising programmes for the Ismaili Community in the UK to educate them about the natural disasters in Pakistan and the assistance provided by the AKDN institutions. I plan to continue my work with FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance Pakistan and to use the expertise that I have gained from The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London School of Economics, FOCUS Europe and FOCUS Afghanistan.

## SOCIAL INTERCONNECTIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: SHAPING THE SELF

*Amal Sachedina, Class of 2000*

Pakistan, Kuwait, the United States, Great Britain, Tunisia, Yemen and Egypt – I was born in the first, raised and educated in the rest. My personal history could be summed up in an inchoate set of experiences, feelings and relationships. However, each personal event was shaped by the circumstances in which I lived.

I was born in Karachi, Pakistan, but lived in Kuwait, where my father was an aircraft engineer, from early childhood. In retrospect, life in Kuwait was one of comfortable stability. My days revolved around school, books and visits to family friends. It was a placid existence then, but at the age of sixteen this was shattered by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent devastation brought about by the first Gulf War. These events proved to be the turning point that placed me on my current intellectual and spiritual path. My family lost all their property and savings at the time, and the trauma of the loss of security left a lasting mark on me. My need to understand how such events could come about led me to the study of Islam and Middle East histories, peoples and societies. This region has since been the focus of my studies.

My studies, thus far, have been informed by the realisation that, despite attempts in traditional art history, Islamic studies and cultural heritage to de-politicise and create tacit, yet sacrosanct, borders around their fields, cultural history is inextricably intertwined with politics and can actively shape identity, nationalism and modern governance. This observation leads to a number of questions regarding our relationship to a physically inaccessible past, such as how the concepts of tradition, history and heritage mediate people's identities, shape their religious sensibilities and practices and ratify their experiences.

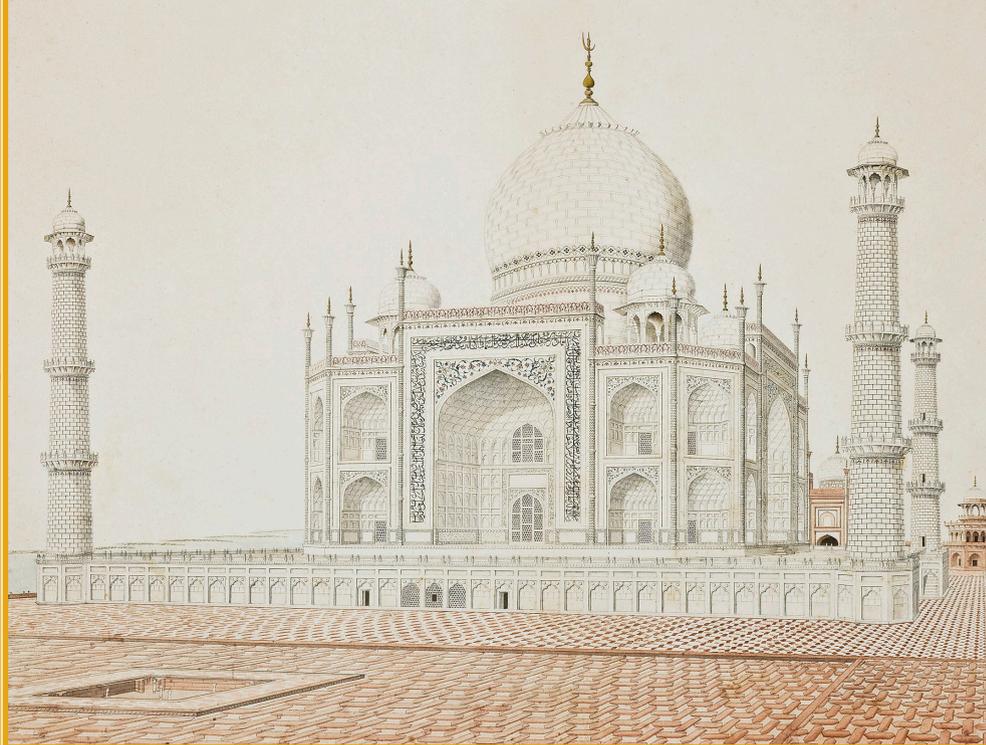
My dissertation focuses on how the formation of the national heritage sector in the Sultanate of Oman has reconfigured the nature of memory, religion and community. It is a study of how historic preservation, public museums, and material heritage recalibrate the sense of tradition and the popular historical imagination so that they accord with the desirable political and ethical futures in Oman. It seeks to understand the different ways in which the Sultanate of Oman's past inhabits the present, sustaining an active effect on the configuration of religion (specifically with regard to its predominant sect, Ibadism), politics and community in the nation state. My examination of the realm of heritage in Oman is based not simply on its capacity to instill ideologies but its potential to shape the perceptual habits and sensibilities of its audience.

