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Religious Pluralism in Ismaili Muslim Religious Education:

From difference to diversity

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A thesis submitted to the University of Sussex in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil)

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Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:……………………………………

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Religious Pluralism in Ismaili Muslim Religious Education: From difference to diversity

Summary

Three questions command even greater attention today, as over forty countries, including many Muslim-majority states, unite against Daesh (the so-called 'Islamic State'): How do Muslims relate to the Muslim 'other'? How do Muslims relate to the religious 'other'? What role can Muslim religious education play in fostering peace? Islam and Muslim education are suspected of promoting intolerance.

This thesis investigates a group of Shia Ismaili Muslim trainee-teachers' attitudes to plurality in their religious education programme. The Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) is a two-year postgraduate course of the Ismaili Muslim community to train religious education teachers. STEP, a novel development in Muslim education, experiments with an innovative pedagogical approach to plurality. The research spanning over three years involved in-depth interviews, focus group, observations and textual analysis. 21 trainee-teachers from 13 different countries participated in the study. Alan Race's (1983) typology 'inclusivism-exclusivism-pluralism' serves as a key theoretical lens through which to examine attitudes to religious others.

The thesis argues that a 'rooted religious pluralisation' is taking place in the Ismaili community facilitating the emergence of the 'tradition' of pluralism in the community. The study shows that initially, the participants were inclusive of other religious communities and worldviews on 'theological', 'humanistic' and 'instrumental' grounds, but were selective about how they embraced it. Many of them believed that their religious perspective exceptionally equipped them over their religious 'other'. Gradually, STEP's 'civilizational, normative and humanistic' approach cultivated an 'academically informed pluralism' in most trainee-teachers. It strengthened their Ismaili Muslim identity on the one hand and generated an appreciation for diversity on the other. The individuals developed not only greater socio-cultural and historical awareness of religion, but also their ability to make a space for faith academically. It cultivated in the participants a degree of 'inter-tradition competence' and 'intra-Islam competence'. The individuals were not 'pluralist angels', but they discursively participated in pluralism.

The present study makes three key contributions. Firstly, this is the first study to propose the thesis of 'rooted religious pluralisation'. It identifies the key features and tendencies inherent in a religious community's engagement with diversity through a five-dimensional working framework. Moreover, as a study of the socio-cultural process of 'intra-faith pluralisation' in Muslim religious education setting, it is unique. It is about making sense of the everyday experiences of the Muslims who encounter diversity within their own faith. The thesis identifies various stages involved in the process of developing intra-faith competence and provides tools and vocabulary to discuss them meaningfully. Moreover, the study suggests the possibility of a Muslim education that can play a vital role in combating extremism and sectarianism.

Current scholarship does not sufficiently take account of new and thought-provoking pedagogical developments in Muslim education. There is a dearth of studies on Muslim faith communities' efforts to build 'intra-Islam competency' in their followers through faith-based education. The literature is also silent about how Ismaili Muslims handle differences among themselves regarding matters of faith, how they view differences within Islam and relate to wider religious plurality. Thus, the study contributes to a niche in the existing literature on religious pluralism.

Notes on Transliteration and Abbreviations

The system of transliteration used in this thesis for the Arabic and Persian words is adapted from the second edition of The Encyclopaedia of Islam. Diacritical marks are not used for those names that are used recurrently in this thesis such as Sunni (Sunnī), Shia (Shiʿa), Ismaili (Ismāʿīlī) and Imam (Imām).

Abbreviations

Organisations /Curriculum:
AKDN: The Aga Khan Development Network

IIS: The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London

IOE: Institute of Education, University of London

MA: Master of Arts

MTeach: Master of Teaching

RE: Religious Education

REC: Religious Education Centre

SC: Secondary Curriculum

STEP: Secondary Teacher Education Programme

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations' Economic, Social and Cultural Organization

PP: Positive Pluralism

Data Collection Methods:
FFI: Face-to-Face Interview

FGI: Focus Group Interview

SIMI: Skype Instant Messaging Interview

SVI: Skype Video Interview

IC: Informal Conversation

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To thousands of individuals killed in religion-related violence from 2010 to 2014, the time during which I wrote this thesis!

1. Introduction

What is to be done, O Muslims?

For I do not recognize myself,

I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gabr, nor Muslim.[1]

Rumi (d. 1273)

This powerful tension [among Sunni and Shia communities] is sometimes even more profound than conflicts between Muslims and other faiths. It has increased massively in scope and intensity recently…In Pakistan and Malaysia, in Iraq and Syria, in Lebanon and Bahrain, in Yemen and Somalia and Afghanistan it is becoming a disaster.

It is of the highest priority, that these dangerous trends be well understood and resisted and that the fundamental legitimacy of pluralistic outlooks be honoured in all aspects of our lives together — including matters of faith.

Aga Khan (2014)

Focus and Rationale

How do Muslims relate to the 'other': Muslim 'other' and other religions? Today, this question is receiving exceptional international attention. The writing of this thesis has coincided with some extremely troubling global events involving Islam; examples of these events include the emergence of Daesh, the so-called Islamic State in the Middle East; current episodes of violence in the Palestine-Israel conflict; numerous bomb blasts in Pakistan, the violent encounters between the Buddhist majority and Muslims and Christian minorities in Burma; the rising influence of Hindu hardliners in India; Boko Haram's kidnapping of innocent girls and boys in Nigeria; the attacks by al-Shabaab; the Russian-Chechen conflict; the Arab Spring; the Civil war in Syria and the attack on

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[1] Cited in Shah-Kazemi, R. (2012). *The Spirit of Tolerance in Islam*. I. B. Tauris and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.

Malala Yousafzai. Recent events in the Middle East have put a spotlight on Sunni-Shia conflicts. Islam and Muslim education are suspected of promoting intolerance (Waghid 2009; Leirvik 2004), raising the questions 'How do Muslims engage with denominational and wider religious differences?' 'What role does Muslim religious education play in this?'

Often the most challenging answers come from people rooted in religious traditions (Morgan and Lawton 2007). This thesis focuses on a group of Shia Ismaili Muslim trainee-teachers' attitudes to religious plurality in a Muslim religious education programme. This topic of religious education and pluralism concerns all of us, whether we are religious or not. No matter where we live today, it is more and more likely that our next-door neighbours will be religiously diverse. The Human Rights Watch (2014) warns that a cycle of revenge killings between communities in conflict, has escalated in the world. The Pew Research Centre's (Street 2014) survey of 198 countries and territories show that the number of countries and territories with high level of religion-related conflict has gone up from 20% in mid-2007 to 33% in 2012.

Therefore, this study is a timely contribution to the debate on the role that religious education can play in the contemporary world. STEP offers a bold take on sectarianism, extremism, and religious pluralism from within a Muslim perspective. Therefore, it is worth examining it for its potential and pitfalls. The learning from such an exercise would be valuable to states, faith communities, religious education experts, and non-governmental organisations.

The Ismaili Muslim Community

In this thesis, the term 'Ismaili' denotes specifically the Shia Imami community of Nizāri Ismaili Muslims who today acknowledge Karim al-Ḥusayni Aga Khan IV as their forty-ninth Imam (spiritual leader).[2] Numbering several millions, the Ismailis live in over 25 different countries, mainly in Central and South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, as well as in Europe, North America, and Australia. They represent a diversity of

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[2] The Nizāri Ismailis form the second major Shii Muslim community after the Ithnaʿashari or Twelvers.

ethnicities and speak a variety of languages and dialects. According to their official website The Ismaili.Org (2009), the creed of the Ismailis is as follows:

> *As Muslims, the Ismailis affirm the fundamental Islamic testimony of truth, the Shahada, that there is no God but Allah and that Muḥammad (peace be upon him and his family) is His Messenger. They believe that Muḥammad was the last and final Prophet of Allah and that the Holy Qurʾān, Allah's final message to mankind, was revealed through him.*
>
> *In common with other Shia Muslims, the Ismailis affirm that after the Prophet's death, Ḥaḍrat ʿAlī, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, became the first Imam – the spiritual leader – of the Muslim community and that this spiritual leadership (known as Imamate) continues thereafter by hereditary succession through ʿAlī and his wife Fāṭima, the Prophet's daughter.*

Karim al-Ḥusayn Aga Khan IV, born in 1936, succeeded his grandfather Sultan Mahomed Shah in 1957. He graduated from Harvard in 1959 in Islamic History. The Aga Khan (2014) explains his role as 'a spiritual one; his authority is that of religious interpretation. It is not a political role'. At the same time, according to him, 'Faith does not remove Muslims — or their Imams — from daily, practical matters in family life in business, in community affairs'. The Aga Khan governs an advanced system of administering the Ismaili community in a systematic effort to modernise community with high standards of education, health and general wellbeing.

The Secondary Teacher Education Programme

The Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) is a two-year postgraduate programme, offered by the Institute of Ismaili Studies[3] in collaboration with the University of London's Institute of Education (IOE) in London (Appendix I: Prospectus of STEP). The aim of the programme is to train professional religious education teachers to teach the Ismaili community's religious education curriculum, known as the Secondary Curriculum to Ismaili children, youth, and parents worldwide. Thus, STEP serves as an excellent case study of where religion and the issues of pluralism are discussed and where tradition and modernity intersect.

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[3] The Institute of Ismaili Studies, established in 1977, aims to promote scholarship on Muslim societies and encourage a better understanding of their relationship with other societies and faiths. The IIS conducts research on Shiism in general and Ismailism in particular. The IIS views itself as a central point of reference for the scholars in Ismaili studies.

In January 2001, the Aga Khan IV, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the IIS, expressed an interest in developing a highly sophisticated Secondary Curriculum delivered by fully remunerated professional teachers. An initial working paper (IIS 2003, 1) elucidates the purpose:

> *Over the years the concern has been, to enable young people to find their place in the larger Muslim community through a more pluralistic approach to Islam... There has also simultaneously been a strong emphasis on helping young people to feel at home in the wider social, political, cultural context of their daily lives and to integrate their sense of being Muslim with being 'Indian' or 'Canadian' or 'Kenyan' or 'Tajik'. These concerns and emphases have informed the development of the curriculum.*

The Aga Khan (Stein 2014) speaks of the 'hardware' of pluralism, the institutions that provide its framework. STEP can thus be seen as the 'hardware', which aims to inform the 'software', the habits of the mind of the community with regard to pluralism.

The need for cultivating a pluralistic disposition called for a major shift in the community's approach towards the religious education of their youth. Traditionally, the nature of religious education has been indigenous and informal and its content varied with teachers' personally acquired knowledge. In the 1980s and 1990s, IIS introduced initiatives to make RE a sophisticated, formal and more centrally guided endeavour. However, these endeavours were largely delivered in local religious education centres (REC) by volunteer teachers with only a few days training.

STEP, in contrast, is a professionalised endeavour, and is a two-year programme that culminates in two postgraduate awards from the Institute of Education (IOE). The Master of Arts 'Education in Muslim Societies and Civilisations' is led by the IIS, and the 'Masters of Teaching' (MTeach) is led by the IOE.

The MTeach aims to support classroom practitioners through sustained continuing professional development. It engages with new developments in teaching, examines current issues and debates on teaching and learning, and gives students a critical understanding of education research.

On the other hand, the MA Education (Muslim Societies and Civilisations) offers modules designed to enhance understanding of the Ismaili heritage within the broader dimensions of Islam and Muslim societies. One of its core modules includes *Muslim History and Secondary Education,* which seeks to examine Muslim history from the

dawn of Islam to the fall of the Ottoman Empire. This module introduces students through interdisciplinary lens political, social, religious, cultural and intellectual transformations through history in Muslim civilisations. Another core module, *Revelation, Hermeneutics, Pluralism and Practice* situates Islam within the Abrahamic religions and examines revelation, the emergence of different Muslim communities, and examines central thematic concepts of the Qur'an, including, authority, as well as social and ethical engagement. The third core module is *Literature of Muslim Societies* that introduces students to Muslim societies and civilisations, a rich literary culture which spans several languages — Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu and literary genres and themes. Literary works of Muslim societies and lands for example Swahili, Bengali, Chinese, Central Asian, etc. are also explored. The fourth module, *Traditions of Enquiry* aims to establish that people in all major world civilisations, including Muslims have engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. It analyses the intellectual influence of Muslim societies and civilisations in world history and examines key questions in historical Muslim civilisations on various topics, including epistemology, theology, ethics, science and mysticism. The fifth module is *Modernity and Muslim Societies,* which surveys a period of rapid political, economic, social and intellectual change in Muslim societies that continues to this day. With the use of case studies of Muslim societies from South Asia, East Africa, Iran, Central Asia, Turkey, and Europe, the module seeks to explore the key aspects of modernisation movements, focusing on the issues faced by Muslim communities and the diverse responses they have formulated, expressed through various media such as narrative fiction, television, print media, music and the internet. The students also study *Cultural Encounters, Material Culture and Narratives,* whereby students explore that like major world religions, "Islam" is neither monolithic nor monocultural; rather it is dynamic, local and embedded in commercial, intellectual, social, literary, or cultural human encounters.

At the time of writing this thesis, approximately 40 faculty members from various countries taught STEP. They held advanced educational degrees in history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, education, literature, media studies and theology and represented a diverse set of socio-cultural, religious and national belonging.

The first cohort of the STEP commenced in 2007 with trainee-teachers from five countries: India, Pakistan, Canada, USA, and Tajikistan. Currently, the programme also enrols trainee-teachers from Portugal, Madagascar, France, Dubai, Syria, Afghanistan,

United Kingdom and Tanzania. Currently, a bulk of the trainee-teachers come from India, Pakistan, Canada and USA and a minority hails from the rest of the countries. The trainee-teachers speak more than ten different languages and dialects among themselves including Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Persian, Shugni, Peshai, Malagasy, Gujarati, Kutchi and English and represent four different geo-historical developments of the Ismaili tradition from South Asia, the Arab world, Central Asia, and the West. A large majority of them tend to be between 20 to 30 years old and female. So far, more than 200 trainees have returned as professional teachers to at least thirteen countries having successfully completed the programme.

The 'Conditions of Pluralism' for the Ismailis

Pluralism is no longer simply an asset or a prerequisite for progress and development, it is vital to our existence. (Aga Khan 2003)

The emergence of an identifiable and sustained discourse on pluralism in the Ismaili community dates from the late 1980s. The term pluralism began to feature more prominently and more frequently than ever before through the guidance of the Aga Khan to the community as well as in institutional programmes and publications in the later decades of the 20th century. Since 9/11, the Aga Khan has not only spoken much more assertively about pluralism on the world stage, but has also taken measures to promote it, including the establishment of The Global Centre for Pluralism[4] in Canada in 2006. Various activities[5] organised by the institutions of the Ismaili community and its publications[6] aim to promote a positive engagement with diversity.

Three major reasons have contributed to the rise of discourse on pluralism in the community. These are globalisation, intra-Islamic diversity and intra-Ismaili diversity.

