

Ismaili Community in Pakistan: Its Doctrines, History and Present Makeup

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During the recent months, Ismaili community of Pakistan has come in the limelight, particularly creation of the Aga Khan University's Examination Board at the national level has made the community a target of malicious propaganda carried out by certain political and religious circles. They have expressed doubts that the community is bent upon secularizing the national curriculum. The federal minister for education and the AKU management have responded to the situation. Though the community is a separate entity, nothing to do with the examination board, but nevertheless, it has suffered an affront and preferred to remain quiet. At this juncture one is supposed to know the origin and the long history of about fourteen hundred years of the community. The knowledge about its role in the Pakistan movement and later its contribution in the development of Pakistan may help in removing unnecessary doubts about the community.

The origin of Ismailis, like the origin of Islam, lies in the Arabian peninsula. Ismailis constitute one of the major sects within the Shia branch of Islam. They have their roots in the history of Islam. Tracing themselves to the earliest period of Islam, they, like other Shias, adhere to the Shia interpretation of Islam, believing that the line of Imams stemmed immediately after the Prophet's demise from Hazrat Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law and Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter. The succession to *Imamat* is by way of *nass* (designation), which is an absolute prerogative of the Imam of the time to appoint his successor from amongst any of his male descendants.¹ In this way, the present Aga Khan-IV is the forty-ninth Imam of the Ismailis.

The Ismailis share the fundamental tenets of Islam, as described in the Quran, with other Muslims. However, the institute of *Imamat* is central in the Ismaili theology. The Imam provides a pathway for applying these tenets in day-to-day life of the community. He enjoys

¹ See para C and D of the Preamble of Ismaili Constitution, 1986.

absolute authority on all religious and temporal matters of the community. As society passes through various stages of development, there is a constant need of reorientation of these tenets at individual and collective levels in the community. Hence, the Imam allows his mission (*dawa*) to review the expression of these tenets in order to find the appropriate language to suit the times. The *dawa* adapts to address the needs and the demands of the changing world. For Ismailis, the religious goals are to be achieved by adhering to and following upon the *tariqah* based on Imam's guidance.

The Imam, as the spiritual head of the community, unfolds a panorama of continuity and change, fusing a sense of tradition with an acute awareness of modern realities. During the last half-century, numbers of conferences² had been organized to find appropriate expressions of fundamental tenets. In these conferences, certain tenets, which have been there since the beginning, were brought forth, re-highlighted and re-emphasized to make the community aware of their importance. These include the concept of the matter and the spirit aimed at striking a balance between the worldly and spiritual aspects of life, the concept of human being – the crown creation of Allah – with a sense of the care and responsibility towards other Godly creation and also the concept of the religion, the straight path leading towards eternity.

The Imam also gives constitutions to the community to facilitate the working of the different community organisations and to run their day-to-day worldly matters. Though it seems that ordaining the written constitutions by the Imam for the community is a recent phenomenon of the Ismaili history of last century. The most recent constitution, ordained by the Imam in 1986, was re-ordained in 1998. The present constitution describes the Ismaili doctrines in its preamble while the rest of it deals with the framework of all institutions working within and without the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The previous constitutions of 1960s were country-wise; the Ismailis living in different countries had different constitutions ordained by the Imam. The constitution proclaimed for Pakistan in August 1962 mentioned the rules of business of various organisations working within the community. Some trivial

² The proceeding of the conferences were narrated of and on, but were never circulated in writing. However, the follow-up implementation of these minutes was often expressed. See one such example of audio-video material exhibition and its inauguration by Begum Salimah Aga Khan, published in *Ismaili Bulletin*, April 1975.

things such as arrangements relating to births, deaths, engagements and marriage ceremonies were elaborately mentioned.³

As per preamble of the present constitution (of 1986 re-ordained in 1998) the Imam of the time is concerned with spiritual advancement as well as improvement of the quality of life of his murids. 'The Imam's *tali'm* lights the murid's path to spiritual enlightenment and vision in temporal matters'. The Imam guides the murids and motivates them to develop their potentials. Murids are supposed to lead a life recommended by the Imam within the basic parameters of Islam.

Among the *tariqah* practices, *bayah* is the first and foremost obligatory act of the *murid* (follower) who accepts the Imam's allegiance. After *bayah*, the *murid* is supposed to lead his/her life in accordance with Imam's guidance. The *murid* has some compulsory practices on daily basis, which include prayer and *dasond/maal-e-Imam*.⁴ There are other devotional duties which *murid* performs out of love and affection for the Imam, if he/she wishes so, but these are not termed as compulsory.

History

The early periods of Ismaili history were full of internal and external challenges, conflicts, wars, and altercations with opposing communities meant to prove their stand. The anti-Ismaili forces always looked upon the Ismailis with hostility and suspicion. They intensely hated Ismailis and styled them as heretics (*rafizis*).⁵ These forces also branded them with derogatory names such as *mulhid* and assassins, and sometimes, they were persecuted and oppressed. Even in these difficult circumstances, the Ismaili missionaries, by their attitudes and actions, not just gained influence but also established their rule over certain territories, like Mansurah in Sindh⁶ which had been an Ismaili stronghold, a few years before Mahmud of Ghaznah (d.1030) captured

³ See Chapter XI, *The Ismaili Constitution of Councils and Jamat of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims of Pakistan*, 1962.