I see Oman as a lens through which to view larger



problems of the past, both in terms of its entanglements with historical memory and its engagements with larger inter-disciplinary debates on the relationship among modernity, religious practices and state practices in modern Muslim societies. In addressing these fundamental questions, my doctoral research seeks to explore the role of global discourses of cultural heritage and conservation in the production of national cultures, particularly in the Arab-Persian Gulf area, and the emergent national heritage industry that shapes the diverse communities of the region. To this end, I conducted ethnographic research in Muscat and Nizwa in Oman over the course of sixteen months, from December 2009 to June 2011.

I am currently a post-doctoral fellow at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. There, while writing my doctoral dissertation, I will also be working with the anthropology department – Asian collections – to generate narratives and themes for a new Islamic and Middle East section as part of the pre-planning phase for a renovated Asia Hall. A fundamental part of my work will be to engage with the local leaders and representatives of Muslim communities in the larger New York area and convey their opinions and concerns about how Islam should be represented in the new permanent Hall of Asian Peoples.



## MUGHAL INDIA: ART, CULTURE AND EMPIRE

British Library Exhibition  
9 November 2012 - 2 April 2013

Qudsia Naunehal Shah, Class of 2006

When I went to see the Mughal exhibition at the British Library, titled *Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire*, I thought I knew what to expect: some beautiful miniature paintings, the history of the rise and fall of the empire, the usual mention of the East India Company, etc. I would have been quite happy with these offerings and was prepared for an enjoyable stroll through the exhibition, but was not expecting any surprises. However, to my delight, there were many pleasant discoveries to be made!

The exhibition starts in the middle of the Paccar Gallery with an interesting walk through the Mughal period, starting with Babur who founded the empire and ending with Bahadur Shah II, the last Mughal emperor. But there is also a special focus on six renowned Mughal emperors – Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb; their stories are narrated through short biographical details and miniature paintings. The rest of the exhibits are laid out around this central space and are divided into seven different sections, entitled, 'Life in Mughal India', 'International Relations', 'Court life', 'Mughal Library', 'Literature', 'Science and Medicine' and 'Decline of the Empire'.

The stories of the women associated with the emperors kept surfacing throughout the exhibition; this was refreshing, as the details of their lives usually remain untold and in the shadows. It was fascinating to note that Humayun's wife, Hamida Banu Begum, had a great interest in books and maintained a library of her own; Shah Jahan's eldest daughter, Princess Jahan Ara, commissioned the building of the *Jamia Masjid* in Agra; Jahangir's wife, Nur Jahan, was politically active especially during the later years of Jahangir's rule when, under the influence of drugs and alcohol, he relinquished his political duties to her (she

also built a spectacular tomb for her father); Aurangzeb's daughter, Princess Zebunnisa, was a poetess and her poems are also on display at the exhibition. These exhibits remind us of the centrality of the women of the palace in politics and society, and of their economic empowerment.

There are many other interesting exhibits: there is a letter that Ghalib had written to his friend Maulvi Numan Ahmed which is on display, and for anyone who can speak Urdu it is a real treat to see and read this. There are also numerous pieces throughout the exhibition highlighting Prince Dara Shikoh's (Shah Jahan's son) tolerance, his Sufi tendencies and love of knowledge. One of these was his translation from Sanskrit to Arabic of the Hindu text of the 'Upanishads'.

Anyone with even a layman's knowledge of Mughal history has heard of their contribution to the arts and architecture. However, their love of books has hardly ever been mentioned. So, it was interesting to learn through the exhibits that the Mughals, at the peak of their empire, had a library which boasted 24,000 volumes which had an estimated value of 6,463,731 rupees at that time. This amount is quite considerable, especially when placed in the comparative context of the value of their weaponry. Unfortunately the library was burnt and looted in 1739 by Nadir Shah, an Iranian warlord.