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[4] The Global Centre for Pluralism is a not-for-profit international research and education centre that seeks to promote inclusive approach to citizenship across the world drawing upon Canada's experience.

[5] Examples include: In 2013, the Ismaili Centre, London organised *Harmony*, a play that emphasised diversity as a source of strength for the community. The IIS's Cambridge Summer Programme held in 2013 had presentations on pluralism. In 2011, the IIS also organised alumni conferences on interfaith and intra-faith dialogue in Central Asia and North America.

[6] Examples include: *The Spirit of Tolerance in Islam* (Shah-Kazemi 2012), *A Companion to Muslim Cultures* (Sajoo 2011) and *Diversity and Pluralism in Islam* (Hirji 2010). Jiwa's books (2013); (2009) depict Fāṭimid Ismaili Imams demonstrating an inclusivist attitude in the medieval period.

Globalisation, 'Gods in the Global Village' and Islamophobia

The first reason is that although Ismailis have always had to negotiate their relationship with their religious 'other', globalisation has completely altered the conditions under which this takes place. Globalisation, although it is theorised diversely, is generally described as an intensification of connections around the globe (Held 2002). In broad terms, it refers to the compression of space and time (Harvey 1990), enabling social interactions 'in real time or in chosen time on a planetary scale' (Castells 2000, 101). According to Robertson (1992, 8), globalisation refers to 'the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole'. This makes the world a 'global village'. What it means to live in this 'village', then, becomes a universal question. Consequently, although religious difference is not a new phenomenon, a positive appreciation of religious diversity has become a new moral imperative under globalisation.

Today, 'Gods in the global village' have assumed an unprecedented political significance (Kurtz 2007; Casanova 1994). Banchoff (2008) has offered some numbers. The Roman Catholic Church, the world's largest religious organisation, with more than one billion members and the Protestant and Orthodox churches, with adherents of just under one billion, have increased their involvement in world affairs since the 1980s. The Word Council of Churches with a membership of some 340 churches has expanded its cultural, social and political interaction with governments and international organisations. Islam, the world's second largest religion with over a billion adherents, has also emerged as a more powerful transnational force than ever before. The Organization of the Islamic Conference brings together 57 countries with significant Muslim populations on global issues. Judaism, with about 15 million adherents worldwide, plays a vital international role through the state of Israel, the World Jewish Congress and the Jewish Diaspora. Buddhism, with about 400 million adherents, has been engaged in politics in Cambodia, Thailand, and Burma.

Within this wider picture, the Ismaili community has also become an influential actor in global affairs. With an involvement in 30 countries employing approximately 80,000 people, the community's Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)[7] is considered the

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[7] The AKDN, established in the late-19th century, is an umbrella of private, international, and non-denominational development agencies. They are involved in the developing world, without regard to faith, origin, or gender, in the area of environment, health, education, architecture, culture, microfinance, rural development, disaster reduction, the promotion of private-sector enterprise and the revitalisation of historic cities.

world's largest, private international development network (AKDN 2007). Its agencies are partners with the World Bank, UN, UNESCO and scores of high-profile international organisations.

Unprecedentedly, religious representatives are now called to clarify their inclusive commitments on a global scale. In the Christian context, this has emerged in recent years as the 'theology of religions' (Barnes 2002). In the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church famously made historical revisions to its doctrinal assertions to take account of the religious other. The Second Vatican Council's extraordinary document, *Nostra Aetate* 'In Our Time' - the Declaration of the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Vatican City 1965), begins with: 'In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions'.[8] Another remarkable development is the Parliament of World Religions' meeting in 1993 with representatives of religious communities to initiate the process for on-going dialogue among religions and a debate on the 'Declaration toward a Global Ethic' (The Global Ethic Foundation 1993). In 2004, King Abdullah II of Jordon released a statement famously known as 'The Amman Message' (2007). This was followed by an international conference in 2005 of 200 of the world's leading Islamic scholars from 50 countries to arrive at unanimity on the issue of Muslim diversity.[9]

Conversely, 'Islamophobia' has emerged as a serious problem since 9/11 for Muslims in the West. Islamophobia has been defined as 'irrational hostility towards Islam and therefore, fear and dislike of Muslims'(Open Society Institute 2005, 146).

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[8]*Nostra Aetate* recognizes a long history of encounters with different religions and sets out theological grounds for non-conflictual relationships. The Church recognizes salvific potential in other traditions, but establishes hierarchy of religious life in non-Christian religions. Christianity and Judaism are seen as united by their shared history and spiritual bond. (Schmidt-Leukel 2009) criticises that with this Declaration, the Church has betrayed one of its established theological teachings to accommodate pluralism. Gillis (1993), a Christian theologian, however, defends that the present situation in Christian theology demands that it be constructed not in isolation but in relation with other religious visions.

[9] The Amman Message emphasizes 'the oneness of the human species' and condemns radical fundamentalism and terrorism. It attempts to be inclusive as it declares, 'Muslims believe in all Messengers of God'. Following the conference, 'Three Points of the Amman Message' was published. It forbade declarations of apostasy between Muslims. The Amman Message is inadequate and essentialist in its definition of Islam. However, its' extraordinary achievement lies in promoting a reflection on historical diversity within Islam.

Subsequently, since 9/11, the pressure on the Ismaili Muslims in the West to articulate their peaceful and non-insular identity has mounted.

Inevitably, as a global figure, the Aga Khan has felt it necessary to clarify his stance on religious plurality on international platforms as a Muslim leader.[10] Further, the Ismaili community lives among many different faith communities including non-Ismaili Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and other indigenous traditions, thus it is important for the Aga Khan to define its relationship with them.

These global changes have had an impact on the Ismaili community's thinking on religious plurality.

Intra-Islam Differences and Sectarianism

The second major reason why pluralism has become pertinent for the Ismailis is the need to co-exist confidently and rightfully within the diversity of Islam. Contrary to the popular tendency in the West to view Islam as internally monolithic, Muslims uphold a rich diversity of spiritual outlooks and traditions (Nanji 1996). Diverse Muslim communities have existed from the beginning of Islam. The first major division in Islam occurred immediately after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 632) over the issue of his successor. A group upheld that the Prophet had not appointed a successor and elected his close companion ʿAbū Bakr to be the first 'caliph' leading the Muslim community. This eventually gave rise to the Sunni branch of Islam. Another major group, the Shiȧt ʿAlī (the 'party' of ʿAlī) upheld that the Prophet had in fact designated ʿAlī, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law as his successor (Daftary 1992), and that the leadership of the Muslim community, the 'Imamate' continued through ʿAlī's line; this gave rise to the Shia traditions. The Khārijīs represent Islam's third major division. They repudiated both the Shia and the Sunni groups and believed that anyone from any tribe or ethnic background could lead the Muslim community based on personal merit. Over time, the Shias, the Sunnis, and the Khārijīs sub-divided into numerous different groups. In view of that, McAuliffe (2006) has questioned the notion of 'authentic Islam'.

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[10] *Where Hope Takes Root: Democracy and Pluralism in an Interdependent World* (2008) by Aga Khan (Author), Adrienne Clarkson (Introduction) is a collection of Aga Khan's talks given after 9/11. In these, the Aga Khan speaks of three cornerstones of development: democracy, pluralism and civil society.

Historically, these various Muslim groups have not always seen eye to eye. I would like to suggest a few caveats here. It would be misleading to think that the conflict has always been between Sunnis and Shias, or such conflict is always to do with religious differences or it exists wherever Muslims of different denominations live. On the contrary, more often than not conflicts have been internal to the denominations. For example, in Somalia the Sunni Ṣūfī paramilitary group Ahl i-Sunna is opposed to the radical Sunni Wahhabi version represented by al-Shabaab. Secondly, it has not always been about doctrinal differences. For instance, the sectarian violence happening in the Middle East today has much to do with who holds power and controls resources (Matthiesen 2013). Thirdly, in many parts of the world such as India, Indonesia and Malaysia the increasing gulf between religious communities is a malaise of modernity rather than a historical feature of the society. In fact, fundamentalism can be seen a modern reaction to current circumstances, or as a phenomenon of Modernity itself (Akbarzadeh 2006; Turner 2010; Juergensmeyer 2011). In addition, it would be misleading to think that different denominations within Islam have historically had well-defined and static boundaries. Muslims have moved around, disputed, contested, exchanged, borrowed and learnt from each other, sometimes shaking hands in friendship and sometimes shaking each other.

Despite these caveats, sectarian conflicts among Muslims have been devastating for millions of ordinary Muslims over the years. The dogma asserting the finality of Muḥammad's prophet hood has meant that in most Muslims societies any prophetic claim made after him is suppressed. Thus, the Bábí and Bahá'i movements have been ruthlessly persecuted in Iran; similarly, the Ahmadiyas are legally considered non-Muslims in Pakistan. The question of religious freedom also applies to Muslims who deviate from beliefs considered 'orthodox' by the politically dominant religious establishments.

The Ismailis have been one of the most persecuted minorities in Muslim history (Asani 2011). According to Asani (2011), during certain historical periods, entire Ismaili communities were annihilated in certain locations. Even today the Ismaili community's position is sometimes challenged within the broader Muslim *Umma* by certain groups or individuals within Islam (Karim 2011). In the past, in the face of persecution, the Ismailis fought back, fled elsewhere, merged with the dominant groups, or hid themselves. What are the options in the global village?

More recently, the 'new sectarianism' sweeping through the Middle East and Pakistan has become a humanitarian crisis. Mattheisen (2013) argues that in reacting to the demand for democracy and a fairer distribution of resources the Arab regimes have resorted to playing on sectarian divisions to bolster their own positions. This is affecting all levels of Muslim societies.

Thus, intra-Islam differences, growing sectarianism, and the need to co-exist confidently as a legitimate part of Islam form conditions of pluralism for the Ismaili community.

Intra-Ismaili Differences

The third crucial dimension is intra-Ismaili differences. If you were growing up as an ordinary Ismaili 30 years ago in Karachi, Kampala, Kabul or Kansas city, it was possible not to know anything, except for passing references, about the Ismailis living in other parts of the world. In the past few decades, however, historically dispersed and independently evolved Ismaili communities have come into intense contact with each other through migration, information technology and transnational institutional infrastructure.

This section elaborates on the history and diversity of the Ismailis in some detail. This is in order to gain a better appreciation of the STEP trainee-teachers' experience of engaging with intra-Ismaili differences in subsequent chapters. However, it would also be worth noting that much of the different Ismaili communities' heritage is transmitted through oral traditions in numerous languages and dialects and without an understanding of those, it is not possible to appreciate fully their religious experiences.[11] The book edited by Farhad Daftary, *A Modern History of the Ismailis* (2011a), however, is an excellent pioneering attempt in this direction.

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[11] According to Daftary (2011), there has been a general absence of historiography from the Ismaili perspective until recently. This is because the Ismailis often had to live underground in remote parts with their Imams maintaining strictest secrecy. As a result, little written material was preserved by the community. Moreover, the Ismaili authors were usually trained as theologians and, as such, were not interested in compiling historical accounts, the exception being works written during the Fāṭimid and Alamūt periods of their history, when they possessed states of their own. With the exception of a few fragments, however, none of these has survived. Consequently, for a long period, Oriental scholarship studied the Ismailis from hostile sources. With the recovery of Ismaili manuscripts preserved secretly in private collections during the 19th and 20th century, there is a small but growing body of literature sympathetic to the Ismailis.

The Shii Ismaili Traditions in Syria: The Syrian Arab Ismailis are one of the earliest Ismaili communities. After a major succession dispute among the Shia Muslims following the death of Shia Imam, Jaʿfar al-Sadiq in 765 CE (Daftary 1992), a group of Syrian Shias recognised al-Sadiq's eldest son Ismāʿīl as the Imam. They eventually came to be called 'Ismailis'. The other group gave allegiance to al-Sadiq's younger son, Mūsā al-Kāẓim; these came to be known as 'Ithnaʿashari' or 'Twelvers'. The activities of Syrian and Persian Ismailis helped establish the Fāṭimid[12] caliphate (909-1171) that over time came to extend from North Africa and Sicily to Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. The Fāṭimids founded Cairo as their capital, which became a famous centre of intellectual inquiry. In the last decade of the 11th century, following a schism over the succession to Fāṭimid Imam-Caliph al-Mustansir bi'llah, one part of the community followed his youngest son al-Mustaʿli, who continued to rule the Fāṭimid state, while the other gave its allegiance to his eldest son Nizār, who was dethroned and executed. Those who followed Imam Nizār were called the 'Nizāri' Ismailis, from whom the Aga Khan traces his descent. The seat of the Nizāri Ismaili spiritual leadership thus moved to Alamūt, in northern Iran. In 1256, Alamūt fell to the Mongols and since then the Ismailis of Syria have survived in subdued conditions under various Muslim political configurations.

The Syrian Ismailis' distinct Ismaili Muslim identity has been formed in response to their predominantly hostile sectarian historical contexts which they have endured. The exegetical distinction between *ẓāhir* (exoteric) and *bāṭin* (esoteric) interpretation of the Qur'an emerged in the Sunni-dominated circumstances whereby the community needed to maintain its beliefs in secret (Daftary 1992). Principles of concealment known as *satr* and precautionary dissimulation called *taqiyya* was integral part of their everyday practice of faith for centuries (Douwes 2011). *Bastiyya*, underground spaces for congregational prayers, were built during Ottoman rule of Syria. The literature of the Ismailis is preserved in the Arabic and Persian languages. Some important works are attributed to the early Shii Imams such as ʿAlī and al-Ṣādiq. Some of the other major works belong to prominent *da'i's* (missionaries) such as Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (9th/10th century), Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 1070) and al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-din Shirazi (d. 1078). Al-Hallaj (d. 922) and Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240) are also revered figures in the

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[12] Fāṭimids indicates lineage from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭima, the Prophet's daughter.

mystical tradition due to their teachings. *Al-Anasheed al-diniyya* is the Syrian Ismailis'
living religious poetic heritage, as Ismaili poets continue to contribute to it.

In 1887 the Syrian Ismailis regained contact with their living Imam after a hiatus of 200
years, then the Aga Khan III, in Bombay. This led to them assimilating many of the
South Asian Ismaili practices (Douwes 2011).

The Shii Ismaili Traditions in Persia: Much of the early history of Persian Ismailis is
intertwined with their Syrian counterparts (Daftary 1992; Eboo Jamal 2002). After the
Mongols terminated the Nizārī Ismaili state (1090-1256) in Alamūt, a large number of
Persian Ismailis were executed, and a tiny minority of Ismailis survived in Persia. By
the middle of the fifteenth century, the Nizārī imams emerged in central Persia as Ṣūfī
shaykhs and *pīrs*.[13] They had followers in India, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and
elsewhere. In 1841 Aga Khan-I had to flee Iran after falling out of favour with the Qājār
monarch.