⁴ In the Indian context, the Khojas pay *dasond* (1/10) to the Imam and 1/12 to the Pir. The present Aga Khan-IV holds the dual offices of the Imam and Pir. This was willed by the Aga Khan-III before his death.

⁵ From Arabic word *rafz*; literally meaning 'forsaking'. The terms *rafizi* was originally applied to the Shias who joined Zaid Ibn Ali but forsook him upon cursing some early dignitaries of Islam. But it came afterwards to denote any sect of Shias. See Dr. Muhammad Yasin, *A Social History of Islam*, p.5.

⁶ Dr. I.H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (Karachi, Ma'aref Ltd., 1977), p.3.

the town. Another stronghold of the Ismailis was Multan – which was visited by Muqaddasi in the year 985 AD when the Ismailis were ruling – reciting the *khutba* (a sermon in Friday prayer) in the name of Fatimid Ismaili Caliph of Egypt.⁷

Indian subcontinent

In comparison to other Shia communities, the Ismailis came much earlier to the Indian subcontinent to win new followers. It is on the record that the *Ithna Asharis* (Twelver Shias) were invisible in the beginning, though the cultural link between India and Iran were there since the advent of Islam.⁸ The *Ithna Asharis* made their presence felt during the reign of the Mughal King Humayun (1530-1556) who is said to have embraced Shiism during a period of exile in Iran, perhaps to secure the help of the Safavid king Shah Tehmasp (1524-1576). Humayun brought with him the Iranian Shia officials, scholars, and thousands of soldiers to Delhi – Bayram Khan, the guardian of Humayun's son Akber (1556-1605) was possibly Shia.⁹

Contrary to this, the Ismaili roots are much older in the subcontinent. They had links with Yemen, which was one of the Fatimid bases outside Egypt. Later on the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt stood divided because of a schism among the sons of Caliph Al-Mustansir (died 1094). The Nizari branch of the Fatimids established its base at Alamut (Iran) and continued with its missionary activities in India. The Mongols destroyed Alamut in 1256 A.D and the Ismaili Imams went into concealment but the missionary activities continued in many areas.

However, one can note that after the Mongol onslaught, there was a shift in Ismaili *dawa* policy. They became more interested in consolidating their inner folds rather than establishing their political rule or sultanate over a particular territory. The history teaches that embracing the idea of a separate Ismaili communal state has cost in terms of immense hostility, sorrows and sufferings. Therefore, the Ismailis should align themselves on the right side of the history and be a partner in progress of the concerned states that they inhabit. The present day Ismaili community continues to follow the same policy. It prefers to remain stateless, apolitical and introvert rather than striving for an Ismaili state. Though there are few instances where the Imam or individual Ismaili murids occupied some political positions in some

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.40.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.46.

⁹ Musa Khan Jalalzai, *The Sunni-Shia Conflict in Pakistan* (Karachi: Book Traders), p.256.

pluralistic state, but the community at large never aspires for an Ismaili state. However, recently it has become internationalized, globally widespread in all continents of the world. In the Indian subcontinent, the Ismaili missionaries adopted a very flexible approach. In view of the Indian context, the converts were allowed to maintain status quo in their day-to-day lifestyle, but gradually over a long time the Islamic essence was conveyed to them. B. Lewis says: ‘...The Ismaili religion evolved over a long period and a wide area, and meant different things at different times and places...’.¹⁰ It is also said that in those days the Ismaili pirs had a tradition of presenting themselves as adherents of the faith within which they worked. There are several instances on record where Ismaili pirs appeared as saintly *bhagats* or *jogis* and instead of contradicting the doctrines of the faith they sought to jell. The Ismaili pirs, accepted basic assumptions, introduced some of Ismaili beliefs in a disguised form and, slowly and gradually, paved the way for total conversion.¹¹

Lack of total adherence has never worried the Ismaili pirs. They were fully confident that the new converts would eventually accept the faith fully and fervidly with their hearts and heads through the process of evolution, to be unfolded with time. In this manner, many segments of the society were converted, some were named as *guptis*, a term used for those who were allowed to maintain status quo outwardly but keeping their inner faith secret to oneself. The Ismailis being Shia accept the principle of *taqiyyah*, which allows them to act like the other segments of the society. Thus they were allowed to continue the practices of their forefathers as usual in an outwardly manner but some secret rites of devotion to the Imam were also introduced.

Thus Ismaili pirs believed in evolution in their mission activities. They never sought cultural overhauling nor laid emphasis for the immediate and total religious shifting of Hindus to Islamic ideologies. The new converts were allowed to retain their original names and follow local lifestyles and cultural patterns. They just indicated that the new converts are on *sat panth* – a term used for a true path. Later at some point in history, these new converts in Sindh, Kutchh and Kathiawar, acquired a respectable name of *Khoja*. The origin of this name lies in Persian word *Khawaja*, normally used for a respectable trader.¹² While a present-day local historian has linked the word ‘*Khoja*’ to a Hindi verb

¹⁰ Bernard Lewis, *The Assassin* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), p.138.

¹¹ Dr. I.H. Qureshi, *op.cit.*, p.41.

¹² Dr. Muhammad Yasin, *A Social History of Islam* (Lahore: Book Traders), p.5.

khoj which means to search or dig out.¹³ He goes on to say that the local low castes Hindus, converted to Islam were heavily loaded with rituals. After embracing Islam, they were instructed to get absorbed (*kho'ja*) through the practice of *dhikr* (the remembrance of God). This establishes a further need of research in this connection.