Another discovery was the commentary, undertaken at the time of the great Mughal emperor Akbar, of Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* by Ali Gilani, who was the emperor's personal physician. This text, titled *Sharh al Qanun fi'l-tibb*, is also on display.

For me, the most haunting exhibit was a picture of Bahadur Shah II taken at the Red Fort while awaiting trial for his role in the uprising of 1857. Having been led through exhibits attesting to the glory of the Mughal empire – its riches, grandeur, the pomp and the pride – to then come across this stark, black and white photograph of a shrunken Bahadur Shah II, with his vacant stare astonishes you, and makes you want to return to each exhibit to take a closer look to see if it is possible to understand how the empire reached this stage.

***THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST***

by Mohsin Hamid  
London, Penguin, 2008

Maria Budhwani, Class of 2010

The question of how one negotiates one's identity and of how idealism and reality clash with this identity are the central questions examined in Mohsin Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. When we first meet Changez, the book's protagonist, he's a chatty university professor, full of anti-American rhetoric, who invites an American journalist, Bobby, to come and sit with him. Changez begins to tell Bobby his story, revealing that despite having studied in the US, he is now known to cultivate a following of students who readily share his anti-American sentiments.

We learn that, as a young man from Lahore, Pakistan, fresh out of Princeton University, Changez was excited about the possibilities that his new life as an investment analyst for one of the most prestigious financial firms in New York City held for him. He tells of how he came from a family that was once wealthy but was now struggling to maintain their image, and how he became fascinated by the easy life of Americans. He nostalgically describes a trip through Greece, just before starting his lucrative job, where he met the alluring and artistic Erica who mesmerised him. It was his continued friendship with her that brought out the gentle side of him which was so at odds with the ruthless and money-hungry career to which his education and skills had brought him. As he begins his first job, he is taken under the wing of his boss who tells him he understands how it feels to be different than the rest, as Changez is the only non-American and Pakistani working for the company. And then the day that is always looked upon as the day that changed America happens, September 11th. While on a business trip to the Far East, Changez sees what is happening to his new home on the television. His reaction to the tragic events leads him to reevaluate himself, his new home and what he stands for.

Hamid's presentation of Changez's complete breakdown, with respect to his beliefs, goals and identity, is handled in such a manner that anyone can relate to it. The author reaches out to the reader and evokes the moments when they questioned something they thought would never change: their beliefs and ideals.

This remarkable book has now been turned into a film by the award-winning director Mira Nair. It stars the charming Riz Ahmed as Changez and Kate Hudson as Erica. It enjoyed its debut at the Venice Film Festival, where it was one of the most highly anticipated films. This film is a must-see, as it forces us to reconsider our understanding of who is a fundamentalist and think about how even the smallest reactions to the biggest events can cause us to question our identity.

***PORTFOLIOS OF THE POOR: HOW THE WORLD'S POOR LIVE ON \$2 A DAY***

by Stuart Rutherford, Daryl Collins, Jonathan Morduch and Orlanda Ruthven  
Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2009

Farida Juma, Class of 1986

The authors of this publication have built on an idea originally presented by David Hulme, which was to compile financial diaries of poor households in order to systematically capture the complex range of ways in which they managed their money. Rutherford and a small team compiled the first diaries from 42 Bangladeshi households between 1999 and 2000; Ruthven did the same with 48 households in India in 2000; and in 2004, Collins collected diaries from some 94 families in South Africa.

In all cases, the technique used was the same. A researcher would visit a poor household repeatedly, say, every fortnight for a year, and would gather

***THREE CUPS OF TEA: ONE MAN'S MISSION TO PROMOTE PEACE... ONE SCHOOL AT A TIME***

by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin  
New York, Viking – Viking Penguin, 2006

Mumtaz Virani, Class of 1983

*Three Cups of Tea* is the inspiring true story of Greg Mortenson, an American mountaineer whose destiny led him to become the agent of change for thousands of villagers in Northern Pakistan and eventually Afghanistan.

The zeal and commitment with which Mortenson, an ordinary person like any of us, embarked on the task of building a school with few financial resources or competencies at his disposal, is inspiring. He made several compromises – sleeping in his car for months on end because he wanted to save every penny to fulfil his promise and sacrificing his social life, including his relationship with his girlfriend who could not cope with his lifestyle. All this because he was determined to keep the promise he had made to the head of Korphe, a little known village in Baltistan, to build a school there as an expression of his gratitude for saving his life.