In medieval times, a distinct Persian Nizārī Ismaili tradition nurtured by a Ṣūfī milieu
evolved (Daftary 1992). Today the finest Ṣūfī poetries of Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 1230
uncertain), Jalāl ad-Dīn Rumi (d. 1273) and Hāfez-e Shīrāzī (d. 1389/90) have become
part of world literary heritage and are still well preserved in the collective memory of
the Persians, including the Persian Ismailis. Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāḥ's Persian treatise on the
doctrine of Ta'līm (the teachings of the imam) and Nizāri Quhistani's (d.1320) poems
are also preserved in the Persian Ismaili tradition.

The Shi'i Ismaili Traditions in Central Asia: Central Asia encapsulates a vast area,
including Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, northern areas of Pakistan, Tajikistan,
Uzbekistan, Xinjiang of China and north-eastern parts of Iran. Ismaili daʿwa seems to
have spread in Central Asia at the end of ninth century during the Fāṭimid era
(Elnazarov and Aksakolov 2011). It influenced the Samanids and famous Muslim
thinkers and poets such as Rūdakī (d.941), Firdousi (d.1020), Ibn Sīnā (d.1037) and al-
Bīrūnī (d.1048) (Niyozov 2003). Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the Ismaili daʿi, theologian,
philosopher and poet's, life and teachings have had such a profound and persuasive
impact on the dispersed Ismaili communities of Central Asia that the entire religious
cultural heritage of Central Asia has come to be known as the Nāṣir--Khusraw tradition

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[13]A 'Glossary' has been provided with this thesis to refer to the meaning of foreign terms.

(Kassam 2010). *Chirag-i-Rowshan*, the funeral ritual, and the vibrant devotional musical tradition of *Madhokhoni* or *Qasidokhoni*, which consist of classical Persian genres such as *gazal, rubayat, qasida, mathnawi, mukhammas,* form an important part of their religious identity.

The Ismailis of Badakshan, popularly known as the Pamiris, are nestled in the deep valleys of the Pamir mountain range. Divided into Munjis, Yazgulemis, Rushans, Bartangs, Vanchis, Shugnanis, Ishkashmis and Vakhis, they speak their own distinct languages in separate valleys. In 1895, the Ismailis of Badakshan were arbitrarily divided into Afghan Badakshan and Tajik Badakshan by the Russian Empire and the British (Jamshedov 2001). The Ismailis on both sides experienced religious freedom differently. In Tajik Badakshan, the practice of faith remained a concealed aspect of life until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since 1995, the Ismailis of Tajik Badakshan have been introduced three times to Arabic *du'a.* An Ismaili Centre[14] was established in Dushanbe in 2010 and the first *mukhi* was appointed in 2012. Contrastingly, the Ismailis in Afghan Badakshan remained more or less in contact with the Imam. The last decade of the twentieth century saw an exodus of Badakshani Ismailis to South Asia, Russia, Europe, and North America as refugees as the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991.

The Hazaragi speaking Ismaili community evolved in Hazarijat (Hazaristan) in Central Afghanistan (Elnazarov and Aksakolov 2011). It is claimed that they are the descendants of Genghis Khan's Turko-Mongolian army. Historically, the Hazaras have lived under hostile circumstances as a Shia minority and slaves among the Sunni Pashtun and Tajik ethnic majority. The advance of the Taliban forced a considerable number of Hazara Ismailis to seek refuge in Pakistan, North America, and Europe. The Hazara Ismailis appear to have followed *shari'a* in Sunni form for centuries (Elnazarov and Aksakolov 2011; Niyozov 2003). In medieval times, Ṣūfī poems became part of their religious repertoire. The Kayani family had provided hereditary leadership as *pīr* and *Sayyid* Shah Sadeh is one of their revered *pīrs*. The first *Jamā'at-khāna* was built in Kabul in 1969 and rites and ceremonies from South Asian Ismaili tradition were introduced.

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[14] The Ismaili Centres' are spaces for social and cultural gatherings, intellectual engagement and reflection, as well as spiritual contemplation for the Ismaili Muslims. They are expected to be bridges of friendship and understanding among faith communities, government and civil society (www.ismaili.org).

The Ismailis of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral live at the foot of some of the highest mountain ranges of the Himalayas, Karakorum, Pamir, and Hindu Kush. They speak Burushaski, Wakhi, Shina, Kalash, Khowar, Pashto, Urdu and several other dialects. According to local tradition, *pīrs* from Badakshan brought Ismaili faith to these areas in the 14th century (Elnazarov and Aksakolov 2011;Niyozov 2003). In the 20th century, the Ismailis in Northern Pakistan and Chitral met the Aga Khan III. In the 1920s, *Jamāʻatkhānas* were built and *mukhi-kamadia* appointments were made.

The Ismailis of Xinxiang were incorporated in China in the 19th century. They are classified as being of Tajik ethnicity, speaking Sariqoli and Wakhi dialects (Saidula 2011). According to local tradition, Nāṣir-i Khusraw sent *pīrs* to Xinxiang to spread the Ismaili faith. They also celebrate *Pilik* festival to commemorate the dead along with other Muslims. The first *Jamāʻat-khāna* was built at the end of 19th century. Religious practices were banned during the Communists' Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Today limited freedom is offered to religious communities. *Jamāʻatkhānas* were reopened after the death of Mao.

Having briefly surveyed the history and traditions of the Ismailis of Central Asia, it is important to note that although their tradition is known as Nāṣir-i Khusraw tradition, it is not at all homogenous.

The Shiʼi Ismaili Traditions in South Asia: An indigenous religious tradition designated as *Satpanth*, meaning 'true path', developed owing to various *pīrs* and *sayyids* that arrived from Persia to the Indian sub-continent from 11th century onwards (Asani 2002). Recitation of devotional poems known as *Ginans* has been an integral part of worship practices of the Satpanthis. The Nizāri Ismailis of India include the Khoja, Momna, and Gupti groups. They speak local languages such as Gujarati, Hindi, and Kutchi. *Pīr* Sadr al-din is credited with the establishment of the first *Jamāʻat-khāna* and appointment of the first *mukhi* and *kamadia*.

During the British Raj, with the introduction of a census, an essentialist conception of religion was introduced among people who previously had fluid religious identities (Asani 2002; Marshall 2009). Orientalist researchers, the British Raj and local elites managed to portray 'Mecca oriented' cultural elements as part of the 'true' Muslim identity and Indic cultural elements as 'Hindu' (Asani 2002; Dominique-Sila 2004). Thus, a reinterpretation of Ismaili practices according to narrowly defined categories of

Islamic identity began to take place. For instance, in 1950, Gujarati congregational prayer was replaced by Arabic. Increasingly, *Ginan* (devotional literature) came to be seen as explanation of the Qurʾān and so called 'Hindu' elements were either abandoned or modified with Arabo-Persian elements. The British court further solidified their transformation from *Satpanthis* to Shia Imami Ismaili Nizāri Muslims (Asani 2011).

The Aga Khan III, Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah (1877-1957) played a major role in international affairs and modernisation of the Ismaili community under the British *Raj*.

The Shi'i Ismaili Traditions in East Africa: In the nineteenth century a group of *Satpanthis* from the Indian sub-continent settled in East Africa (Hirji 2011). They established *Jamāʿatkhānas*, appointed *mukhi-kamadia*, recited prayers in Gujarati and sang *Ginans*. They acquired a Western lifestyle and learnt English and French under colonial masters. They also learnt Swahili. In time, the community became one of the most powerful and prosperous Asian business communities in East Africa. Owing to the 'Africanization' programmes, and anti-Asian agitation in the 1970s, a considerable number of Ismailis had to seek refuge in the West.

The Shii Ismaili Traditions in the West: In the 1970s, many Ismailis arrived in the West as a result of the Asian expulsion in Uganda and decolonisation in Africa (Karim 2011). The Ismaili community today is scattered across several European countries such as the UK, France, Sweden, Portugal and Germany as well as Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Today some of the *Jamāʿatkhānas* in the West have become multi-ethnic and multicultural. A group of Ismaili refugees arrived from Iran after the Iranian revolution in 1989. Another large group of Ismaili refugees arrived in the 1990s from Central Asia and Afghanistan due to the civil wars there. A minority of individuals from European backgrounds have also embraced the Ismaili faith mainly through marriage (Karim 2011). In time, the Ismailis have emerged as a progressive Muslim minority in many countries of the West (Karim 2011).

There has been an increased contact between these historically isolated different Ismaili groups in recent decades.

Together these three dimensions of globalisation, intra-Islam differences and intra-Ismaili differences form conditions of pluralism for the Ismaili Muslim community. Engler and Grieve (2005, 5) aptly observe that something becomes a matter of 'over the

top articulation when a crisis is felt and it is seen as a necessity…when it is seen as somehow missing and one wants to establish it'.

Research Questions

Where the Ismailis live, those societies differ in the extent of globalisation, religious diversity and tolerance for religious differences. Think of the Ismailis caught up in the civil war in the Middle East, in Taliban controlled areas in Afghanistan or those living in Zanzibar or Toronto. Keeping these complexities in mind, the key research question was:

How do trainee-teachers from different contexts negotiate religious plurality in the STEP?

Sub-research questions:

- How do the STEP trainee-teachers engage with intra-Ismaili differences?
- How do they relate to intra-Islam differences?
- How do they engage with other religions and perspectives on religion?
- What impact does the STEP have on them over the two-year period with regard to diversity?

The 21 key participants in this research were from 13 different countries spread over North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. They spoke more than ten different languages and dialects among themselves including Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Persian, Shugni, Peshai, Malagasy, Gujarati, Kutchi and English. The research questions were investigated through in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group, observations and textual analysis.

Key Finding and the Arguments

The thesis argues that a 'rooted religious pluralisation' is taking place in the Ismaili community facilitating the emergence of the 'tradition' of pluralism in the community. Contrary to certain official portrayals of pluralism as a 'tradition' of the Ismaili community as if it always existed in the community's teaching and practice, pluralism as its 'tradition' is a modern discourse of the Ismaili community. By this, adapting the ideas from Hobsbawm (1983), I mean that pluralism is a contemporary response of the community to contemporary concerns; however, the community has rooted pluralism in its past and religious texts, thus building a sense of continuity with its history.

The study illustrates, based on insights adapted from Butler (2010), that the Ismaili community's approach to pluralism is *performative*. In the Ismaili community, through a sustained and repeated discourse, set of acts, guidance, education, events, programmes, celebrations and rituals there is an effort to inculcate a positive disposition to difference (see Appendix II: The Harmony Project, as an example). It is through such repeated acts, conversations, gestures and desires that a discourse becomes internalised in the individual and social psyches. The STEP also serves as a crucial vehicle of this. In this way, pluralism is becoming part of an 'internal' feature of the community. Individuals are socialised into being pluralists. This is how pluralism has taken root in official Ismaili discourse over the years and the community has established a 'tradition' of pluralism. The Aga Khan (2005) duly observes in Oslo, 'Pluralist societies are not accidents of history'.

The influence of the Aga Khan is extraordinary in terms of 'rooted' religious pluralisation. I explain it with the help of the influential philosopher of language J. I. Austin. In his book, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), Austin divides language into two kinds: *constative* and *performative*. *Constative* language describes statements such as 'the grass is green'. It does not affect the world; it merely describes a state of affairs. However, *performative* language causes something to happen. Austin's paradigmatic example is in the Christian wedding ceremony when the priest proclaims, 'I pronounce you husband and wife'. The moment a person who is seen to uphold the authority to pronounce these words does so, two otherwise unrelated individuals change into a married couple. In this example, the words do not merely describe their status but

perform an act. Similarly, the words of the spiritual leader of the Ismaili community do not merely describe the 'status of affairs' of the community in relation to pluralism, they have a *performative* effect. When the spiritual leader says, 'I pronounce you pluralists' the community begins to describe itself as pluralist. The Aga Khan's words have a *performative* effect because of 'symbolic capital' that community perceives him to embody (Bourdieu 1991). This symbolic power comes from the belief of the community that as a direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, he is invested with the authority to represent the institution of the Ismaili Imamate through a divine appointment by his predecessor and his command must be followed (Daftary 1992). Thus, the *performative* effect of his emphasis on pluralism is not purely a linguistic but a religio-social phenomenon.

Significance of the Study

This study matters for three key reasons. First, a great deal of literature since 9/11 focuses on Islamic fundamentalism and reactive Muslim responses to globalisation and modernity. This study examines a much less studied Muslim religious community that is not afraid of globalisation, modernity and diversity. The Ismailis are not only a part of the globalising process but also contributors to it. The study thus extends the current theorisation of globalisation, religion, and Islam.

Secondly, this is the first study to propose a 'rooted religious pluralisation' thesis. Much of the current work on religious pluralism is abstract, expressed through philosophical and theological discourse and there is little empirical work done on religious pluralisation of faith communities. The five-dimensional framework of rooted religious pluralisation involves: value adjustment, reflexivity, selectivity, ambivalence and *performativity*, provides a conceptual vocabulary and tools to analyse the phenomenon of religious pluralisation. Moreover, as a study of the socio-cultural process of 'intra-faith pluralisation' in Muslim religious education settings, it is unique. It is about making sense of the everyday experiences of the Muslims who encounter diversity within their own faith.

Thirdly, the study offers a refreshing possibility of an approach to Muslim religious education that can play a vital role in addressing extremism and sectarianism. Some

Muslim states have been found advancing prejudices against other faith communities, including Muslim traditions whose interpretations of Islam differ from the so-called 'orthodox' strand (Nayyar and Salim 2002; Thobani 2010). Equally worrying is the way Islam is treated as a school subject in state schools in the West (Panjwani 2005; Olsson 2009; Revell 2012). The present study shows that a sensitively designed Muslim religious education can nurture an informed religious pluralism.

Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis contains five aspects that lead to a progressive understanding of the Ismaili Muslims' engagement with religious diversity.

1. Broader context

The first three chapters situate the study in a broader context. The first chapter positions the research study in contemporary conditions. The second and third chapters situate the study in the literature on pluralism and religious education.

2. The research process

Following the background of the study, the thesis reflects upon the particular choice of research methodology and research methods in the context of plurality in Chapter 4.

3. The formal response to pluralism

Chapter 5 explores how the Ismaili Muslim community is formally responding to religious plurality through its religious education.

4. Trainee-teachers' experience of pluralism

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 describe how the Ismaili individuals experience and engage with religious diversity. Chapter 6 investigates their experience of diversity within the Ismaili faith in the STEP. The seventh chapter examines the attitudes the participants held towards faith communities and worldviews other than their own, particularly intra-Islam, inter-faith and atheist perspectives. The eighth chapter investigates the way the STEP participants applied social scientific tools in the study of religion and its impact on their attitude to diversity.

5. Making sense and concluding the thesis

The ninth chapter synthesises the findings of the preceding four chapters in a 'rooted religious pluralisation' thesis. The concluding chapter summarises the thesis, reflects on its limitations and recommends areas of further research.