While in Punjab, the new converts were named as *Shamsi*, a name referring to a saintly person, Pir Shamsuddin (d.1356), who came especially for *dawa* activities in Punjab. Similarly, another Ismaili saintly person named a small segment of Gujraati people, residing in Sidhpur (Indian state of Gujraat) as *momnas* – from Arabic word *momin* (believers).

Immediately on conversion, the new converts were provided with a centre called *jamatkhana*, a meeting place; they appointed *mukhis* as local leaders to run the day to day functions of the community. There is a rich body of literature known as *ginans and granths* (devotional religious hymns) which the community still cherishes and sings in its religious gatherings. These are attributed to the pirs but its actual authorship is an issue of debate within the community.

British period (1856-1947)

During British rule in the subcontinent, the forty-sixth Ismaili Imam (Hassan Ali Shah), the Aga Khan-I migrated to India from Iran in early 1840s. He co-operated with the British government to consolidate their rule in Sindh and remained active till his death in 1881. The forty-seventh Imam (Ali Shah), the Aga Khan-II (d.1885) devoted his time to the cause of the education of the community.¹⁴

The forty-eighth Imam (Sultan Muhammad Shah), the Aga Khan-III (1877-1957) was frontline leader of Indian Muslims who laid the lasting foundation of Muslim political organisation. In 1906, he led a delegation to Viceroy Lord Minto to get political concessions for Muslims. He actively helped the Muslim educational movement launched by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1897). The Aga Khan-III also served as the first President of All India Muslim League and stood firmly by the side of Sunni Muslims on Khilafat Committee although, as a Shia Muslim, he did not personally recognize the Ottoman sultans as caliphs of the Muslim *ummah*. The motive of joining hands with the Sunnis was to spare Muslim political power from further erosion. In

¹³ F. Alexander Bailee, *Kurranchee Past, Present and Future* (Karachi: Oxford University Press), p.92.

¹⁴ Mumtaz Tajuddin, *Ismailis Through History* (Karachi: Islamic Book Publisher), p. 386.

1928, he responded wholeheartedly when Muslims of the subcontinent turned to him for guidance in their moment of despair and anxiety.

Pakistan (1947-2005)

In Pakistan, the Ismaili community emerged with a new character of an organised, unified and progressive community, headed by a central leadership of hereditary Imam. The Imam usually stationed himself in Europe but often visits Pakistan to see his community. He has built vast network of social institutions around the globe and is much concerned with the development of the community.

Through out history the Ismaili community remained segmented with multi-ethnic dimensions – a community built up with many ethnic groups with vast differences of cultures, traditions, languages and geographical locations. Each segment had accepted Islam through different strategies of Ismaili *dawa* system in different period of history; therefore, they adhered to different traditions before the emergence of Pakistan. But after independence, a planned process of modernization under the leadership of a hereditary Imam was launched, which ensured equal attention to and equal say for all segments. As a result thereof, each segment started coming closer to each other.

The creation of Pakistan in 1947 was a blessing in disguise for the Ismailis of Pakistan, which enabled them to go through the process of modernization and development. The role of earlier missionaries i.e. pirs stood replaced by an Institution. The Aga Khan-III constituted a *dawa* organisation called Ismailia Association for Pakistan (IAP) in 1948 aimed at imparting religious education to the community. The Aga Khan-III declared the association to be the successor of former Ismaili dais and pirs who converted the local Hindus to Islam centuries ago. The Aga Khan-III had the longest period of *Imamat* in the Ismaili history (1885 to 1957) but in his early period of *Imamat*, he did not drastically change the social and cultural patterns of Ismailis, nor touched the religious parlance and vocabulary. Until the emergence of Pakistan, members were allowed to maintain a status quo. They retained the Hinduistic cultural elements i.e. dress, languages, and even names etc. The early Ismailis have Indian names like Ramji, Moolji, Shivji, etc. of their origin. But gradually the Ismaili community in Pakistan started adopting Islamic parlance in their daily matters. In the religious liturgy, Arabic prayers and Quranic elements were gradually introduced. Hindu terms were abandoned and Islam became the most visible aspect of their daily lives. By and large, it was assumed that living in an Islamic country, the Ismaili community will evolve to an extent where Islam would be the main framework for regulating the affairs of the

community. In Pakistan the present day Ismaili community can thus be seen only through their history which consists of different segments. Each segment has its legends, its history, languages and rich cultural traditions.

