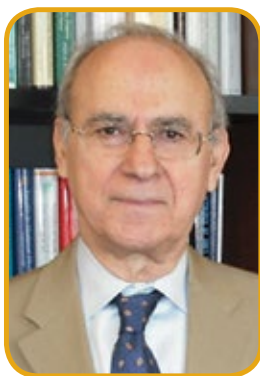


IIS Alumni Newsletter 2016

MESSAGE FROM THE CO-DIRECTOR



Dear IIS Alumni,

I am delighted to inform you that preparations are under way for the IIS to move into its permanent home at King's Cross, in 2018. In the meantime, as you may know, our student accommodation building has already been inaugurated and all our GPISH and STEP students are now housed there.

Our move will be particularly exciting because it will coincide with two memorable celebrations: the first is of course the 60th anniversary, also known as the Diamond Jubilee, of His Highness the Aga Khan's accession to the Imamate. We at the IIS, with other institutions, are considering ways to celebrate this momentous event. The second event will be the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the IIS. Here again we will be looking at appropriate ways for celebrating - we hope that by building on our solid academic foundations the IIS will go from strength to strength in the fulfilment of its mission.

In 2016, we organised a seminar for a high profile delegation from the Government of Kyrgyzstan and their State Commission for Religious Affairs. The seminar provided an opportunity to exchange views on curriculum development, teacher training, pedagogy and the civilisational approach that the IIS follows in its academic programmes. As a result, the IIS is now one of the signatories to a Memorandum of Understanding with the Kyrgyz Republic.

Last year, we also organised two major conferences. The first, "Fatimids and Umayyads: Competing Caliphates", convened by Dr Miriam Ali-de-Unzaga, was co-sponsored by the IIS in collaboration with several other academic institutions. It aimed to compare these two contemporaneous dynasties in their contexts, looking at their interactions and affinities, while also discussing their conflicting claims to authority, all from an interdisciplinary perspective (historical, social, intellectual, economic, legal, theological, religious, cultural, technical, visual, and artistic). The second conference, "Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread", convened by Dr Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, focused on the intellectual interactions as well as the mutual influences that occurred between the Ismailis and other groups and movements within Islamic Civilisations. With such a comparative approach, the conference emphasised the intellectual diversity of the Islamic world along various perspectives, such as authority and law, philosophy, polemics, mystical and messianic trends or exegesis.

We had our first Higher Education Review by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), examining every aspect of the Institute's work that may have an impact on student experience. We met all of QAA's expectations. Their report identified areas of good practice and made some recommendations. As a result, we have published an action plan and created a Quality Assurance Unit, which is now led by Diane Rainsbury. The QAA Review has confirmed that the IIS is able to operate at the highest standards within the UK Higher Education sector, delivering a high-quality experience to our students, as well as properly transmitting the complex and groundbreaking contents that the Institute's research activity has developed over the past decades. This result is the outcome of the continued dedication of our staff and the commitment of our students.

On a related note, I would like to mention that our two graduate programmes have recently been reviewed. The GPISH curriculum has been reviewed and strengthened by the Academic Steering Committee of the IIS. We are now seeking a partner from among British universities to obtain validation for our programmes. That will hopefully be the first step towards acquiring degree-awarding powers in the future. The STEP programme has also benefited from the feedback gathered from the teachers in the field. From September 2017, we shall offer a Postgraduate

I would like to thank all alumni for participating in the annual survey for 2016. The results of the survey, in which 97% of alumni participated, are used to compile the Alumni Status Report which is submitted to the Institute's Board. Some of the main points from the 2016 report are highlighted below:



- Currently, the alumni body is comprised of 551 graduates.
- As part of the Alumni Internship Programme, a majority of recent GPISH graduates have been placed with various AKDN and Jamati institutions.
- Twenty-nine alumni received various types of awards and grants, including fellowships or scholarships, and fifty-seven alumni presented papers at international conferences and published works.
- Four research grants were awarded by the IIS to alumni to present papers at conferences.
- The vast majority of IIS graduates (91%) have contributed to Jamati and Imamat institutions, either in a professional or voluntary capacity.
- Seventy-one alumni made contributions to Jamati/Imamat institutions through the Time and Knowledge Nazrana.
- Twelve alumni were appointed to senior professional roles within Jamati and Imamat institutions or in external organisations.
- In terms of voluntary contributions, ten alumni were appointed to senior positions in Jamati institutions and seven to positions in external organisations.
- Although 35% of alumni were recruited from South Asia, only 19% reside there now. On the other hand, 35% of alumni are based in Europe, although only 5% were recruited from this region. Shifts in other regions are relatively minor.