2. Religious Pluralism: The discourse and critique

This chapter provides theoretical underpinning to the thesis. In this thesis, Alan Race's (1983) typology 'inclusivism-exclusivism-pluralism' serves as a key theoretical lens to examine faith communities' attitudes to religious others. This chapter primarily focuses on three key threads of discourse on pluralism. Firstly, it explores both the basic and the nuanced meanings of the terms 'inclusivism', 'exclusivism' and 'pluralism'. Secondly, it identifies problems with pluralism. Thirdly, it examines an interactive relationship between the choice of ecumenism/ exclusivism paradigms by faith communities and their historical and political circumstances. I have used examples from three monotheistic faiths — Islam, Judaism and Christianity — to this end. Together, these ideas inform interpretation of data in subsequent chapters.

The 'Exclusivism-Inclusivism-Pluralism' Paradigm

There are many mutually incompatible proposals about how attitudes toward the religious other should be understood; however, Alan Race's (1983) typology 'inclusivism-exclusivism-pluralism' has emerged as an influential way of classifying them. It has become increasingly familiar in many disciplines, faith communities and political arenas across the world since the 1980s. Alan Race first proposed this highly influential threefold typology in his book *Christians and Religious Pluralism* in 1983 as a way of categorising Christian theologians' and thinkers' attitudes towards non-Christian religions. The typology mainly classifies individuals' judgments about truth-claims and the salvific potential of religions other than their own.

In broad terms, as far as truth is concerned, exclusivists believe that truth lies only within their own religious tradition. Inclusivists believe that the full truth lies within their own religion, while other religions express that truth only partially. Pluralists believe that the claims of most religious traditions are equally true. Insofar as salvation is concerned, pluralists insist that all religions are equally salvific: Inclusivists believe that their religion is the true path to salvation, yet other religions facilitate salvation of

people to a certain extent and exclusivists say that commitment to their religion is essential for salvation.

Although it is very difficult to find uncontroversial examples for each category, I briefly consider some of the best representatives of each position to explain the threefold paradigm in the following pages:

Exclusivism: The central idea in the Dutch theologian Kraemer's (1888-1965) major work *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938, 107) is that 'God has revealed the Way and the Life and the Truth in Jesus Christ and wills this to be known throughout the world'. His work resonated with his contemporary Barth (1886-1968). When Ceylonese theologian D. T. Niles asked Barth how he knew that Hinduism was 'unbelief' when he had never met a Hindu, Barth is said to have replied, '*A priori*- it is a given; it derives from revelation, not experience' (Boase 2010, 26).

Pluralists criticise exclusivist theological stance for its arrogance, for considering their own tradition as superior to others. D'Costa (1986) rejects Kraemer for compromising universal salvific will of God by insisting on salvation through Christ only.

Inclusivism: This occupies a middle ground between exclusivism and pluralism. Karl Rahner (1904-1984), the German Jesuit theologian, is an important proponent of theological inclusivism. He influenced the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate*. Rahner coined the term 'anonymous Christian' to suggest that individuals, irrespective if they are Christian or not, can be saved through the salvific grace of God, through Christ without them knowing about it (Clinton 1998).

Another noteworthy theory of inclusivism can be found in John Milbank (1952-), a Christian theologian and academic's 'ontology of peaceful difference'(2006). Drawing upon Augustine's argument Milbank suggests that all creatures are related to God and therefore to one another. Ultimately, this difference in relation is rooted within the inner life of the Trinity. He grounds peace in a historical, contingent community of the church. Milbank abhors discussing peace in the general or the abstract as that he sees this as giving in to liberal thought. In his view, peace comes from forgiveness of sins and reconciliation as embodied in the Church and without this no one can attain salvation.

Ernest Troeltsch's (1865-1923) approach to inclusivism is different from Milbank. He (1971) emphasises that people can acknowledge shared elements and common values and rejects Christian absolutism by granting legitimacy to the religious experience of other traditions. However, he upholds the relative superiority of Christianity and shows how Christian tradition has evolved through the ages, leading to greater ethical universality than that of other religions.

Exclusivist theologians criticise Rahner for emphasising the individual and downplaying community, history and institutions and failing to give enough importance to the unique history of Jesus (Muers and Higton 2012). Pluralists charge Rahner with patronising non-Christians by incorporating them in his Christian story of salvation (Muers and Higton 2012). Rahner revised his position to suggest that other faiths could also use this paradigm, for example, there can be 'anonymous Buddhists' (Clinton 1998). On the other hand, Milbank can be criticised for rooting the values of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation within the Church only. Troeltsch has avoided this criticism but can be accused, along with Milbank and Rahner, of arrogance for treating Christianity as superior than other religions. All three of them fall prey to Hick's (1989) suggestion that such positions are implicitly exclusivist. Hick claims that inclusivism is an invention of 20th century by Christians who have realised other religious traditions as having salvific efficacy while insisting on the superiority of their own religious traditions. D'Costa (1986) defends inclusivist paradigm, saying that it holds together the universal salvific will of God and the axiom that salvation alone comes through God in Christ.

Pluralism: The British theologian John Hick's (1922-2012) 'pluralist thesis' is one of the most debated pluralistic philosophies of religion. Hick proposes in his highly acclaimed book *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (1989) that the great world faiths embody different conceptions of and correspondingly different responses to the 'Real', the transcendent reality. Within each of these traditions, the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness takes place. Drawing on Kant, Hick distinguishes between the 'Real' as-it-is-in-itself (noumenal Real) and the Real as-it-appears in the act of human perception (phenomenal Real). What is Real for different religious traditions is historically and culturally informed, and absolutely nothing can be said or known about the divine in and of itself.

Hick has been heavily criticised. The first key criticism is that different religions make different, even contradictory truth-claims, how can all be equally valid? Satanism and Christianity or the claims that God exists and God does not exist cannot all be right at once. This is like saying that all economists make the same claim and have the same theories (Griffiths 2001).

The second set of criticisms questions the necessity of the Real and its attributes in Hick's thesis. Eddy (2002) argues that if nothing can be said of the Real and everything is merely a human construct then the noumenal Real is an unnecessary construct. However, if the presence of an external reality promotes moral behaviour, then the Real as-it-is-in-itself has an important explanatory role. Markham (2011) finds Hick's proposal inadequate on religious grounds. If the Real as-it-is-in itself is neither good nor just; if it does not act in history nor serves as the source of revelation, then there is nothing that would make it a suitable object of reverence and awe.

Hick (2010) defends that the Real is important in his scheme because it is the source of informational input into religious experiences. It facilitates the transformation of people from self-centeredness to Real-centeredness. This contradicts Hick's own claim that no attributes apply to the Real.

The third criticism finds Hick's thesis insufficiently pluralistic. Donovan (1993) argues that Hick assumes that all religions have the same aim and plurality lies only in our responses to it. We should let each community prescribe their own goals instead of trying to discern a common goal for all. Ward (2000) accuses Hick with exclusivism, since he focuses on faiths that are concerned with a belief in the transcendent. Many faiths do not hold such a belief. Barnes (2002) finds Hick intolerant, since he asks religious traditions to rewrite their theology to fit his pluralist paradigm.

The fourth charge against Hick's thesis is that it is vague in terms of how one god and different gods fit together. Mavrodes (2000) suggests that from Hick's theory several readings of the Real are possible. Either God is like a prince who appears in different disguises, or like a landscape, which different artists paint differently. Hick (2010) responds that the Real is not like the prince because it does not have definite characteristics and unlike the landscape, the Real cannot be experienced directly.

Hick (1997; 2010) in turn responds that pluralism is the best way to conceptualise diversity. Employing the research of Smith (1991) Hick defends the idea that religions

are not mutually exclusive entities. It was only in the 17th century that the Christian West developed the notion of religions as mutually exclusive ideological communities. D'Costa (2000) responds that this still does not render labels such as 'Christians' or 'Muslims' meaningless. Hick (2010) defends his position that the universe is ambiguous and religious traditions provide people with interpretive frameworks with which to interpret events in their lives. The dominant cultural ethos at certain times and places makes certain types of beliefs about God possible over others. Therefore, Basinger (2002) defends Hick that his concern is not what can be justifiably affirmed on the face of diversity, he is primarily concerned with which response is more reasonable today.

Unpacking the Threefold Paradigm Further

Robert McKim in his work *On Religious Diversity* (2012) argues that these categories have been considered in a sweeping fashion. If one is exclusivist then he is exclusivist through and through and if one is pluralist then he is pluralist through and through. When confronted with diversity there might be in-between views or neither, or one might decide that the wise course would be to stand outside the threefold typology for an indefinite period, or tentatively. Alternatively, one might have different attitudes towards different traditions, perhaps being exclusivist about some and inclusivist about others; or one might continue to belong to their traditions but become tentative in their beliefs as a member of that tradition. There are many other possibilities too. McKim provides a nuanced understanding of the threefold paradigm as follows:

Exclusivism
Exclusivism by its nature excludes. According to McKim, there are many ways by which someone may be excluded. Hence, exclusivism has several options. 'Closed exclusivism' would be to say that 'Our tradition is entirely right and all other traditions are entirely wrong'. McKim argues that such closed exclusivism is not plausible because the traditions have too many things in common. For instance, if the monotheistic claims of one tradition were correct, the other monotheistic tradition would be correct when they say that God exists. It is possible for some to say that other traditions are correct when they accept our claims and they are mistaken when they reject our claims. Gellman (2000, 401) defines an exclusivist as someone who 'believes

that her religion is true and that other religions are false insofar as they contradict her home religion'. This leads to a possibility of exclusivism that is limited to a particular topic. Nonetheless, McKim says, some people go all the way in this regard. The Roman Catholic theology's *extra ecclessiam nulla salus,* 'Outside the church there is no salvation' is an example of pure exclusivism.

McKim says that the best way to approach exclusivism is to think of it as extending over a continuum, the extreme ends of which are 'closed' and 'open'. In 'closed' exclusivism, the claim is that we are completely right and others are completely wrong, whereas in 'open' exclusivism, others may enjoy some success in the relevant respects, although we certainly outscore them. If others score moderately well this is because their views and our views overlap. Overlap, too, is subjective. It can be about important or unimportant matters. It can overlap slightly with the views of some and considerably with others.

According to McKim, it is usual for religious communities to believe that they are superior and that their ideals, their reasoning and their religious perspective exceptionally equip them better than those of others. Such views about one's community promote solidarity and a sense of shared identity. However, McKim questions whether each group is the best judge for its own case, whether such an interpretation might not be somewhat self-congratulatory. According to McKim, this does not mean that exclusivist beliefs are always self-serving, because some believers may have sacrificed a lot to belong to a certain religion, they may also feel humbled by seeing themselves as the recipients of the divine grace. The question is whether everyone has the chance of winning (McKim 2012, 64). William Rowe (2000, 164) argues that the merciful deity would not allow hundreds of thousands of people to die in other religions without ever having heard of the path of salvation.

Inclusivism

Inclusivism by its nature includes. McKim states that it does not, however, clarify what is it that one is being included to, to what extent and who is being included? Does it involve only central and important matters? Does it consist of matters related to doctrines, practices or ethics? There seem to be two dimensions present in inclusivism. The first dimension is 'the best route' syndrome, meaning that our tradition is better equipped than other traditions in getting one to the desired destination. The second dimension is that there is a willingness to learn from other religious traditions. For

Griffiths (1991), 'closed' inclusivism involves the idea that others do well, but not better than we do. 'Open' inclusivism in contrast, means that we learn from others and that is already part of our tradition.

According to McKim, inclusivism can be seen as extending over a continuum. It is possible that we could be closed inclusivist for some traditions and open inclusivist for others. Alternatively, we might see some traditions as a phase or the way to the development of our tradition, which is the most fully developed tradition. For instance, for the Bahá'i faith the religions that came prior to it are phases towards it and historically some Christian groups have seen Judaism as earlier stage to Christianity. Alternatively, we might think that other traditions have truths that were appropriate for the time and place in which they were first enunciated, but are no longer relevant. Thus, there are many ways to map the inclusivist terrain. The key desire is to make space for others.

Pluralism

The term pluralism was attested in 1882 in philosophy for 'a theory which recognises more than one ultimate principle' (Harper 2013a). Some scholars use the term pluralism as a descriptive concept, to refer to the uncontroversial fact of religious plurality and some use it to denote a normative commitment to plurality (Skeie 2007). Netland (2004, 24) uses the term pluralism in the following way:

> *By this is meant a set of assumptions and values that celebrate religious diversity as something good and is deeply suspicious of attempts to privilege any one tradition or perspective as normative for all people.*

Pluralism is different from tolerance: tolerance means putting up with something that one dislikes (Robinson et al. 2001). Religious toleration is also a political and legal term denoting an absence of punitive sanctions for the practice of one's religion. However, 'it does not imply that one shares or even likes the views of others, nor does it imply any openness to dialogue' (van der Straten Waillet and Roskam 2013, 71).

Schilbrack (2003) categorises approaches to pluralism into 'convergent' and 'non-convergent' types. Convergent views say that there is just one reality that is variously interpreted validly (for example Hick). Non-convergent proposals claim that the reality is relative to particular religious traditions. As Schilbrack puts it (2003, 107), 'the Hindu…[is] right that Brahman is the ultimate reality, the Buddhist…[is] also right that emptiness is the ultimate reality and the Christian …[is] right that the Trinity is the

ultimate reality'. Joseph Runzo (1988, 347) has labelled this position as 'religious relativism'.

McKnight (2000, 433) critiques relativistic proposals that pluralism is not about claiming that there are no right and wrong answers but that there may be more than one answers. The pluralist's slogan is not 'anything goes' but rather 'several things go'. 'Anything goes' is relativism, not pluralism. Eck (2005) argues that pluralism is not a radical openness to anything and everything that drains meaning from particularity. Murphy (1990) criticises sweeping pluralism on the basis that if one cannot evaluate a tradition negatively, neither can one evaluate it positively.

Most pluralistic proposals fit into three broad categories. I categorise them into 'truth-claims oriented', the 'shared-ground oriented' and the 'integrated' positions. The 'truth-claims oriented' proposals are concerned with doctrinal religious difference (e.g. Hick).

In the 'shared-grounds oriented' approach, finding common positions beyond the truth-claims assumes a much greater significance. This approach does not require the endorsement of pluralism about truth or salvation but the affirmation of common positions. There are several overlapping proposals for how the notion of 'shared grounds' must be interpreted. For instance, a shared-grounds proposal sees universal values such as love, care, forgiveness and serving others as a common ground (Basinger 2002). Swidler's (1995) 'Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic', urges religions to find grounds for the support of universal human rights and a concern for conservation of the Earth. Harvey Cox (2009) advances 'liberation theology', for religions to fight against poverty and oppression instead of fighting over God. Cosmopolitanism is also a pluralistic approach. Appiah (2007) proposes that it is an attitude that combines moral concern for all people with a willingness to let others live their own lives. John Rawls' 1971 (1999) book speaks of 'social contract theory of justice', which is based on the idea that people could in principle agree on a definite notion of the person and the good life. His (1987) later revised position, 'overlapping consensus', holds that a consensus could be supported from each comprehensive doctrine according to moral principles. McIntyre (1984) submits that ethicists can unite on practical issues or applied ethics, as context-specific reasoning overcomes abstract differences.