Khojas

Khojas constitute a sizeable segment of the Ismaili community, mainly concentrated in Sindh and Karachi. They were converted from Hinduism to Islam some 500-700 years ago. They were originally based in the southwestern coastal regions of Indian subcontinent, which include Sindh, Kutchh, Kathiawar, and Makran coast. According to traditions, these Khojas have remained mobile, enterprising and risk-taking during the last many centuries. On the creation of Pakistan in 1947, thousands of Khojas from the western regions of India migrated to eastern and western wings of Pakistan, and started contributing towards the socio-economic upliftment of Pakistan. They established many business enterprises, mills, factories, banks and hotels etc. thus becoming an affluent community. They built many jamatkhanas in Karachi, which stand for architectural monuments of the city. The surge of Khoja Ismailis to Pakistan continued for a long period because of political turmoil and upheaval in neighboring countries. Pakistan is considered as a safe place for all Ismailis, they have established many strong institutions. The Ismailis from India moved towards Pakistan till 1960s. In 1964, thousands of Ismailis left Burma to settle in East and West Pakistan. Fortunately, the process was so smooth that it did not shake the fragile economy of Pakistan. Again in 1970-71, almost 90% Khojas Ismaili community of East Pakistan moved out because of political turmoil and military action against native Bengalis. In 1990, certain Kuwaiti Ismaili families also moved towards Pakistan due to Iraqi aggression in Kuwait. Some Khoja Ismailis had originally settled in the interior or in up-country, later they moved to Karachi. Few Khoja families are also found in Gwadar, Pasni, Ormarah, Islamabad and Lahore. In the early period of Pakistan, they used to speak Kutchhi (a dialect), Gujraati and Sindhi but now they have mostly adopted Urdu as their first language. Recent generation is more comfortable with Urdu, rather than with Kutchhi or Gujraati. Some Khojas gentry, particularly living in the affluent areas of Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad are competent in spoken English. However, in rural Sindh, Ismailis prefer to speak Sindhi as their first language and Urdu stands as a second language. In Sindh, they slightly change the word Khoja to Khawaja.

Initially Khojas were business people but now the new generation is moving towards various professions, mostly engaged in the

institutions of Aga Khan Development Network. In the fifties and sixties, they occupied all top leadership positions in the Ismaili community. The Khojas are urbanized and love to live mainly in walled-colonies scattered all over Pakistan. They have constructed a number of residential societies in various cities of Pakistan, the biggest one is the Karimabad colony in Karachi, built in 1960s followed by other housing societies. Within the boundaries of the societies, they have community institutions such as *jamatkhana*, religious education centre, health centre, scouting and girls guides etc.

Momnas

Momnas (a misnomer from the Arabic word ‘momin’) is a small segment of Ismaili community of Pakistan. As per traditions, an Ismaili *dai* named Syed Imam Shah gave them the name, Momnas, in Indian state of Gujarat centuries ago.¹⁵ They were originally centered in Sidhpur, but later moved to major cities of India. After 1947, some of them made their way to Pakistan and mostly settled in Hyderabad and Karachi. Within Ismailis, the Momnas are introvert, not easily mixing with the rest of the community. Economically majority of them are well off and contribute to uplift the weaker sections of their segment. They have established many housing estates, hotels and dairy business through cooperative farming and are exemplary for the other segments of the community.

Khyber Jamat

The Khyber Jamat is a recent addition to the Ismaili community of Pakistan. The Ismaili missionary activities never come to a halt in any period of history. At times, missionaries have worked under an institutional umbrella, educating the community members as well as winning new converts. While on other occasions, they have worked without the institutional umbrella, out of their personal zeal and with a sense of service for the community. Sometimes the mission activities had to slow down due to the sensitivity of the situation, while at times, it gained momentum. Similarly at times, it had to work in a clandestine manner, while at other times it performed its mission more openly.

After the creation of Pakistan, few Ismaili missionaries, notably Bhagat Pirbhai (d. 1973) and his successor Kassimali Badinwala (d.1976) and some other well-wishers were active in converting local Hindus in lower Sindh. Their services bore fruit in the late 1960s when a few hundred people belonging to Hindu sub-castes Bheel and Koli

¹⁵ Zawahir Moir, *Tarikh-e-Aimah-e-Ismailia* (Urdu), (Karachi: The Ismailia Association for Pakistan, 1983).

embraced Islam out of which about one hundred were the residents of the Khyber village in district Hala (Sindh) and about two hundred were scattered in other areas. All of them were inter-related through marriages. The pattern of conversion differed from area to area; however, dedication, commitment and self-sacrifice of the missionaries played a vital role. Initially this segment of the community was named as new Khyber Ismaili Jamat. Khyber being the name of the village. Later a plan was chalked out to absorb the novice in to the mainstream.

The Khyber village later became a strong Ismaili colony. The missionaries approached the institutions for patronage. A *jamatkhana* was established in the village and was officially inaugurated by the then Sindh Minister for Education, Pyar Ali Allana, in March 1976. Whereas, other new converts remained scattered in lower Sindh for a much longer period. They had no centre for collective gatherings or for offering supplications, nor any access to other institutions of social welfare, education, health etc. The well-wishers of these new converts formed a committee named Khyber Welfare Committee to look after them. They selected a few teenage boys from the new converts for training them as missionaries. The committee hired the services of an experienced missionary (late Missionary P.B. Haji) to impart religious and secular education to these teenage boys. Later, these boys became missionaries and, in 1984, they were appointed by the then Ismailia Association (presently ITREB) for rendering services to the community.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, these scattered Ismailis were rehabilitated in newly established colonies at Tando Allah Yar (Rahimabad and Shah Ali colonies) and Hyderabad (Alyabad colony at Hala Road). All community institutions started providing them support through establishing the schools, health centres and other welfare organizations for the community. They are now regarded as an integral part of the Ismaili community, though culturally they still have some Hindu elements in their daily lives. They have connections with their Hindu relatives and, at times, they establish marital relations with them. The old Ismaili Jamat of Sindh has not yet been able to establish any kind of social or marital relations with them. The volunteers of the established Ismaili community of Sindh usually extend all kind of help to the new community but the stage of establishing marital relations with them still seems distant.