This year, we will be celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of His Highness the Aga Khan's accession to the Imamat and also planning our move to the purpose-built academic building at King's Cross designed by the Pritzker prize-winning architect Fumihiko Maki. In thanking you all for your ongoing support and participation, I hope that 2017 will lead to further strengthening of the alumni body throughout the world and that the forthcoming Online Alumni Portal will encourage even greater engagement of alumni with the IIS and each other. As always, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome new alumni and wish them the very best as they begin their careers.

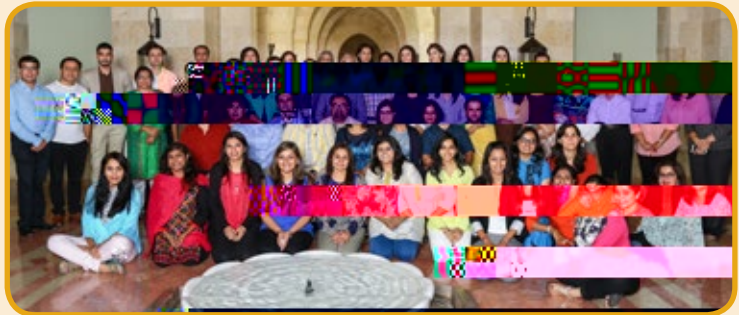
Congratulations!

**Shellina Karmali, Alumni Relations
Coordinator**

The annual chapter group meetings were held in:

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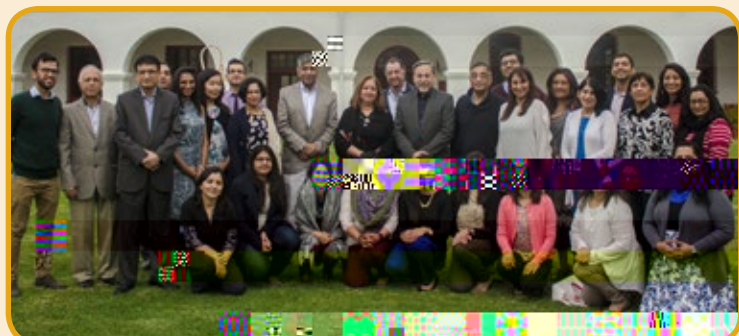
ASIAN CHAPTER GROUP



EUROPEAN CHAPTER GROUP



NORTH AMERICAN CHAPTER GROUP



my life can replicate. This is who “we” became
when brought together from different lands: we
all b (r)10.1, Ieam s: w

REFLECTION ON THE AGA KHAN AWARD FOR ARCHITECTURE WINNERS' SEMINAR (2016)

Rami Gargour, STEP Class of 2014

The acquisition of knowledge is potentially limitless in the sense that it has no contextual boundaries, whether in the learning space or among knowledge providers. I was fortunate to partake in the inspiring learning opportunity provided by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA) Winners' Seminar which took place on 5 November 2016 in Dubai. It was an occasion that enabled the interaction of a multitude of stakeholders from the field of art and architecture – architects, art historians, artists, global AKDN representatives, Ismaili dignitaries and the six winners of the 2014–2016 Award cycle. The seminar comprised a panel of the six winners as well as the Master Jury and Steering Committee members of the 2016 AKAA. The panel discussion focused on issues and themes pertaining to the vision and criteria of this triennial cycle of the AKAA. The seminar served as a platform for enlightening discussions about human creativity, diversity, the built environment and quality of life, and how all of these go hand in hand when approaching architecture in its broadest sense.

The AKAA was established in 1977 and is now in its thirteenth cycle. Every three years it awards projects that push the boundaries of excellence in architecture, planning practices, historic preservation and landscape architecture. The goal of the AKAA is to recognise and encourage building concepts that successfully meet the needs and aspirations of societies worldwide, primarily those in which Muslims have a significant presence. Nineteen projects were shortlisted for the 2014–2016 cycle. From these, six winners were chosen and announced on 3 October 2016. Those