In short, the shared-grounds oriented proposals are concerned with arriving at some kind of agreement for pragmatic reasons. In this, differences relegate to private space and commonalities acquire significance in public sphere.

The 'integrated approach' brings the two categories (truth-centred and shared-grounds) together in varied combinations. It upholds the right and freedom of everyone to subscribe to what they believe to be true about religion and even claim it as the only true way (Tan 2011). This stance is reflected in Suleiman's (2009, 39) proposal, 'No faith community should be forced in any way to compromise the integrity of its belief system in order to be part of this admirable code of co-existence'.

To sum up, pluralism is a contested concept and there are different proposals as to what it means, and, if indeed it is desirable, how it might be achieved.

Intolerance of Pluralism

Pluralism is self-contradictory as it claims liberal moral superiority over other stances (Galston 2002). It implies a value preference over others. This especially comes to the fore when human rights and religious and cultural values clash. Examples of such a clash include the right of people from some African societies to practice on 'cultural' grounds Female Genital Mutilation in the UK, or the United States' legal prohibition against the polygamy of certain Mormon sects. The UNESCO *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* and the United Nations' documents unambiguously uphold that 'the norms of multiculturalism cannot be used to outweigh the right of man (or woman)' (Kymlicka 2007, 6). The key charge against pluralism is that due to a homogeneous logic of human rights and liberal principles, pluralism irons out plurality.

Some commentators see religious pluralism as ideological and imperialistic. Mouffe (1996;1999) cautions against the uncritical celebration of difference. The experiences and perspectives of marginalised and oppressed groups are likely to be very different from dominant groups. Mouffe (1996, 246) argues that is important to scrutinise the terms of engagement through which differences might be judged and valued. For Pluralism has to be a critical engagement. Dryzek and Niemeyer (2006), in agreement with Mouffe, propose that an open communication across difference is key to

resolution. Paul Morris (1990) draws on Foucault's analysis of the coercive powers of liberalism: a state, whose success depends on modern economy' control of every aspect of human life; even ways of thinking about diversity to facilitate the economy.

Moreover, there seems to be a clear link between pluralistic proposals and their proponents' stance on religion. Griffiths (2001) points out that the questions raised by religious diversity will often look very different, depending on whether one is looking at diversity from inside a religious way of life or from outside it. The answers that may appeal to those who are inside or outside may be different. Those outside may think that it is high time religions shed their arrogance and see other religions as equal. They may also make claims that apply indifferently to all religious people. This is a very practical issue for any community of faith seriously engaging with others.

In response to the criticisms of 'intolerance of pluralism', Donovan (1993) draws a distinction between respect for liberty of opinion as an epistemological principle and liberalism as ideology. Donovan argues that critics have failed to distinguish pluralistic tolerance as an epistemic requirement, from ideological pluralism. It is clearly one thing to say pluralism is a way to finding truth and quite another to say 'pluralism is the Truth' (Donovan 1993, 220). Not all liberal thinkers have been ideologically committed to a 'modernist' project. Donovan draws upon the classic defence of epistemic liberalism found in J. S. Mill's essay *On Liberty*. Tolerance of free thought, Mill argues, is the best guarantee there is that truth will emerge from debate and that knowledge will be maintained based on openness to radical critical scrutiny and not based on authority and tradition. This is the essence of liberalism. This, Donovan says, provides the needed protection against liberalism developing into a totalitarian ideology.

Other Conceptions of Engaging with Religious Diversity

Peter Byrne (2010) considers four responses to epistemological problems arising out of religious diversity. One is 'apologetic investment'. In this, one is required to prove that their religion is true over and against the rest (e.g. Swinburne 1981; 2005). If they cannot produce such grounds then they need to reflect on their opponent's positions and be willing to accept their grounds if they are able to prove them. Second is 'atheism'.

Byrne uses the term to mean rejection of a transcendent reality. Third is 'agnosticism'. Broadly, an agnostic is a person who 'believes that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God' (Oxford Dictionaries 2013) and therefore they demonstrate a non-committal attitude towards religious beliefs. Fourth position is anti-evidentialism. It denies apologetic obligation. The believers are under no obligation to reflect on substantive and truth-indicative grounds for their beliefs. Religious believers remain assured of their particular beliefs despite diversity. A famous proponent of this stance is Plantinga (1983; 2012), who contends that religious believers who are aware of diversity can justifiably *sit tight* in their beliefs.

When confronted with religious diversity, some of the other choices available to individuals are: 'separation' or 'conversion' (Griffiths 2001). 'Separation' involves isolating the religious Alien. It is to decide that you want nothing at all to do with them. Amish separatism is an example of comprehensive separation. 'Conversion' involves domesticating the religious other. It can be through either force or persuasion.

These attitudes overlap with the threefold typology of exclusivism-inclusivism-pluralism.

Pluralism as a Modern Construct

A few years ago, when I mentioned my interest in this topic to a philosopher of religion, he asked, 'When did differences become 'diversity'?' In the past, the term religious diversity carried a negative meaning in English from the late 15th century, as 'being contrary to what is agreeable or right; perversity, evil' (Harper 2013b). In the 1650s, diversity also signified dissidence, derived from the Latin *dissidentia* (Harper 2013b). Today, the term 'religious diversity', refers to the fact that there are significant differences among religious adherents, mostly in a neutral sense (Meister 2011). It has also acquired a positive connotation in policy discourse. The notion of religious diversity, however, is still changing with the emergence of new perspectives on postmodernity, gender and sexuality.

The journey from conceiving of differences as diversity in the Modern West is interesting. The turning point in the modern history of religion in the West was the

signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 (Turner 2007). It not only ended the Wars of Religion that had beleaguered Europe, but also set the wave of liberality in motion in Western Europe that eventually led to suitable conditions for pluralism. Milton's ideas, as presented in *Areopagitica* in 1644, propelled the need for the liberty of thought and conscience. Locke's famed *Letter Concerning Toleration,* written in 1689, contended for full civil rights and freedom of public worship for different religions. Kant's (1784), definition of Enlightenment invigorated rational freedom from revelation and religious authority. Further, Darwin's 1859 theory of evolution strongly challenged Biblical revelations. The new academic departments of Comparative Religion, the History of Religions and the Science of Religion shook many assumptions within Christian theology. In due course, the liberal philosophies of individual freedom and autonomy became powerful axioms of modernity and deeply penetrated into the Western politics, education, and theology. Protestantism emerged as a model of religion that allowed and even encouraged individualism (Gearon, 2013a). By the 19th century, writings such as Higginson's 'The Sympathy of Religions' emerged (1876). It recommended recognising universal commonalities among different religious sources. Later, in the mid-20th century, the Holocaust provoked an urgent reassessment of Christian attitudes to Judaism. By the 1970s, many parts of the West had become much more multi-religious societies owing to colonisation and industrialisation and that prompted further shifts in the discourse on religious differences.

Thus, the wave of liberal religious tolerance initiated with the Treaty of Westphalia eventually reached a point in the West where appreciation of differences rather than assimilation or integration started to assume the high moral ground in political arena. Talal Asad (1993) has, however, warned that the seeds of liberalism that lie in the Wars of Religion presume that religion in public life is inherently divisive. The danger is that what passes as liberal tolerance of religion in the West is in fact liberal indifference to religion.

Here it is worth noting that even though the contemporary term 'pluralism' did not exist in the past, attitudes of tolerance, openness to the other people's religious orientations and respect for other people and cultures are not modern attitudes. We can find humanistic attitudes in history across cultures. Therefore, when I say pluralism is a modern construct, what I refer to is a normative commitment to the promotion of

conditions in which religiously diverse groups can flourish, with the assumption that such flourishing is a desirable goal; this, I argue is in many ways distinctively modern.

Another important point to note is that the discourse on pluralism, as discussed here, is limited to monotheistic contexts. In the absence of non-Western discourse of religious diversity in polytheistic traditions in the literature published in English, it is not possible to offer a full assessment of the range of possible attitudes that individuals or faith communities might hold toward other beliefs.

Discourse on Pluralism in the Muslim Context

As in the case of Christianity, there is no common 'Muslim position' on religious plurality. On the one hand, groups like the so-called Islamic State, Al-Qaida and the Taliban promote exclusivist interpretations; on the other hand, there are those who find such interpretations inappropriate (Al-Azmeh 2009). Even within the latter group that backs pluralism, at least two broader stances are discernible. The first type sees pluralism as an inherently Islamic value, integral to the message of Islam. Scholars such as Neyazi (2002);Carney (2008); Al-Ahsan (2009) and Chak (2009) argue that while the Qurʾān speaks of tolerance, it is Muslims and their leaders who offer weak interpretations of Islamic notion of tolerance. Sachedina (2001) even attempts to show the Islamic roots of democratic pluralism in the Qurʾān, and Aslan (1998) proposes a theoretical framework for an 'Islamic religious pluralism'. The second type suggests that Muslims must draw upon historical moments and perceptions from Muslim history which engage positively with the fact of diversity but one must not make it an apologetic endeavour (Filali-Ansary and Karmali 2009). The objective is not to say that Muslims have always been pluralists; neither is it to say that positive attitudes to diversity were marginal in Muslim history. Ibrahim (2014) observes that from the Qurʾān conciliatory stances as well as uneasy relationships both can be read. We need to make conciliatory reading from the Qurʾān and reject reading of the Qurʾān that supports extremism as well as Islamophobia.

In backing pluralism in the Muslim context, both groups of scholars selectively draw upon the Qurʾān and the *Ḥadīth*, the life of the Prophet Muḥammad and Muslim history to develop their pluralist stance. The difference is that apologetic scholars utilise these

primary textual sources of Islam to prove how pluralism has always been part of Islam, while non-apologetic scholars draw upon them as a pragmatic strategy to legitimise the case for pluralism among Muslims.

As far as the Qurʾān is concerned, the verses often cited to defend religious pluralism are as follows: 'There is no compulsion in religion' (2:256); 'We have made you in tribes and nations so that you may know one another' (49:1), and; 'If He had willed you to be one, He would have made you in one nation' (11:118-19). The universal salvific will of Allah is highlighted through verses such as 35:24, which says that God has willed his message for all people. The verse 3:84 can be interpreted as presenting Islam as a religion that accepts all faiths. It asserts that people will be judged based on their moral conduct rather than religion. Aslan (1998) contends that Islam never said that there is no salvation outside of normative Islam. The Qurʾān does not say that particular people will be saved, but that whoever believes will be saved. The verse (29:46) speaks of 'People of the Book', which includes Jews, Muslims, and Christians. In later times, there was expansion of this term to include Zoroastrians and Hindus as Islam spread over other regions, by some Muslim groups (Asani 2003). Being a 'Muslim' is interpreted broadly as 'submitter to God' and thus Islam includes pre-Islamic figures such as Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus as its prophets.

In addition, examples from the history of Muslims have also been used to illustrate Islam's positive position on religious diversity (Asani 2003; Shah-Kazemi 2006; 2012). For instance, the 'Constitution of Madinah' can be presented as recognising Jews as a community of believers. The treaty of the Prophet Muḥammad signed with the Christians of Najaran is also held as evidence of the Prophet's respect for other religions. ʿAlī (d. 661), for the Sunnis the fourth Caliph and for the Shia the Shi'i Imam, instructed his governor in Egypt to treat all subjects under his rule with kindness and respect, including non-Muslims who he declared to be 'your equal in creation' (Asani 2003). Examples of pluralism and tolerance are also drawn from the reign of the Ottomans, the Moorish Spain and the Fāṭimids in Egypt. Muslim dynasties recognised non-Muslims as members of the Islamic state and made active legislation regarding their rights and welfare. It is also argued that Muslims by and large did not resort to forced conversions (Khuri 1997).

Additionally, pluralist commentators see internal diversity within Islam as attesting to the pluralist nature of Islam. The existence of several schools of jurisprudence and mystic groups such as the Ṣūfīs are hailed as examples of pluralist tendencies within Islam. Hasan Askari (Hick and Askari 1985) suggests that differences between monotheistic faiths must be interpreted symbolically and not literally. Religious differences can be transcended at a mystical level.

Asani (2003) traces the reasons why exclusivist interpretations of Islam developed in history. Islamic hegemony first emerged in eight and ninth centuries when Islam became the religion of the Arab empire of the Umayyads. Muslim exegetes began to interpret the Qurʾān in ways, which tried to establish an Islamic hegemony by promoting the idea that Muslims were superior to other religions. Through Islam, they were able to build solidarity among the Arab tribes and clans. The term *jihad* also became popularised as a term used for political expansion. During the 17th and 18th centuries, purist movements within Islam targeted a whole range of practices and beliefs of their fellow Muslims. They also came to view Christians and Jews as infidels rather than monotheists. In modern times, fundamentalist groups within Islam use this line of exclusivity.

The selective reading of religious sources and history has been criticised. Muslim exclusivists criticise pluralism as a means to diminish Islam's ultimate authority (Al-Azmeh 2009), whereas the scholars such as Demant (2006) argue against Islam's claim to religious equality. He argues that Muslims have historically treated three groups less equally − slaves, women and non-Muslims and that *dhimmi* was actually a polemical and theological term on which Christianity and Judaism were considered as valid but incomplete forms of revelations, which Islam completed. The Ottomans, the Moors, and the Fāṭimids cannot be considered pluralistic according to modern definitions. The concept of equality of opportunity is a modern phenomenon. Bowden (2005) adds that an atheist stance was punished in Muslim societies. Friedmann (2003) notes that in view of the dogma asserting the finality of Muḥammad's prophet hood, any prophetic claim after him made under the Muslim rule was suppressed. Whether Muslims are allowed to abandon Islam or question its basic tenets is an issue in many Muslim societies.

Demant (2006) argues that describing a reasonable treatment by Muslims of the 'other' in history as pluralism as we understand it today would be anachronistic. For example,

taking tribal consultation that goes by the name of *shura* for democracy is false, since democracy involves the notions of citizenship, of representation, legitimacy and political parties. No amount of drawing positively from the past can prevent such anachronisms.

Arkoun (2012) responds that just as calling historical events pluralism is anachronistic, seeing historical events as exclusivism is also an anachronism. Arkoun provides a few examples from the Qurʾān to suggest that those verses could be interpreted negatively in the modern context, but that doing so would be anachronistic, since it would project backwards the current philosophy of human rights and ignore the fundamental lesson of the verse as a whole, which is not outmoded. Arkoun calls for the urgent need for a modern rereading of these sacred texts that takes account of the historical context. (Filali-Ansary and Karmali 2009) propose that rather than denying the existence of certain intolerant notions in Muslim historical experience, modern Muslims might instead admit such elements, while at the same time exercising their power to reject these and embrace the more liberal and tolerant principles of their tradition.