Shamsi

The Ismailis of Punjab are known as Shamsi, being the followers of Ismaili Pir Shams Subzwari.¹⁶ While other Punjabi Ismailis were semi-converted (*guptis*) who made their way to Islam in early 20th century on the special directives of the Aga Khan-III, the 48th Ismaili Imam. They are scattered all over Punjab and are mostly engaged in jewelry business. Before Pakistan, a number of Ismaili families of Punjab moved towards the frontier and western edge of Punjab and established themselves on sound economic footings. They had jamatkhanas at Hazro, Mardan, Ghari Kapurah, Tarbellah and Ghazi. These became flourishing centres and mission activities were in full swing. However, after independence, the new rising wind of radicalization did not favour these Ismailis. They faced acute pressure from hostile anti-Ismaili forces. Besides, there was also slackness on the part of Ismaili *dawa* mission in these areas, and the mission headquarters in Karachi did not respond to the situation nor promptly address the local needs. Consequently, slowly and gradually, these centres dried out and number of Ismaili families drifted away from the mainstream of the Ismaili community. At present, one rarely finds any staunch Ismaili in these areas.

At the outset, the Punjabi Ismailis felt that the central institutions at Karachi have not responded to their needs. In 1957 when the 48th Imam (Aga Khan-III) passed away and his grandson Karim (Aga Khan-IV) became the 49th Imam of the community, a small section of Punjabi Ismailis, consisting of a few families under the leadership of Dr. Aziz Ali Chinoiti, did not accept the *Imamat* of Prince Karim, but preferred his father Prince Ali S. Khan for the *Imamat*. Thus, it led to schism, creating a fissure in Pakistani Ismaili Jamat. The top-leadership of the community tried its best to avoid the schism by convincing these families. However, after the sudden death of Prince Ali S. Khan in a car accident in May 1960, they switched their allegiance to his younger son Prince Amyn who, during his visit to Pakistan in 1974 clearly mentioned in Urdu that he is not the Imam, but his elder brother Karim is the right Imam. Due to continuous efforts, some of the members of these families made their way back and rejoined the mainstream, while others turned towards Sunni Islam.

Realizing the fact that the *dawa* mission has suffered serious setbacks in Punjab, and cognizant of local demands, the central ITREB headquarters of Karachi, incharge of *dawa* mission, under the directions

¹⁶ A. Nanji, *The Nizari Ismaili Traditions in Hindi and Sind* (New York: Caravan Books, 1978), p.91.

of Ashique Ali Hussain,¹⁷ undertook a training programme to train local human resources at Lahore in early 1980s. Fifteen youths were thus trained to address local needs. On completion of their training, this human resource has tried its utmost to serve the local needs but the lack of vigor and support from the leadership has de-motivated them.

During the visit of the Aga Khan-IV to Punjab in 1987, the local Punjabi Ismailis put several petitions before him requesting for clarity of basic concepts, seeking material help from the institutions to address the educational, health and unemployment problems. It was made clear by the Aga Khan-IV to the top-leadership that much is to be done in Punjab so that the institutions work more effectively.

Realizing local needs, some Khoja members of the south came forward to address the problem of unemployment by establishing their bases in Punjab so as to support local Punjabi Ismailis. In this connection, the example of Farishta Group is worth mentioning which established number of industries in Punjab. This group has also established the Soneri Bank in Punjab where it has absorbed a number of Punjabi Ismaili youth in its network. The Aga Khan Education Services (AKES) started establishing schools in various cities where population of the Punjabi Ismailis is substantial. They have established the Aga Khan School at Hafizabad in 1990s and establishment of other schools at Multan and Sialkot is in the pipeline. Similarly, new *jamatkhana* buildings have recently been constructed in number of cities like Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Sialkot, Sargodha and Hafizabad etc. to fulfil the long-standing demands of local Punjabi Ismailis. Within the Punjab, local Ismailis have failed to find sound, able and dedicated leadership of their own. The Khojas have taken the lead in their areas while the native leadership has given negligible attention to the social and general developmental needs of the community.

Badakshani

The Ismailis of Northern Areas of Pakistan and district Chitral in NWFP are commonly known as Badakshanis, as these areas were parts of Badakshan in the past. They affiliate themselves to the *dawa* system run under the name of an Ismaili *dai* Syyedna Hakim Nasir Khusrow (1004-1088). Presently, the whole Northern Areas consist of five districts i.e. Gilgit (the headquarters), Ghizar, Diamer, Baltistan and Ghanche. Out of which two districts namely Gilgit and Ghizar have a majority of Ismailis. The heated political debates currently raging about the status of the

¹⁷ Mr. Ashique Ali H. Hussain was the President of Ismaili Association of Pakistan, now called ITREB, during 1980-1984.

Northern Areas are in most cases rooted in the area's turbulent history. In fact, locals to substantiate their point of view often invoke history, but most people outside the Northern Areas are completely ignorant of the political and social developments, which have unfolded here over the last sixty years. The area's geographical seclusion has meant that it had to weather its travails in isolation.