It is amazing to read about this man's wisdom in selecting services for the building of schools in the various villages. After all, he was not connected to any well-established institution or non-governmental organisation; he was a nurse by profession with no experience in rural development. With the benevolent

detailed information about what its members had earned, spent, borrowed and saved since the last visit. Through the data collection and the associated conversations, an intimate portrait of the household's financial life was pieced together.

The book emphasises that being poor in a poor country means having an income that is not just low, but variable and unpredictable. It shows that if you make \$1 today, \$4 tomorrow and nothing the day after, but need to put food on the table every day, you will engage in complex patterns of borrowing and saving to rectify the discrepancy between your income and outgoings. Thus, out of necessity, poor people deploy more complex financial strategies than rich people. The book provides stories of families who are constantly juggling small loans to and from friends and family; saving with local 'moneyguards'; participating in savings and insurance clubs (such as burial clubs in South Africa); buying groceries from the local shopkeeper on credit; and otherwise employing an extraordinary diversity of financial devices in order to get by.

*Portfolios of the Poor* also shows how these informal

financial relationships become embedded in social relationships, which proves to be both a blessing and a curse. The blessing is that it allows for flexibility in the management of money; the curse is that it carries a level of uncertainty – for example, will your brother pay you back? In the view of the book's authors, in the financial lives of the poor, 'semiformal' microfinance stands out for its reliability: traditional microcredit is disbursed once a year, but family members do not fall sick within the confines of such a neat schedule. This is where other, informal, forms of finance fit in.

The book has two main shortcomings. The first is that it lacks a full-blown discussion of gender issues at play in the households' management of money. The authors explicitly state that their unit of analysis is the household not the individual; yet, surely, in the course of their research they must have gathered information on how both men and women within a household cooperate and vie with each other in managing money. The second oversight, more understandable since it lies further from the core contribution of the book, is that it does not examine the business imperatives of microfinance. On the whole, though, the book is balanced and worth reading.

assistance of a single donor he was able to generate the funds required to fulfil his commitment. Although not consciously aware of it, Mortenson effectively applied principles of participatory management and decision making by consensus, and he believed in the wisdom of rural populations.

The story excellently portrays the essential component of success. The application of passion, commitment, patience and determination, coupled with common sense, to any endeavour gets results. With these essential ingredients in place, everything else can be learnt. Mortenson experienced many of the dangers and challenges an American might face in a traditional Muslim society, including kidnapping, *fatwas* against him and attacks on his life. However, driven by his passion, he miraculously worked through all of these. In over a decade he established 66 schools and the mission still continues.

The book is not just inspirational, it also brings out the nuances of both cultures well; for example, we see that while the locals admire the work being done by the American, he is still labelled an 'infidel'. The beauty of this book is that it is an account of a real life story but also akin to a fictional work, allowing the reader to enjoy the subtleties and beauties of the Eastern world as they are highlighted through the loving and caring people that Mortenson comes across in rural villages.



**WHOSE MEMORY?  
RE-THINKING ORIENTALIST AND  
OCCIDENTAL CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF  
'ISLAMIC ART'**

Dr Karim H Karim, Class of 1984

I recently visited New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art's expanded 'Islamic galleries'. The displays of calligraphy, miniatures, glassware, rock crystal, woodwork, metal artefacts and jewellery from various periods are spectacular. However, following many decades of viewing such exhibitions, and especially in anticipation of the opening of the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, one ponders about the choices made by curators and their cumulative impact on visitors. The cultural historian James Clifford has noted that:

*What is at stake is something more than conventional museum programmes of community education and 'outreach'. Current developments question the very status of museums as historical-cultural theatres of memory. Whose memory? For what purposes? (Clifford, 1993, 72)*

Even though Clifford wrote this two decades ago, most displays of the art produced in Muslim-majority lands reflect long-standing orientalist museological tendencies, categorising objects according to period, geographic location or the ruling dynasty in whose territories they were produced or found (Said, 1978). The perspectives and memories of these societies' common people are rarely reflected.