I suggest that when ideologies of pluralism and multiculturalism are perceived in the past, the charge of anachronism is always present. However, the spirit behind these approaches and some of the attitudes that go with these 'isms', must not be denied the past as it would cast modernity as 'progress' and the pre-modern as 'uncivilized'. Pluralism may be a modern philosophy but it is important to remember that humanistic attitudes are present in history alongside intolerant attitudes.

Al-Azmeh (2009) rightly argues that generalising pluralism across fourteen centuries and several continents is a highly problematic proposition. Muslims have lived in a variety of settings with attendant social and religious arrangements like other religious communities, none of which should be essentialised, despite the ideological demand for such an imagined unity.

The Politics of 'Reading' Pluralism in History

The debate outlined gives rise to the question: How should we read the past? The Christians, the Jews and the Muslims have shared a complex history as significant others for each other and therefore, depending on what is in demand, an exclusivist or pluralist reading of the past can be rendered. McKim (2012) suggests it would be illuminating to review the conduct of different religious communities, both now and across their history, both when they have been powerful and when they have been a powerless minority in order to assess how they have engaged with religious differences. Differences may be exacerbated in times of tension and similarities may be overstated when ecumenism is wanted or allies are needed. Openness to others may also depend on the history of interaction with each other. It also depends on which particular voices are influential at the time.

One can find intolerant stances in history. The historical conditions in which the relations among the three monotheistic traditions were formed, Bernard Lewis (1985) observes, were not always ones in which religious freedom or equality of religions in the modern sense were considered as positive or desirable notions. Therefore, the texts of different religious traditions, in particular Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are full of attacks on their religious other. During the medieval period, religious disputes grew fervent. Gillis (1993) observes that the well-known phrase *'extra ecclesiam nulla salus'* (outside the Church no salvation) had largely shaped Catholic response to other religions. In Christianity, anti-Semitism has had a long history. Similarly, in the history of Islam, following the battles of Uhud and al-Khandaq in 625 CE and 627 CE, large numbers of Jewish tribes were put to death in Medina.

History also shows conciliatory stances (Gillis 1993). For example the Second General Council of Nicea in 787 CE, held that Jews who did not wish to convert to Christianity should be allowed to live openly as Jews. In 1076 CE, Pope Gregory VII wrote to the Muslim king of Mauritania that Muslims and Christians worship the same God in different ways. The Ottomans offered refuge to Jews fleeing from Spain, Germany and Eastern Europe.

There has also been considerable intercultural interaction among the three monotheistic traditions (Haskins 1927; Watt 1994; Katz 1998; Fakhry 2010). During the ʿAbbāsid

period (750-1258), the exceptional Ancient Greek texts in science, medicine, and philosophy were translated into Arabic. These were transmitted to Western Europe in the later Middle Ages. In the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas interpreted Christian revelation by using the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato, which he encountered through the writings of the Arab scholar Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d.1126). The major Jewish thinker Maimonides (d.1204) adapted the stringent criticism Muslim theologian al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111) had made of Islamic philosophers. Translation of Averroes' commentaries of Aristotle in 13th century by European scholars influenced the rise of rationalism and humanism in the Western Europe. The Crusaders and the Arabs learned a great deal in the military, social and agricultural fields from each other and a large number of Arabic loan words found their way into most European languages, such as sugar, orange, alcohol, saffron, arsenal, algebra, calibre, cipher and zero (Watt 1994). Far from the so-called 'clash of civilisations', it could be argued that there was an active intercultural and intellectual exchange.

Given such complex relationship between the three monotheistic faiths, it is possible that retrospectively faith communities can construct an exclusivist narrative, an inclusivist narrative or a pluralist narrative by a selective reading of the past.

How Should We 'Read' the Present? The politics of 'Judeo-Christian' versus 'Abrahamic' tradition

In order to understand the present-day politics of pluralism between the three monotheistic traditions it is important to understand which actors use the term 'Judeo-Christian' or 'Abrahamic traditions', when and to what end. According to Novick (2000), the term 'Judeo-Christian' referring to shared ethics between Judaism and Christianity, first appeared in the USA in 1939, with the phrase 'the Judaeo-Christian scheme of morals' in the New English Weekly. In the following decade, the term was promoted widely in the West in this sense. The reason for this is rooted in the United States of America's policy of dealing with its religious differences. The early settlers in North America consisted of adherents of different varieties of Christianity that were persecuted in Europe. After independence from England, the USA institutionalised a system that encouraged Americans to think of different denominations of Christianity as

part of one religion, rather than the sectarian exclusivism that existed in much of Europe (Wentz 1997). Later with the migration of European Jews into the USA in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the USA invented 'the myth of Judeo-Christian tradition' as a means of expanding the denominational system to maintain peace (Silk 1984). The diversity of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant traditions, therefore, was sometimes presented as variant expressions of a shared religious heritage.

Before 11th September 2011, there were efforts to replace 'Judeo-Christian' to the 'Abrahamic' model to include Islam. The 'Abrahamic' model seeks to mediate Christian, Jews and Muslims.[15] Elsewhere in the world, Pope, Jordon's King Abdullah II and the scores of Christian, Muslim and Jewish organisations, concerned with the three monotheistic faith's unity had already begun propagating this term. However, today Islamophobia poses serious obstacle to this effort in the West. This anti-Islamic attitude can be interpreted as anti-pluralistic (Asani, 2003).

The 'Judeo-Christian' and 'Abrahamic' models are now being challenged by 'global pluralism' and 'new religious pluralism' paradigms in the USA to include all religious and non-religious life-stances. Further, what is known as 'global theology' and 'interreligious theology' has called for seeing religious traditions as part of a common human heritage that have interacted throughout history (Foster 2010).

This shows the changing articulation of the relationship between religions in given political-historical circumstances and the capacity of powerful voices to shape the discourse.

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[15] The Abrahamic tradition model is contested. Groups such as the Bahá'i , Rastafarians, Samaritans and Falashas also trace their roots back to Abraham, but often their claims are denounced by other Muslim, Christian and Jew groups (http://religioustolerance.org).

Conclusion

Drawing upon Alan Race's (1983) typology inclusivism-exclusivism-pluralism, this chapter explored the Christian and Muslim responses to plurality. It can be deduced that the ways in which individuals and faith communities respond to religious plurality cannot be seen as free from their socio-political context, sweeping and static throughout their history. Differences may be exaggerated in times of tension and similarities may be overstated when ecumenism is wanted or allies are needed (McKim 2012). It is possible that through time and cultural and geographic space, some groups or individuals may slip from one position to another, or may adopt differential approaches towards different traditions, or different individuals may interpret their situation differently. Thus, I end this chapter with Eck's (2005) insight that pluralism is an 'active engagement with plurality' (Eck 2005, 41).

3. Religious Education in the Context of Religious Diversity

This chapter examines broader discourse on religious education (RE) in the context of religious plurality. It focuses on two key settings: England and Wales, and on Muslim RE in general. This is because the STEP programme brings together traditions of Islamic education and Western approaches to RE. The reason for focussing on England and Wales is that post-1970 developments in British RE have affected RE in other national and faith communities. In particular, the Ismaili Muslim community's partnership with British educational institutions for designing and delivering their RE goes back over 25 years. The University of London awards the dual-Master's degrees of the STEP. The reason for discussing Muslim RE is that the STEP represents modern developments in Muslim religious education. In this chapter, I also elucidate on how this study contributes to the current discourse.

This chapter contains three key sections. Firstly, the chapter explores the changes in socio-historical circumstances, which have made the issue of diversity pertinent in RE in England and Wales. Secondly, it describes various approaches to RE that have emerged to address religious plurality in the last sixty years in RE in England and Wales. After this, I will discuss Muslim responses to RE. There is a dearth of literature on faith communities' response to RE in the context of religious diversity. This is precisely why the current study makes a useful contribution to the debate.

Jackson (2007) discusses various connotations of the term 'religious education'. In England and Wales, the term religious education refers to the subject taught in state funded schools. Its aim is not transmission of religious culture from one generation to the next; rather, it is to promote understanding of different religious traditions for all pupils. Some scholars use the term religious education to denote 'religious upbringing', whereas in UK there is a tendency to use the term 'religious nurture' in this sense. Some authors argue that such a distinction is not useful as there is a fine line between learning *from* and learning *about* religion (Teece 2010).

The Changing Religious Education Landscape

Over the past sixty years, RE has moved through three broad phases of religious diversity in state schools in England and Wales (Grimmitt, 2000; Wright, 2004; Barnes, 2012). The phase up until the 1960s can be described as 'traditional diversity', as RE reflected the perception of Britain as a Christian society (Barnes 2012). It entailed teaching a broad non-denominational version of Christianity in a nurturing environment. Pedagogically, RE was confessional, instructional, and catechetical. The belief in the authority of revelatory sources was paramount and critical thinking and autonomy were not necessarily seen as desirable goals in RE. It affirmed Christianity as the primary basis for national and personal identity and thinking positively about the wider religious plurality in society was not considered essential to the role of RE.

In the1960s, far-reaching changes occurred in British society leading to RE responding to 'modern diversity'. Post-war immigration made it a multi-religious society (Barnes 2012). The secular, atheist and humanist lobbies also began strongly to challenge the equation of RE, moral education and good citizenship. Moreover, the psychological investigations by Louke (1961), Goldman (1964) and others found that the content and pedagogies of RE were not appropriate for children's developmental levels.

These, among other factors, resulted in a shift in thinking about RE. What emerged was a 'modern RE' deeply influenced by the Enlightenment's notion of reason, autonomy, freedom and progress. The term 'Enlightenment', clearly a very positive self-description, regarded the previous era as 'the age of darkness' and saw itself as 'progress' (Muers and Higton 2012). The Enlightenment was concerned about what human beings can know without reference to traditions or external authorities. In 1693, John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* challenged the idea of indoctrination. These ideas were further developed by Rousseau's 1762 work *Emile* in (2009) and Kant's *Lectures on Pedagogy* in 1803. The tradition that came to be known as 'liberal education' emerged from these discussions, emphasising the two key principles: of child's freedom of thought and autonomy of the individual. Freedom claims much higher value in modern RE than religion. With the construction of reason as a reliance on ourselves rather than on traditions, the principle of verification became the dominant criterion for determining knowledge and truth (Wright 2004). This

demanded that all truth claims must be tested against empirical evidence. Statements are considered meaningless in those instances where it is impossible to show how they could be verified as true or falsified. This raised question whether utterances about God tell us anything about god, or only about human beings (Muers and Higton 2012). By the 19th century, different readings of religion as a human phenomenon rather than a response to divine revelation had begun to emerge from economic, political science and psychological perspectives (Valdes 1991). Consequently, in the British state's approach to RE, 'religion' became an artefact of human culture that is best studied using social scientific methods (Wright, 2004). Consequently, RE teachers are not required to be trained by their specific faith communities or committed to any religion in England and Wales. It is essentially a 'secular' subject.

According to Wright (2004), Wittgenstein understood the implications of this situation better than most. In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* published in 1921, Wittgenstein (2007a, 108) joined the logical positivists in proclaiming that 'the natural world is all that is the case'; but his genius lay in advising that everything else, all our moral, aesthetic and religious concerns, must be left unspoken: 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent'. Thus, he made a space for 'the inexpressible' which 'shows itself; it is the mystical' (Wittgenstein 2007a, 108).

The Romantic Movement that ran parallel with rationalism brought back the significance of emotion and intuition in modern RE. Towards the end of the 1960s, Smith (1991) distinguished between religious doctrines as the outward expression of inner religious experience and doctrines as dogma. If experience is taken to be primary and is common to all religions, then it is possible to achieve common ground regardless of religious differences. This, further influenced modern RE's approach to plurality.

Since the 1990s, RE in England and Wales has undergone further transformation to account for globalisation and postmodernist thought. Lyotard (1984, xxiv) described 'postmodernity' as 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. It rejects total explanation of reality, ideological positions that he terms 'grand narratives'. Postmodernity criticises modernity's three key features. Firstly, it problematizes the modern notion of universal rationality by redefining it as contextual. What counts as rational is relative to the prevailing narrative in a society. Reason is situated within particular narratives, traditions, institutions and practices (Wright 2004). Secondly, postmodernity

deconstructs modern epistemology. Whereas modernity regards knowledge as 'objective', supported by reason, and scientific observation, postmodernism is radically relativistic with regard to knowledge and truth claims. Instead of seeing language as corresponding to empirical reality, postmodernism emphasises the slipperiness of language. Meaning is tied to the use of language within particular ways of life. Postmodernists see knowledge as relative to different ways of life and recognise the role of power in this. Post-modernity is thus characterised by ambiguity, uncertainty and contradiction which is clearly unlike the modern desire to order and control reality.

Postmodernity clearly has important consequences for RE. According to Lyotard (1984) it challenges not only secular narratives, but also religious ones. It questions the narrative of traditional societies. Postmodernity is also defined by the 'loss of a centre'. It deconstructs binary opposites such as orthodoxy and heresy, true believer and infidel, saint and sinner, the sacred and profane (Jackson 2004). All are seen as discourse dependent. Taylor (1992, 489) criticises postmodernity that 'Is it then simply a case of replacing the tyranny of objective knowledge with tyranny of subjective opinions?' Beckford (1992, 19) raises the question, 'what, if anything, does postmodernity seek to put in its place?' For a postmodernist this is a modernist question (Wright 2004). The deconstruction of language leaves postmodern readers free to create their own readings. Pedagogically, then a postmodern RE essentially encourages young people to deconstruct traditional narratives and construct their own.

In summary, the development of modern RE in England and Wales has been influenced by traditional, modern, and postmodern approaches to plurality.

Pedagogical Approaches to Religious Education in the Context of Religious Plurality

In this section, we will journey through the approaches to RE that have emerged in the last six decades in response to the issue of religious plurality. I divide these approaches into two broad categories: 'pluralistic' and 'truth-centred'. The 'pluralistic' pedagogies are not concerned with the truth or otherwise of religious claims. They do not claim to nurture children in religions that they teach but treat religion as a phenomenon of human culture. While pluralist approaches aim to facilitate children in developing their own stance on the matter, they also assume religion as a significant factor in social harmony and therefore often strive for generating some sort of consensus among pupils on matters of religion. Some pluralist approaches view religions as discrete, fixed and equally valid entities (for instance, Phenomenological RE), while others see religion as highly subjective, fluid and dynamic processes (e.g. Personal Narrative approach to RE). Some pluralist approaches lie somewhere in the middle (e.g. Interpretive RE). On the other hand, 'truth-centred' approaches are more concerned with the relative validity of religious claims than social cohesion. Some of these tend to be exclusivist as they view that their own religion offers unique access to the truth. Other truth-centred approaches assume that different people perceive reality in different ways, but that it is nevertheless possible to determine truth (e.g. Evaluative RE).

Both pluralist and truth-centred approaches entail a range of pedagogical models. Watson (1993) has suggested that these models might even converge with each other, subsuming what is seen as good in all the previous models. This means that it is not always possible to straightjacket them in fixed categories. The following section elaborates on these approaches.