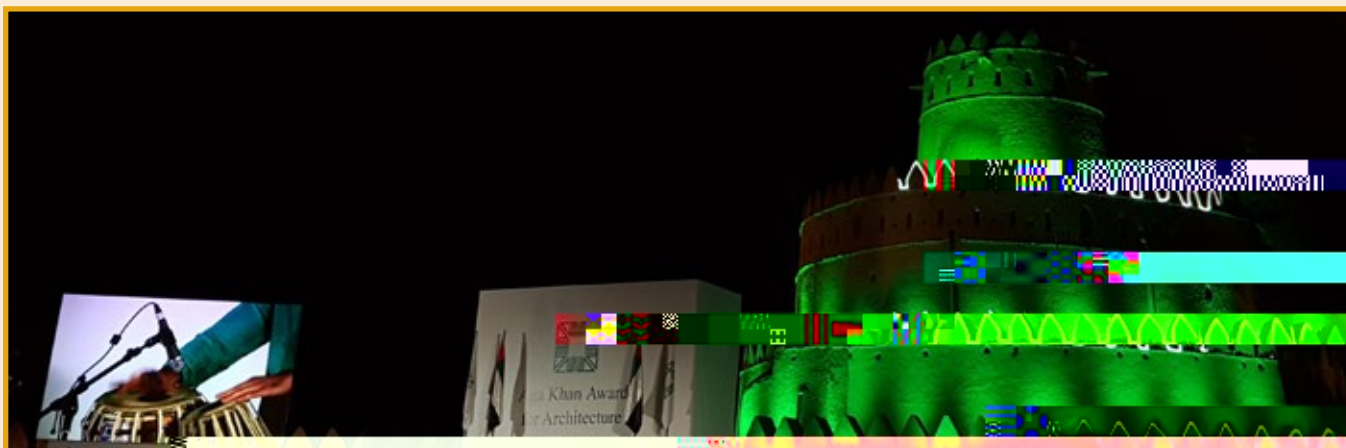
involved with these projects were recognised and honoured in a ceremony held at the Al Jahili Fort in Al Ain, UAE, on 6 November 2016 in the presence of His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan and His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai).

Attending the AKAA Winners' Seminar opened my eyes to a wide array of perspectives which deem architecture a vital aspect of people's daily lives. One major thing I learnt was that architecture is both concrete and visionary; it is the practical embodiment of people endeavouring to create a dignified life for themselves and for others. In other words, architecture is much more than mere buildings and designs; its effects have a direct bearing on people's health, comfort and happiness. Speaking at the AKAA ceremony, His Highness the Aga Khan alluded to the ethical and moral dimensions of architecture and the need for us to use it responsibly as a tool to enhance well-being. He said:

"The Holy Qur'an commands humankind to shape our earthly environment, as good stewards of the Divine Creation. In that spirit, in moments both of elation and disappointment, we hope that the Aga Khan Award for Architecture will always point towards an architecture of optimism and harmony, a powerful force in elevating the quality of human life."

A key point to take away here is that architecture is not an end, but rather a means to holistically attain both sustainability and human dignity.

Overall, the insights I gained from the AKAA and architecture in general are of great value to me as a teacher, as the principles can be utilised in the teaching and learning processes in the classroom environment.





referred to as “*Nazar*” created to protect oneself against the evil eye. Several charms bearing the eye-like symbol have become a permanent heritage across countries like Greece, Syria, Turkey and others who all claim rightful ownership to the tradition. It goes without saying that Syria certainly served as a crossroads of culture, language and faith.

Finally, the exhibit comes full circle with Elias Zayat’s 12-foot mural (acrylic on canvas) that hangs at the entrance of the exhibit. The piece is entitled *Deluge: The Gods Abandon Palmyra* and captures the thrust of the exhibit’s aspiration. The mural is a depiction of the deluge, which Zayat chose to situate in Palmyra as a way to link Syria’s past, present and future. The painting portrays the diverse species and ethnic groups united in their resilience, in their darkest of hours, with a promising optimism for a new beginning. The tale of the deluge was first illustrated in the most famous Mesopotamian myth,

JOURNEY INTO RUPTURES & DISCONTINUITIES: A FIELDTRIP TO DELHI

Nisha Keshwani, GPISH Class of 2010

For a decade, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) has had a presence in Delhi's Nizamuddin heritage precinct. Its work there has encompassed the preservation of Humayun's Tomb, the Sunder Nursery (the gardens adjacent to Humayun's Tomb) and over 45 monuments in the Nizamuddin Basti area, an area containing one of the densest ensembles of medieval monuments in India. In 2015, thanks in part to the AKTC's findings, UNESCO recognised that the areas around Humayun's Tomb were of outstanding universal value, and agreed to considerably expand the boundaries of that World Heritage site. The aim of the AKTC is to sympathetically restore these sites, and in this vein it has employed master craftsmen who use traditional tools, materials and building techniques that are in keeping with those utilised at the time these structures were first constructed. Additionally, the AKTC seeks to enhance the quality of life of the local resident communities, so it has worked closely with them to improve such things as healthcare, education, sanitation, housing and waste collection, and assisted them with urban development, cultural revival and, lately, madrasa improvement.¹

With the AKTC's conservation and developmental initiatives in Delhi a focal point, ITREB India organized a fieldtrip for its academic staff, as well as for the STEP teachers and its programme staff in early December 2016. This trip was meant to expose the group to the various cultural encounters that had occurred during India's history, through visits to select architectural monuments at Delhi, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri. It aimed to explore the material culture of the five Muslim dynasties which ruled over India sequentially: the first four, the Mamluk dynasty (1206–1290), the Khilji dynasty (1290–1320), the Tughlaq dynasty (1320–1414) and the Sayyid dynasty (1414–1451), were of Turkic origin, and the fifth, the Lodi dynasty (1451–1526), was of Afghan origin. The Mughal dynasty (1526–1540; and 1555–1857) was also a major focus of the fieldtrip. The discussions that these dynasties' architectural monuments inspired in the group cut across sectarian and political lines, but also touched on the subject of identity – in particular, the past's construction of Islam as a homogenous category, and its impact on the present.