The Ismailis community, the main component of Northern Areas, is visible in every sphere of life. The majority of Ismailis speak Shina, which is prevalent in the southern part of the region. This area is locally called Shinaiki. While in the northern part of the region i.e. in Hunza, Nagar and parts of Yasin, Gupis, the Ismailis speak Burushaski, which is one of the remaining linguistic puzzles of the world yet to be solved. It is spoken by less than 1,00,000 people of the north and shows no resemblance to any other known language. Still further north in Hunza, in the villages of Gojal and Gulmit, are settled Wakhi-speaking immigrants from Wakhan 200 years ago. The Ismailis of Punial, Iskoman, Gupis and Yasin claim themselves to be Sayyids, linking direct descent from the Holy Prophet (PBUH) while Hunzaite Ismailis claim no such background.

According to Ismaili record, the Imams have always maintained contacts with the Ismailis of the Northern Areas. During the last century, the Aga Khan-III sent his emissary named Subz Ali to the Northern Areas with certain guidelines in 1923.¹⁸ The local community followed the same guidelines till 1950. In the earlier period, the Ismailis of the Northern Areas were deprived of many social and economic facilities. There was no concept of formal education. In 1946, on the occasion of the diamond jubilee commemoration ceremony of Aga Khan-III, held at Bombay, the Aga Khan granted a delegation from the Northern Areas a special audience. He directed a member of the delegation, Qadaratullah Baig, to establish schools in the Northern Areas. He also approved a monetary grant out of jubilee funds. Thereafter, a number of schools known as DJ schools were established which are still functioning. Again in 1950s, the Aga Khan-III granted an audience to the leaders of the Northern Areas community, wherein he strictly directed to avoid the use of narcotics and emphasised the importance of education. A diamond jubilee boarding was established in Gilgit to facilitate the students of other valleys. A religious teacher (Syed Muniruddin Shagnani) was sent from Karachi to the Northern Areas to start religious education at community level. He established an institution known as Darul Iblaagh

¹⁸ *The Great Ismaili Heroes* (Karachi: HSH Prince Aly S. Khan Religious Night School, 1973), p.104.

in Gilgit for religious teaching. In 1951, on the occasion of the second visit of Aga Khan-III to Pakistan, he made the Mir of Hunza his special representative for the entire Northern Areas including the valleys of Gilgit, Punial, Iskoman, Gupis and Yasin.

In October 1960, Aga Khan-IV paid an official visit to the Northern Areas that ushered a new chapter in the history of the local Ismaili community. During 1960s, the new Arabic *dua* was also introduced in the Northern Areas. In 1969, Aga Khan-IV officially ordained a constitution for the Northern Areas, appointing Supreme Council of Central Asia. The Mir of Hunza, Mir Jamal Khan, was the First President of the Council, while Syed Karam Ali Shah was the Vice President and Haji Qudratullah Baig was the Secretary of the Council. Along with the Council, the appointment of *mukhi* and *kamadia* was also introduced in the Northern Areas for the first time in history; they were assigned the leading role in religious ceremonies of the Northern Areas, before that, the most senior *khalifa* used to lead the prayer.

This system of government remained in effect till the early seventies when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto introduced drastic changes. He abolished the princely states, the harsh Frontier Criminal Regulations (FCR) and the system of forced labour. In a special cabinet meeting, held on 13 October 1973, it was decided that the Northern Areas should be awarded a separate council and the area's status should be raised to that of a province within ten years. And this status quo was maintained for two decades until Benazir Bhutto, in her term announced her package of reforms known as the Northern Areas Council Legal Framework Order, 1994. This order repeals and replaces an order by the same name passed in 1975. In 1974, when the Government of Pakistan abolished the state of Hunza and merged the area with the rest of Pakistan, the Federal Council of Central Asia was also abolished. It was merged with the Federal Council of Pakistan.

In 1974, the Ismailia Association of Pakistan (presently ITREB) conducted a survey to start a Teachers' Religious Education Programme for North. This programme was launched in 1975 and is known as Guide Training Programme. Thereafter, a full-fledged programme known as Manpower Training Project (MTP) was launched in Karachi on 5 January 1976 in which the young of the Northern Areas were also selected to participate. This was for imparting specialized training to 25 young graduates and postgraduates. On successful completion of the prescribed two-year study course, the students were to be absorbed within ITREB as *waezeen*, research associates and administrative staff etc. to meet the increasing needs of the community. However, upon

completion of the project, the number of graduates did not find the environment conducive, therefore, they left the association forever.¹⁹

The Ismaili youth of the area are bilingual and to some extent, trilingual. In addition to their mother tongue, every young person can manage some Shina and Urdu as well, which is the only medium used in the schools of Northern Areas. Since 1987, there is mushrooming growth of English medium schools, which indicates the future trend of Ismailis, who are particularly keen to learn English.

Certain districts of the Northern Areas are predominantly Ismaili with strong position in business and commerce. In the beginning relations between the Ismailis and the other locals were by no means friendly; mutual jealousy and rivalry were more religious than personal. The locals used to consider Ismailis outcasts; they did not use the meat of animals slaughtered by Ismailis nor consume the food cooked by them. However, during the last sixty years, the Aga Khan Development Network institutions have tried to build better understanding of Ismailis among their neighbors. The Ismailis have organized themselves by developing institutions of education, health care, and economic and social upliftment. They have initiated many schemes of outreach, inviting members of sister communities to participate in their social functions. This has at least removed misconceptions amongst the sister communities.