Pluralist Approaches to Religious Education

> In a society like ours where the creation of tolerance and understanding must be rated as an important social goal, it seems unwise to take the risk. *(Hull cited in Bates et al. 2012, 26)*

In broad terms, the pluralist pedagogies do not claim to nurture children in religions that they teach, but treat religion as a phenomenon of human culture. The assumption underlying this approach is that religion is not merely a private but also a public concern and it will benefit children to understand their religious 'other'. Some of the pluralist approaches are reviewed below.

Phenomenological approach: The most influential of the various phenomenological versions has been Ninian Smart's (1969). It assumed a high moral ground in 1960s in the UK as it regarded different religions as equally valid expressions of 'the Sacred'. Phenomenology focuses on religious phenomena, i.e. elements associated with religion. In order to perceive religious phenomena directly, we must bracket out our existing assumptions. After this, we must bracket out the particular so that the universal can be directly intuited. It involves seven religious dimensions. These dimensions are doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, experiential, social and material. This approach shaped RE into the teaching of 'world religions'.

Among its many criticisms, the one that strikes right at the heart of the phenomenological method is that primary school children's cognitive development level is such that they are incapable of bracketing out their prejudices. In addition, it is also not seen as desirable to set aside our prejudices, because without it, we would yield little learning (Gadamer 1975; Watson 1993). In addition, this approach is reductive towards religion.

Experiential approach: The experiential method of RE developed in the 1980s in the UK. While the phenomenological approach focuses on observable phenomena, the experiential approach focuses on individual feelings. It is influenced by William James (1983) and 1920's Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of Holy*. Otto (1968) argues that a God who can be understood ceases to be God, and emphasises the need to acknowledge the non-rational in religion. The attainment of outcomes such as expressing meaning, relationships, ultimate questions or personal understanding are central to experiential

RE. It emphasises the personal search of the individual. Existentialism is therefore the foundation of the experiential approach.

This approach has been criticised for a lack of clarity and rigour in the definition of religious experience and for indoctrination since it leads to seeking states of mind such as joy, awe, wonder, love and for emphasising individuals rather than faith communities or traditions (Grimmitt 2000; Watson 1993). However, Hammond et al. (1990) have defended it, claiming that an RE entirely based on fact-giving is dry and irrelevant to pupil's needs. In addition, the experiential work is not the same as indoctrination because the aims are different.

John Hull's 'practical theology': Hull (1982) argued for the replacement of a Christian nurturing approach to a secular, multi-faith approach based on Christian theological grounds. Hull called for the 'Christian hegemony in Agreed Syllabuses' to end by introducing the idea of 'religionism' (Hull 1998). It referred to the attitude of superiority that expresses itself as intolerance towards adherents of other religions. Religionism, he affirmed, is rather like racism, the idea that one's own 'race' is better than others. Hull insisted that teaching tolerance of other religions is not enough; pupils should be taught explicitly that all religions are equal and this interpretation should also become part of the self-understanding of religious communities themselves.

Hull is criticised by evangelical Christians for subduing Christian truth to secular ideology (Cooling 1994). Cooling (1994, 12–17) finds him a 'radical Christian liberal' who rather than tolerating 'religionism' as one possible religious stance alongside others, is intolerant of it. Cooling (1995) also attacks Hull's 'theology of pluralism' as incompatible with traditional forms of belief and asserts that religious communities have the right to represent their faiths in ways they choose(Cooling 1995; 1995). Hull responds that the creation of tolerance must assume higher priority than the need for exclusivity (Miedema 2009).

The 'dialogical' approaches: A group of dialogical approaches to RE were developed by Julia Ipgrave in Britain, Heid Leganger-Krogstad in Norway and Wolfram Weisse and his colleagues in Germany (Jackson 2003). All claim the relative autonomy of the individual and recognise the contextual influence of family, peer, ethnic and religious groups. Ipgrave's (Jackson 2003) 'dialogical religious education' has a threefold stage of understanding. In primary dialogue, diversity is recognized. In secondary dialogue,

openness to difference is encouraged. In tertiary dialogue, students examine and encourage the process of dialogue itself. The contextual approach was first developed in Norway by Leganger-Krogstad (2011). Education in Norway was constructed on a long mono-cultural, Christian tradition. The indigenous minority cultures in this society, such as the Kven and Sami, were barely mentioned in the educational curriculum until recently. Efforts are being refocused on understanding their cultures and histories, as children are led to reflect on socio-cultural diversity in their experience and learn from it. Weisse's (1996) approach is grounded in human rights codes and it aims to foster community cohesion, rather than leading to relativism and theological pluralism. Pupils compare, contrast and listen with empathy, difference is recognised and pupils are encouraged to find their own epistemological standpoint.

Interpretive approach: Robert Jackson (2003; 2004; 2010) has contributed to interpretive pedagogy, which uses the methods of ethnography, anthropology, hermeneutics, cultural theory and historical thinking. Three concepts are central to interpretive pedagogy: representation, interpretation and reflexivity. This approach does not represent 'world religions' as homogenous systems of beliefs. Cultures are seen as dynamic, internally diverse and fuzzy edged and individuals as capable of contributing to the reshaping of culture. The term 'tradition' is preferred to 'religion'. Students are expected to form their own ideas about traditions and find their own positions within the key debates about religious plurality. The interpretive approach ensures that the development of personal convictions, however, is consistent with democratic values, namely respect for human rights, pluralism and the rule of law.

Watson and Thompson (2007) criticise Jackson for inconsistency in his approach, in that he denies expert overviews of the traditions, yet he requires teachers to construct overviews of tradition for classroom use. The use of the phrase 'religious tradition' is the same as the word 'religion' and therefore relies on the very reification of religion that Jackson seeks to reject. However, what is remarkable about the interpretive approach is that it shows that religion is a complex matter.

Positive pluralism: Cush and Francis' (2001) 'positive pluralism' (PP) does not teach that all faiths are equally valid or that all are paths to the same goal. It takes the differences and incommensurability of worldviews seriously, but approaches them from a viewpoint of 'epistemological humility' or 'methodological agnosticism'. Cush and

Francis (2001) list 11 characteristics of RE that exhibit PP, including welcoming plurality as an opportunity for learning, holding views in a provisional way and respecting the backgrounds of all pupils, whether religious or not. Students use critical thinking, explore and develop their own beliefs. It recognises plurality and interactions within traditions and avoids constructing normative versions. Similarly, to the phenomenological approach, PP takes an empathetic stance towards believers' experiences. It makes a connection with the interests and concerns of pupils as with an existentialist approach. Like the experiential approach, PP treats RE as affective and cognitive process and as in the interpretive approach, PP engages pupils in a dialogue with members of traditions studied.

Constructivist approach: Grimmitt (2000) argues that religion enforces particular meanings on others. RE therefore must engage in deconstructing what others want pupils to believe about their religion and reconstruct religious interpretations in the light of their own experience and alternative perspectives. Pupils should reflect on the sexism and racism of religion, thus preventing RE from perpetuating injustice, inequality and oppression. Grimmitt acknowledges the problem of relativism but reinforces the view that truth-claims only reflect their advocate's opinions.

Personal narrative approach: Clive and Jane Erricker (2010) adopt a non-realist and postmodernist stance. Erricker and Erricker make three major critiques of the modernist approach to RE. Firstly, any form of RE which provides children any kind of prepared curriculum is providing children with a pre-packaged construction of knowledge that includes the moral and political sentiments of whoever has assembled the material. Secondly, the very focus on 'religion' privileges the religious against the secular (Chater and Erricker 2012). Realms such as 'moral', 'cultural', 'social', or 'spiritual' are constructions rather than absolute categories. Lastly, in seeking to avoid nurture, modern RE has reduced the significance of developing personal spiritual stance. 'Faith' for Erricker and Erricker is an intuitive and ontological sense of how emotions, values and motivations can be integrated into a personal spiritual stance. This informs and governs one's position in social relations and on moral and political matters.

Jackson (2004) wonders that if the only trustworthy 'knowledge' is that which individuals construct for themselves, then there can be no public criteria for rejecting socially repugnant, including racist, worldviews. Moreover, Erricker and Erricker's

instrumental view of religions as source material for the individual's construction of meaning seems open to criticism. Further, a total focus on narrative denies children opportunities to scrutinize wider issues. However, according to Jackson the involvement of children as agents in the process of RE is refreshing.

Truth-claim Approaches to Religious Education

> *Which of these religions is the true one? Alternatively, which (if any) should I believe? (Hobson and Edwards 1999)*

In broad terms, truth-centred approaches are concerned with an informed development of religious worldview. The spectrum of pedagogies in this category range from those that uphold that truth can be perceived as it is (naïve realism) and that their own religion offers a unique access to it, to those that uphold that reality is perceived differently by different people, but it is possible to determine truth (critical realism). Critical realism is distinct from both 'non-realism', which rejects any transcendent divine reality and naïve realism, which argues that divine reality is reflected within their particular tradition as it is (Wright 2007). Critical realism is the middle position, in that there is a transcendent divine reality but that we can only make sense of it through our different human religious conceptualities and not all are equally plausible. I will review two representative examples of this approach.

Critical RE: Wright (2004) refers to his approach as a 'religious literacy' approach. It entails an understanding of how religious language relates to different interpretations of the world. It also enquires into the way world events shape and contextualise religious worldviews, how they change over time and the way in which that affects societies and individual behaviour. Wright (2007) recommends approaching religion both as faith-based traditions and as ideologies; therefore, he advocates paying attention not only to their ideals, but also to the way in which they act politically and morally in the world. According to Wright, religious literacy is not a universal model, but is open to historical and contextual variances. It is also not a value-free or power-free model, but it opens up questions of transcendent truth. It avoids a single reading of all religions, or seeing all religions as equally valid, but it is honest about the complexity of the situation.

Wright is critical of liberal approaches to RE. According to Wright, in an effort to resolve the tensions between the conflicting truth-claims of the world's religious traditions, Hull marginalises the exclusive truth claims of religious traditions by invoking a generic universal theology; Erricker and Erricker; on the other hand, dissolve them into a plethora of private spiritualties. For Wright, both of these approaches fail to grapple with the ultimate questions of meaning and truth.

Jackson (2004) notes that while critiquing modernity, Wright does not take into account that these religious 'wholes' were constructed by modernity. Instead, he sees internal diversity within traditions as deviations. He also seems to impose certain doctrinal formulations on different religions. Furthermore, empirical classroom experiences do not inform Wright's approach. His denial of emotions or experience in forming religious stances makes his approach irrelevant to the needs of many pupils. Jackson also argues that Wright's approach is demanding for younger children and for those who do not feel psychologically ready to face the tensions involved in resolving inconsistent intellectual positions. On the other hand, Jackson contends that Wright's approach has its merits. It is inclusive, as every position is discussed in the class. In addition, Wright reinforces the centrality of language in RE and insists on the application of critical skills to religious beliefs. Wright (2012) responds to Jackson's criticism regarding religious essentialism saying that religions must be seen as socio-cultural identifications.

Evaluative RE: Watson's (1993) evaluative RE seeks to avoid relativism by addressing truth-claims in the classroom. She introduces ten criteria; these are not to be applied rigidly, but are intended to stimulate thinking. Through these one looks for insights and truth which may be found and affirmed, before considering aspects which might count against a particular religion. Her approach allows pupils to ask the question 'Is this true?' rather than simply introducing what people believe. Criteria should help pupil achieve what the truth of the claim is, but Watson wants teachers not to declare which one holds the truth. According to Thompson (2004), this puts into question her claim that she has found a way of avoiding relativism. Another issue with Watson's approach is that she reifies religions.

In addition to pluralistic and truth-centred approaches to RE, there are approaches that do not necessarily neatly fit into these categories. For instance, value-based and human

rights based approaches to RE. The value-based approaches contend that RE must centre on universal concerns for truth, honesty, respect, empathy and justice for all, based on universal ethical imperatives (Basinger 2002). Gearon (2003) advocates a human rights-based RE that openly discusses abusive practices in religion and what can be done to guard against such abuse. He argues that there are limits to tolerance. For Erricker (2010), to attempt this would be controversial as it is questionable whether all that is credited to 'religion' is truly religious.

To sum up, the pluralistic pedagogies do not claim to nurture children in religions that they teach, but treat religion as a phenomenon of human culture. In contrast, the truth-centred approaches are concerned with the relative validity of religious claims.

Social Cohesion or Religious Confession?: A debate

There is good news and bad news in all this: the good news is that no one knows more than me about how to proceed; the bad news is that no one knows more than me about how to proceed. (McKinney 2008, 30)

The debate that lies at the very heart of RE in a multi-faith context is, 'should the thrust of RE be on nurture in a faith or on social cohesion?' Defenders of liberal education have argued that liberal approach has made space for other religions to be introduced in school and it has had important success in upholding freedom and diversity (Jackson 2004). On the other hand, it has been contended that this is to limit religion to its social usefulness (Cooling 1994).

A major criticism of the pluralist approach to RE that upholds social cohesion as their key aim is that it misrepresents religion. According to Copley (1997), not all religions would like to see social cohesion as having first priority and their doctrines as having a secondary order. Gearon (2001) contends that RE represents others in a colonial perspective. Drawing upon Said's (1978) influential work 'Orientalism', Gearon (2001) states that others can be controlled, not through physical subjugation but through control of their cultures and their presentation. To accommodate religious pluralism, RE has adopted a similar route between power and representation, between history and the representation of tradition. Similarly, Panjwani's (2005) study of Islam as an RE subject in Britain suggests that the way different religions are taught, including Islam, in some

pluralist RE, actually reduces them to stereotypes. Cush (1999) discusses issues of power and representation in RE, whereby some faith groups have privileged access to representation. Gearon (2001) argues that RE reintroduces hierarchy into that which is supposed to be facilitating equality.

Liam Gearon (2012) critiques the EU-backed project 'Religion in Education: a contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries', which was funded by the European Commission between 2006-2009, arguing that it makes RE increasingly enmeshed with political agendas due to its emphasis on social cohesion. RE thus risks being moulded to serve the interests of political forces. He argues that there is nothing religious about Jackson et al.'s 'civil religion' approach to RE but the deification of democracy itself. This he describes as 'policing the sublime' in educational terms drawing upon Milbank. Milbank (2006) argues that there is usurpation of theology by sociology. Sociology makes religion private, but invokes it at the public level purely for instrumental purposes. Noticing recent developments in European state policies, Gearon (2013b) even calls it 'the counter-terrorist classroom' masquerading in the name of RE, whereby religion is made to serve political and security purposes. This hijacks RE's capacity to connect pupils with religious life.