Exhibitions of beautifully painted miniature illustrations, skilful calligraphic renditions, delicately carved wood, glass and rock crystal, silken tiraz tapestries, brass objects finely inlaid with ivory and silver, and filigree gold jewellery have been dazzling museum visitors in various parts of the world. Galleries usually map out artefacts from specific times and places in sectioned spaces, rarely displaying pluralistic interactions between peoples. In this, they depict the plurality (i.e., diversity) of Muslim cultures – but not necessarily their pluralism (i.e., inter-group engagement).

These displays primarily exhibit elite arts rather than the materials related to the lives of people who are outside the circles of power. Innovative exhibitions and museum programmes that are centred on the latter rather than the elites are able to portray more effectively the social phenomena occurring in broader society. This is demonstrated in the permanent display of Malaysia's Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, which exhibits local religious and cultural life through artefacts and old photographs. However, the Islamic Arts Museum in Kuala Lumpur, the country's capital, conforms to the dominant mode of displaying primarily the elite arts, which – to use the cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy's words – plays

'occidental rationality at its own game' (Gilroy, 1993, 38) rather than re-thinking the received discourses of presenting one's cultural heritage.

Rarely does one hear an analysis of the commonly used term 'Islamic art'. Is it meant to denote that all artefacts categorised as such are of a religious nature, i.e., related to Islamic worship or theology? We know this would not be correct since many of the materials in displays of 'Islamic art' depict various non-religious aspects of life. Does the term then refer to the artists, implying that they were all Muslim? We also know that this was often not the case; for example, many craftsmen who contributed to the building of mosques and madrasas in India were Hindu. Does 'Islamic art' refer to a Muslim cultural ethos? If that is true, how then should we view the artefacts like the 13th -14th century d'Arenberg basin in the British Museum's collection, which is described as an 'example of Islamic art with Christian subject matter' portraying 'the resurrection of Lazarus' (Cardini, 2012, 141)?

Apart from objects from the Fatimid period, artistic materials related to Ismailis almost never appear in major public exhibitions. If judged only from the perspective of 'high art' produced under court patronage, it would be difficult to identify many Ismaili artefacts worthy of placement in museums. The relentless persecution and marginalisation of the post-Fatimid community over many centuries weakened its organisational structures, and the creative output by Ismailis in Syria, Iran, Badakhshan and India under these circumstances was largely of a folk nature. Nonetheless, it constitutes the transnational community's heritage of more than 800 years. This legacy, along with the art, architecture, literature and music developed in the diasporic regions of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, eastern Asia, Europe and North America in more recent times, bears the most tangible communal memories of contemporary Ismailis. The picture that would emerge from including imaginative displays of Ismaili folk art of the last few centuries in museum exhibits would have the possibility of presenting a dynamic and topical understanding of this contemporary Muslim group. It would help to uncover some of the roots of the current resurgence of the community that is engaging in a unique Islamic interaction with modernity.

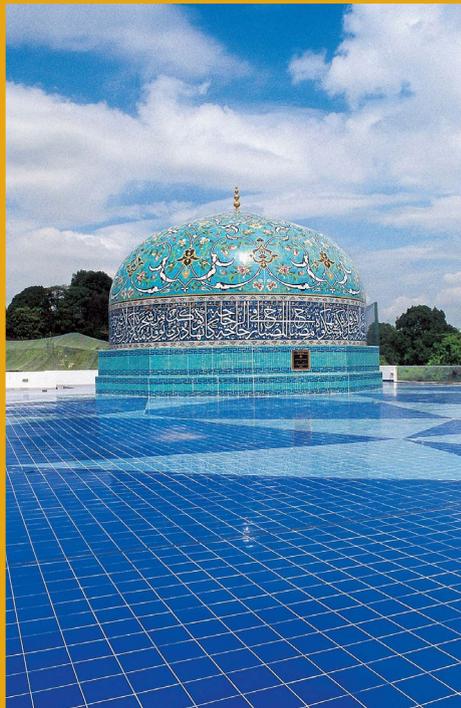
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*Tapping feet sense the rhythm  
Magnetic mind captures the beat  
Restless heart grasps the essence  
But the soul dances away to eternity  
Shhhhh...  
Listen carefully, Ignore the clamour, the  
Cacophony of your wishes, your needs, desires  
Be patient, be wise  
Be satisfied  
And you shall be satiated,  
Initiated...into the realm of the truly content*

Minaz Master, Class of 2002



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