On a chilly morning, our group arrived at the first destination of our three-day journey: the Qutub Minar complex. Our guide, Dr Jaybir Singh, besides being a tour guide, was a practitioner of Ayurveda, an ancient system of medicine, and had a passion for astrology. He told us that the complex is a World Heritage site, and consists of the striking conical tower (which stands at 73 meters and took several years to construct) and the monuments surrounding it. He stated boldly and with the confidence of an "expert" that the minaret is perceived today as a symbol of victory of the Muslim dynasty over the last Hindu ruler of Delhi, Prithviraj Chauhan, especially, he pointed out, because the Muslim dynasty replaced old structures with new architectural monuments. This interpretation of "Muslim rule" as having replaced "Hindu rule", as embodied through changes to the various monuments, unfortunately

completely ignores the many cultural exchanges that each of these groups engaged in. Yet it is currently a widely accepted view in India. As we proceeded, the guide also seemed to subscribe to the concept of "Muslim rule" as undifferentiated, failing to acknowledge the unique approaches to leadership employed by the individual Muslim dynasties.

This latter view held by the tour guide, unfortunately, is also common among orientalist and nationalist historians alike; Muslim rule in India is seen as a monolithic and ruleous car-

Muslim culture then and the Hindu culture now can be seen as dominant and affecting less influential cultures. But a more dynamic view accepts that as much as the Muslim culture affected the local Indic culture, the reverse was equally true. Akbar's short-lived residence at Fatehpur Sikri brought together the regional architectural traditions of India which had absorbed the Indian forms earlier, and clad them in red sandstone.⁹ The syncretism of different regional Indian, Central Asian and Persian styles signalled that these buildings could be attractive



to all of the emperor's subjects, regardless of their religious identity, ethnicity or geographical origin.¹⁰ Akbar strove for a reconciliation between his Hindu and Muslim subjects, especially in intellectual and religious spheres; built his relations with the Safawids, Uzbeks and Ottomans; and also sent an envoy to the pope and King Phillip II of Spain.¹¹ Another Mughal ruler, Aurangzeb, on the other hand, who was a strict orthodox Muslim, broke with the liberal traditions of his predecessors. The exchange of cultural elements between regional traditions and the Timurid architectural heritage the Mughal's brought with them, along with shifts within the dynasties (as given in the example of Aurangzeb), if viewed from the new theories of cultural encounters, prevents one from seeing the shift in mere chronological fashion and thus as mere expressions of power from one dominant culture to the lesser one.

More importantly, the AKTC's work can be seen in an inclusive light, if understood from this framework of dynamic exchanges of cultural inputs. The conservation of the Baoli and Chausath Khambha are just two examples. The former is the fourteenth century stepwell which was considered holy by millions. It was desilted 80 feet below ground level for the first time in centuries and its broken parts were restored. The latter is the tomb of Mirza Aziz

Koka, the cousin of Akbar, with twenty-five domed chambers supported on sixty-four marble columns. Investment in these two monuments, which may be considered of less functional value than some others but are certainly important culturally, could easily have been neglected for fear of causing a "drain on fragile economies"¹² in Basti. But restoring these sites allows or even creates a "cultural space" for further exchanges between various communities and for finding new grounds to develop the local community itself to expand its potentialities in new forms.¹³

After witnessing the painstaking efforts by the AKTC at Humayun's tomb, I wondered if all the monuments we visited on our fieldtrip could be maintained equally well under a public-private partnership similar to the one between the government of India and the AKTC. Instead of the myth of the "medieval Muslim villains" taking political prominence, I walked away hoping that the story of Muslims in India will be rewritten with trust by well-meaning protagonists. This not only will enable many successful partnerships that will be of the benefit of the monuments in ruinous state but will also create more possibilities of exchange and partnership, not in favour of one or the other culture but for a seamless dialogue, called "encounter".

¹ The information within this paragraph was taken from the "Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Annual Report 2014".

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⁴ Ramchandran, "Crossing Paths", p. 85.

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⁶ In Ramchandran, p. 83.

⁷ See "CEPS – Cultural Encounters in Pre-Modern Societies". <http://www.en.cgs.aau.dk/research/research-groups/ceps>.

⁸ Audrey Truschke, "It is High Time We Discard the Myth of India's Medieval Muslim Villains".

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⁹ Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture: An Outline of Its History and Development (1526–1858)* (Delhi, Primus Books, 2014), p. 5.

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