Ismailis in Chitral

Chitral is one of the major districts of Pakistan where one can find sizeable number of Ismailis, belonging to Badakhshani tradition of Syedna Hakim Nasir Khusrow. Chitral, at the beginning of twentieth century, was an independent state ruled by Katur dynasty. The rulers were known as *Mahatir*, they were Sunni by faith while the area has mixed population, some are Kalash, other are Muslim Sunnis and Shia Ismailis. The Shia Ismailis mostly live in upper Chitral areas like Mastuj, Torkho, Mulkho while in lower Chitral, the tehsil Lutkow has sufficient number of Ismailis. They speak Khowar language. While few thousand Ismailis live in Drosh area of Chitral (at Madaklash), speak Persian and some other Ismailis in Brogal area speak Wakhi. The Katur rulers were not friendly with Ismailis on religious grounds. They had banned Ismailis from practicing their faith collectively; not allowing them to build their prayer houses i.e. jamatkhanas. Suspensions and doubts were always on the rise and there were many uprisings against the rulers particularly in the year 1914 and 1926. The rulers compelled local Ismaili leadership

¹⁹ A community publication, *Ismaili Bulletin*, September 1976.

many a time to go underground or on forced migration. The local Ismailis commonly known as *mowlai* and the *saadaats* were their local leaders. They used to lead them in religious and social matters, these leaders include Syedna Shah Nawaz, Shah Bulbul Shah, Haji Sifayat Shah Sangoghar, Syed Bulbul Shah Zahaj Jinalkoch.

In 1923, the Aga Khan-III emissary named Subzali visited Chitral as a part of his Central Asian tour under the instructions of Aga Khan-III. He brought some guidelines with him known in Chitral as *Qaeda-e-Jadid* (new rules). He emphasized during his visit to Chitral to establish jamatkhanas and dispatch the *maal-e-Imam* through the councils. Though these instructions were not fully implemented because of political situation but some efforts were made in these directions. A local missionary, Syed Moallim Shah Harchin, supported these guidelines, as a result of which he was forced to leave Chitral. He went into exile to neighboring state of Ghizer where he died in 1941. Again in 1926, the Aga Khan-III sent a *taliqa* urging Ismailis of Chitral that if construction of jamatkhanas was not impossible, then they should practice individually and if possible organize prayers by joining at least two or three persons. This continued up to 1950. However, at the end of the Mahatir Malik Muzafer's period, the construction of jamatkhanas started on a limited scale.

In his instructions, the Aga Khan-III was most emphatic about educating children, which was totally impossible for Ismailis during Mahatir's rule in Chitral. On his accession to the throne in 1936 Mahatir Nasirul Mulk immediately established the first ever government school in Chitral city. But the Ismailis did not gain any benefit as they lived mostly in the rural areas of Chitral. It was impossible to send the children to the newly established school as there was no hostel arrangement in the city. However, Ismailis founded a society with the name of *Anjuman-e-Tarqi-e-Talim* for educating their children. The society was patronized by Aga Abdul Majid Khan, incharge of Chitral affairs in Bombay – the headquarter of Ismaili *Imamat* during Aga Khan-III period. He sent a donation of one thousand books along with a few thousand rupees for paying stipends to teachers and office bearers of the society.

In 1946, the Ismailis all over India celebrated the diamond jubilee of their Imam in Bombay. On that occasion, Aga Khan-III sanctioned a special grant for educational development in Chitral. This grant remained unutilized as the ruler did not allow the establishment of diamond jubilee schools in Chitral.

After some time, the local Ismaili leaders thought of establishing an educational centre within Chitral city. Aga Khan-III donated a fund amounting to Rs. 20,000 for educational purpose, while

the *Anjuman-e-Tarqi-e-Talim* also raised funds at the local level and founded an Ismaili *musafir khana* in Chitral in 1954. This *musafir khana* later served not only as educational centre for Ismaili students of Chitral but also served as a platform for local Ismaili leaders to discuss community issues. Students from far flung rural areas used to stay there to continue their education up to middle level in the city. The *musafir khana* was renamed afterwards as Ismailia Centre and then as Ismaili Hostel. It played a pivotal role in the lives of Ismailis. It also provided a meeting point for Ismaili leadership and a general-contact point for inter-Chitrali and intra-Chitrali Ismailis. This hostel was burned to ashes in sectarian riots during 1982.

Activities of IAP (presently ITREB) in Chitral

The Ismailia Association for Pakistan (IAP) was somewhat late in entering Chitral for educational activities. Chitral was being looked after by the hereditary system of pirs and khalifas, whom the Imam used to address as *mu'allim-e-sadiq* (true teacher). In 1951, the Aga Khan-III constituted a Council for Central Asia under the presidentship of Mir of Hunza and Pir Syed Jamal Ali Shah was made incharge for Ghizar and Chitral areas as the vice president. The already constituted local councils were tackling local matters since 1920s. In 1958, a young group was selected to function as religious teachers and *waezeen* within the local Ismailis. A senior scholar of IAP, Jawad Al-Mascati trained them in Karachi. Again in 1970s, the IAP trained few more candidates from Chitral in Karachi for performing religious functions as teachers/*waezeen*. In 1971 a two-year training programme was started at local level in Booni. In January 1976 the IAP launched manpower training programme in Karachi and few Chitrali students were also accommodated in the programme. It also sent a candidate to IIS for its graduate programme. In 1982, the IAP started a four-year full time professional *waezeen* training in Chitral which was disturbed due to sectarian riots and was shifted to Gilgit and Karachi. This programme produced more than thirty professional teachers/*waezeen* in 1988 who are still serving the community in Chitral.

The year 1969 was important in the sense that the Chitral state was finally abolished and the area was merged with the rest of Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan declared Chitral a district of NWFP, thus the Katur dynasty rule in the Chitral that lasted for three hundred years came to end. In the same year, the Aga Khan-IV also ordained a constitution for the Ismaili community of Central Asia; thereby a supreme council was constituted under the head of Mir of Hunza. Previously the Mir was assigned the responsibility of tackling the affairs

of Central Asia who was doing his job in coordination with Vazir Capt. Amirali Karim of Karachi. Now with the enforcement of constitution, the system of local councils and *mukhi/ kamadia* was formalized. The Aga Khan-IV visited Chitral on his first ever visit in March 1976. He met his followers at several places like Garam Chasma, Booni, Shotar and Mastuj. With his visit the development of the area was started. Various institutions of AKDN started their activities in Chitral aimed at developing the basic structure on modern lines, though some of the institutions like health and education were functioning since long but, after 1976, their activities took a fillip.

Afghan Ismailis in Pakistan

Thousands of Ismailis living in Pakistan are originally from Afghanistan. They were displaced due to internal conflict, turmoil and civil war between different Afghan factions during the last two decades. It is said that in Afghanistan there are number of Ismaili segments, some belonging to the traditions of Syedna Hakim Nasir-i-Khusrow, while others link themselves with the tradition of Hassan-e-Sabah, an Ismaili *dai* of eleven century AD.

The last twenty five years of Afghanistan have been characterized by hardships, turmoil, displacements and other difficult circumstances. People of Afghanistan were forced to leave their homes and seek refugee in neighboring countries. A group of five Afghan Ismaili students of the Kabul University, belonging to medical and engineering faculties also left Kabul for Pakistan, and met top-Ismaili leadership. The leadership incorporated them in a religious educational programme, jointly launched by the Ismailia Associations for Pakistan and India, in June 1981, known as 'Joint *waezeen* Training Programme'. They received training in various religious and social disciplines, which had no relevance to their early fields of study i.e. medical and engineering. After training, they left Pakistan, one after the other, for the West. This was the starting point of Afghan Ismailis leaving their native land for Pakistan. After that, thousands of Afghan Ismailis have come to Pakistan. In contrast to early groups who usually came from Kabul, in the 1990s, due to Talibanization, the Ismailis came from all other areas, particularly from northern provinces of Afghanistan such as Parwaan, Baghlaan and Samanghan etc. The surge of refugees was the highest when an Ismaili stronghold at Phule Khumri fell to Taliban. There they massacred number of Ismailis compelling others to leave their native land.

A group of 30 Ismaili families, belonging to Jalalabad came to Rawalpindi in the early 1990s. They were garbage collectors or *zabaleen*.

They spread throughout the length and breadth of the city collecting garbage from dawn to dusk. The local Ismailis helped in educating them. In the end these Jalalabadis were sent to Canada where some Canadian Ismaili families gave a commitment of supporting them in the initial period of their resettlement.

In 1996, to avoid any untoward incident, the Ismaili management started a process of screening to ascertain refugees status. It deputed scholars to interview the incoming refugees about their faith, tradition, area of originality etc. Those who passed through this screening process were sent either to Rawalpindi or Karachi where other community organisations were actively helping them settle in the area. They were made to stay in camps for at least three months, where Focus, a humanitarian organisation, established by the community under Aga Khan Development Network, provided food, medicines and clothing. During their three months stay in camps, they were asked to find suitable housing and employment within the city for which the Social Welfare Board (SWB) paid three months rent and subsistence allowance etc. There were many transit camps in Karachi where Afghans were given temporary accommodation.

The influx of Afghans continued for a longtime and the Ismaili community of Pakistan by and large tried to support their displaced brethrens even though their own economic conditions were not always up to the mark. The Afghans have a different temperament. Sometimes, they reacted harshly, but the Ismaili leadership made it clear to entire local resident Ismaili community that their Afghan brethrens have been members of the destabilized society ever since their birth. For the past twenty years, they have seen nothing but guns so they have to make greater efforts. The community's response has been overwhelming. A number of Khoja Ismailis have accommodated them, they have engaged them in their businesses, and professions and even Afghan women have been provided job etc. to ease their financial difficulties. The Afghan school going children were admitted in various community-based schools. The young were trained in various skills. The ITREB, Pakistan, has also been actively imparting religious education to the Afghan children. It has encouraged young educated Afghan Ismailis to serve their brethrens on an honorary basis. In the whole process of educating Afghan Ismailis, the ITREB is mindful of the cultural diversity of the Afghan vis-à-vis Pakistani Ismailis.

The situation of Afghanistan, after US invasion in 2001, has changed. The Focus and other Ismaili institutions made arrangement for majority of Afghan Ismailis to return. However, a good number of

Afghan did not return. They have made Pakistan their home and are trying to adjust themselves with the local Ismailis.

Conclusion

The present day Ismaili community of Pakistan, though segmented within, is unified under the central leadership of the hereditary *Imamat*. It has transformed itself into modern and progressive force without disregarding the traditional values. It is well-educated, economically sound and had built connections with their brethrens in the developed world. It has nurtured the culture of philanthropy by establishing wide range of institutions of international standard in Pakistan, aimed at translating the Islamic values into practice. It is a partner in progress and wants to contribute whatever it has learnt over the past century towards the goal of progressive Pakistan.