Hamnett (1990), suggests the view that all religions are to be encouraged shows a lack of serious concern for truth which in the end trivializes religion. Teece's (Sugirtharajah and Hick 2012) issue is with an 'objective and dispassionate' interpretation of religion: What is there to distinguish RE from sociology or history or citizenship education? Felderhof (Felderhof et al. 2007) and Oakeshott (2010) argue that RE must include nurture within particular religious traditions. Their logic is that we recognise the importance of initiation in other subjects. We do not just want students to learn about history or mathematics. We want them to become historians and mathematicians; we want to cultivate in students a love for history and mathematics. We want to give them the feel of what it means to think within each form of knowledge. Similarly, students need to be initiated into a particular kind of religious knowledge, spirituality, or way of life. William Galston (1991, 255) suggests, 'the great threat to children in modern liberal societies is not that they will believe in something too deeply, but that they will believe in nothing very deeply at all'.

A group of scholars and Christian theologians contend that the unique role of Christianity in shaping Britain, European history, literature, music and art must be recognised (Watson and Thompson 2007). Hull (1989) rejects that this is an attempt to link citizenship with Christianity and establish Christian cultural hegemony. Burn and Hart (1988) contend that the influence of Christianity should be taught from educational point of view and not from that of cultural hegemony.

Jackson (2004) argues that associating one religious tradition, Christianity, with the national culture and morality ignores the moral concerns of other religious and humanistic traditions within contemporary society. In addition, there is an assumption that a secure framework of values is necessarily tied to religion. Jackson agrees that Christianity must be given an important place in the curriculum because it has played an important role in Britain for over a millennium, but it should not be included in the curriculum because of the assumption that there exists a fixed and unchanging 'way of life'. Christianity and all other religions need to be seen as living and internally diverse traditions, responding and reacting to one another and to the secularism they encounter. In addition, young people grow up in a world where such cushioning from other beliefs and ways of life is not possible.

This debate questions the dichotomy between the 'confessional' versus the 'liberal' approach to RE. Kay and Francis (1997) have described the word 'confessional' in RE as activities intended to aid formation in religion. On the other hand, Hirst (1975) a prominent philosopher of education, has underlined two philosophical principles of liberal RE. The first is that no belief system should be privileged in education, and the second is that education should promote autonomous rationality.

Other scholars deconstruct the dichotomy between the confessional and the liberal approaches. The non-confessional claims of religious studies are considered confessional in the sense that they reflects belief-system in themselves (Hamnett 1990). Philosopher Roger Trigg (1998; 2007) has argued that it is wrong to assume that secular rationality is neutral and impartial. (McLaughlin 2002, 84) suggests that common schools can be complicit in secular indoctrination. For indoctrination happens most effectively through a failure to present alternatives. In the 'null curriculum'- which alongside the explicit and implicit curricula governs what pupils actually receive - atheism tends to be the norm. Wright (2007) identifies this as 'liberal nurture'. Copley

has asked (2005, viii), 'What if they (young people) irresistibly acquire a non-religious worldview in the same way they acquire a taste for jeans, logo trainers, and pop music?'

Advocating a more a positive view of indoctrination, Thiessen (1993) argues that this is inevitable and perhaps even desirable. Children learn road safety without knowing why they should obey it and it is impossible to start learning without taking information on trust from others.

The above discussion suggests that RE in the context of religious plurality is a contested field. The central question, given the apparent to impossibility of a value-free education, is what kind of confession is desirable and what values and beliefs should be taught? (Watson 2006).

Religious Education, Plurality and Islam

> *(Islam is) a broad canopy that covers diverse and often contradictory sets of commitments, expressions and ideologies. (Hughes 2008, 70)*

Since 9/11, a number of studies have focused on Muslim religious education as possible seedbeds of extremism and terrorism. I reviewed 310 research articles published in the last fourteen years on Muslim RE into order to understand how the issue of attitude to the 'other' is dealt with, whether the studies indicate possibilities for radicalisation and extremism and to identify gaps in the literature. Based on this review, I argue that any generalised portrayal of Muslim RE's attitude to the 'other' as fostering radicalisation or pluralism is impossible. Muslim RE institutions' responses to plurality are contingent and dynamic. It is problematic to try to portray a unified 'Muslim RE' when dealing with an enormously vast geographical area, whose peoples speak diverse language and have undergone different historical experiences. There is tremendous diversity within Muslim RE, containing a wide spectrum of outlooks, from the universalist to the local, and it is not possible to portray some monolithic theology of pluralism that all Muslim RE institutions uphold. However, the usefulness of understanding key attitudes to the 'other' that emerge from Muslim RE is unquestionable.

Before proceeding, I would like to explain that the notion of Muslim RE is complex in Muslim societies. The distinction between 'religious' and 'secular' education does not

accord with the historical experience of many Muslim societies. 'Islam' did not exist as a bounded school subject up until modern times. In Muslim societies, education takes place in many forms, including informal and self-directed learning and formal institutionalised avenues. According to Kadi (2006), by far the most widespread and important of these educational institutions have been the *kuttab*, the mosque (and other places of worship in Muslim societies, which Kadi overlooks) and the madrasa. The *kuttab* (also called a *maktab;* literally a place of writing) arose in the first century of Islam, providing elementary education. By the tenth century, the madrasa (literally, a place of study) were built alongside the mosque. Kadi (2006) notes that they soon became the ubiquitous colleges of Islam. The madrasa provided post elementary, specialised and advanced instruction for adults. Students (*talib*; Persian plural *taleban*) came from diverse Muslim and other religious orientations. Madrasas taught students in a number of disciplines the Qurʾān, exegesis, *Ḥadīth,* law, theology and doctrines, poetry and oratory, later some of the 'foreign sciences', especially logic, astronomy and medicine. Madrasas created a rich and diverse pedagogical tradition, producing scholars like litterateur al-Jahiz, jurist Ibn Sahnum, philosophers al-Fārābī and Avicenna and theologian Al-Ghazzālī. Some of the earliest notable madrasas are al-Qarawīyīn, located in Fas, Morocco, established in 859 AD, al-Azhar, established in 972 in Cairo, Egypt and standard-setting network of the Madrasah Niẓāmīyah established in Baghdad and elsewhere at the end of the 11th century (Kadi 2006).

In the colonial era, when a large number of Muslim societies came under European rule, the new rulers introduced entirely new curricula, school structures and teaching methods for utilitarian purposes, madrasas and other traditional places of teaching came to be viewed as offering religious education, while European-style educational institutions were perceived as secular institutions. Today in the UK, madrasas are defined as 'supplementary schools run for Muslim children that operate outside the mainstream education system' (Cherti and Bradley 2012, 3). However, many Muslim educators did not and still do not necessarily distinguish between 'secular' and 'religious' in Muslim education. Therefore, such a religious/secular education distinction is not an appropriate understanding of the places of study in Muslim societies.

Bearing this complexity in mind, for the purpose of this review, I define Muslim RE broadly as educational movements, courses and institutions that engage with education

of Muslim students. I now focus on the question: what do the research studies carried out in the last fourteen years tell us about Muslim RE's approach to plurality?

In broad terms, Muslim academics respond in two different ways to RE in a multi-faith world. The first group of responses, which I call 'defensive retreat' approaches tend to withdraw from plurality. In Britain, some of the responses that fall within this range have elements in common with those of the Christian right and in some cases they have emerged as a reaction to them. In 1996, The National Muslim Education Council held a conference at London School of Economics. The theme was *Religious Education of Muslim Children— the way forward*, which aimed to highlight the concerns of Muslim parents about the contents and methodology of the RE being taught in state schools. This was in the wake of the Education Reform Act 1988, which stipulated that RE should be wholly or mainly of a Christian character. A small booklet *Religious Education — A Muslim Perspective* (National Muslim Education Council of U.K 1997) following the LSE conference was published, arguing in favour of confessional Muslim faith schools.

The reasons for favouring confessional Muslim faith schools revolved around the assumption that many Muslim parents were concerned as a minority about a range of factors. These included the negative effects of a secular and 'permissive' society, declining standards of education, the breakdown of the family system and the lack of respect and discipline among the young due to the sexualised, violent and anti-social cultures being nurtured by the mass media. In terms of allocation of time for RE, the Muslim content in state schools was minimal. Further, it was thought that that certain educational method, for example dramatization of prophetic events, did not conform to Islamic principles. Moreover, in state schools Muslim youth were suffering from self-esteem issues, poor academic achievement and disciplinary problems. The book also highlights that the state school policy of teaching all religions as equal was against Islamic doctrines.

The authors argue that the positive influence of Islamic education would be that it would enhance the British Muslims' self-esteem, preserve integrity of their inherited faith, and develop moral values that will enable them to live in harmony at home and wider community. Perhaps the biggest advantage of providing Islamic RE and collective worship for Muslim children is that they would develop a positive attitude

towards the system that they live in, hence feel part of it and learn to contribute to it in a positive manner. This would clearly minimise, if not eliminate, the tendency to affiliate themselves to the more extreme groups. The authors also defend themselves against the criticism that Islamic based RE was promoting separatism while indoctrinating pupils. They argue an Islamic *tarbiah* (upbringing) enables children to live in harmony with their fellow citizens.

A second group of Muslim scholars favour a more social scientific approach to RE. In this approach, there is an acknowledgement of plurality. A potentially productive framework recommended by Jackson (2004), Panjwani (2005) and Thobani (2010) is to approach Islam from civilizational, historical, intercultural and humanistic perspectives. For instance, Panjwani (2005) proposes a historical-humanist approach to RE. He argues that without historical understanding, it is difficult for Muslims to reconcile Islam with changing human conditions. The lack of a historical approach also overlooks historical interconnections and exchanges between different cultures and faith communities such as Muslims, Jews and Christians. There is also a need for humanist approach. Within Islam, several philosophers and schools of thought such as the rationalist Muʿtazila thought about ethics from a more humanistic perspective − a position similar to that of Maimonides and Aquinas. Panjwani argues that with such humanistic and historical approaches, RE can truly contribute to social cohesion, as they would emphasise the historical connections between faiths. Similarly, Makdisi (1981) recommends the re-contextualisation of the Muslim history, theology and texts for RE in a global context. According to Makdisi *diraya* (interpretation) was used as a method in law classes in the early medieval madrasas of Baghdad and disputations were encouraged. The practice of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) meant that students could form their own judgments. These elements could sit well with the liberal principles of autonomy and critical assessment.

The plurality of positions within Muslim educators mirror Muslim history. On one hand, the scholars such as al-Fārābī (probably d.961), Ibn Sīnā (d.1037) and al-Ghazzālī (d.1111) argued for an openness to knowledge regardless of religion and ethnicity; however, scholars such as Ibn Ḥanbal (d.855), Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328) and al- Shāfi (d.1330) had rejected it as having a corrupting influence on Muslims (Moosa 2003, 112).

Attitude to the 'Other' and Muslims

In the preceding section, I explored in broad terms two educational approaches to Muslim RE in response to issues of plurality. In this section, I draw upon empirical sociological and anthropological studies which enable us a more nuanced understanding of how Muslim communities actually engage with religious diversity in their everyday lives, in and outside the context of RE. It reinforces the argument that any generalised portrayal of Muslims' and Muslim RE's attitude to the 'other' as exclusivist or pluralistic is impossible. As highlighted earlier, given the complexity of defining Muslim RE, I define Muslim RE broadly as educational movements, courses and institutions that engage with education of Muslim students.

Attitudes Towards the West

In contemporary literature on Muslim education, the predominant theme since 9/11 is the way Muslims relate to the West. In the past decade, international observers and agencies such as the International Crisis Group have produced a number of critical reports on Islamic madrasas and their curriculum as they are suspected to be 'medieval posts' promoting dogmatic beliefs and polemical relationship with the West (Haqqani 2002; Leirvik, 2004). However, Kadi (2006) notices that when a special issue on 'Islam and Education' invited articles, studies from Philippines, Indonesia and Pakistan to Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco showed a great diversity in forms and content of religious education.

Building upon this, I suggest that a continuum of trends exist in Muslim RE, ranging from militant resistance to the West to pro-active engagement with it. Muslim attitudes to the West can be summarised in three broader categories: retreatism, essentialism and engagement (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking 2011). The first reaction translates into absentism from political participation; the second reaction, essentialism is confrontational and has a tendency to radicalise, while the third response, engagement promotes cosmopolitan attitudes that respects religious identity with commitment to plurality and hybridity.

A number of studies show the first and second reactions, retreatism and essentialism, whereby Muslim RE uphold attitudes antithetical the West. Meijer's (1999) article, *Islam versus Western Modernity: A Contrast in Educational Thought,* observes that the

First World Conference on Muslim Education organised in Saudi Arabia, that assembled over 300 Muslim educationists from forty countries in 1977, underlined a spirit opposing to Western ideas. Haqqani (2002) underlines that 'other' as in the West, especially the United States, is seen as bad 'other'. Ipgrave's (1999, 150) research in a UK state school, where a majority of the student population consisted of Muslims, suggests that secular RE teachers found many 8 and 9 year old Muslim children demonstrating 'narrow-mindedness' and 'exclusivity'. Secular RE teachers felt uneasy teaching about Islam to Muslim students as they were argumentative about the 'correct' understanding and the teachers felt pressured to convert to Islam. Ipgrave notices that Muslim children demonstrated a weak form of critical openness, as they were not open to questioning the foundations of their beliefs. Ipgrave also claims that teachers saw 9 year olds as not understanding the symbolic meaning of rituals. They took rituals literally. Ipgrave calls symbolic interpretation as a westernised reinterpretation of Islam. Thus, these studies contribute to theories of the clash of civilizations.

Contrastingly, a number of studies present the third response, a collaborative relationship between Muslims and the West. Meer (2010) argues that in the UK, British Muslim educators demonstrate a synthesis of faith requirements and citizenship commitments. They negotiated reciprocal British Muslim identities. Rashed (2014) notes that many Muslim educators seek to reform Muslim RE in the Western way. Pasha and Ahmed's (2014) survey of Iranian youth in Tehran high schools on their perceptions about pluralism and fundamentalism suggests that they rejected violence and appreciated modernity in terms of technology and lifestyle. They did not see Islam in conflict with modernization. However, they opposed aspects of West that included the anti-Muslim politics and *laissez*-faire sexual relations.

Some studies take account of social, historical, cultural, economic and political factors in shaping dynamic interactions between Muslims and the West that encompass antagonism alongside intercultural engagement. Hopkins'(2011) work on the experience of Muslim students in British higher education found that they experienced both tolerance and exclusionary and hostile behaviour. What united them with other students was their shared experiences of learning, like having deadlines and shared goals. Global issues and national policies shaped their campus experience as they encountered discrimination and exclusion in their everyday use of campus facilities. However, Muslim students were not merely victims but actively responded to this through

resistance, creative dialogue and challenges to the status quo. This is also reflected in Kadiwal and Rind's (2013) study of 'Selective cosmopolitans' in Dubai. Arab Muslim students engaged with the adaptation of British higher education in the Emirati context selectively, ambivalently and pragmatically. These students enthusiastically accepted the benefits offered by globalisation, English language and the Western education. Simultaneously, they were ambivalent and sceptical about how such intercultural interaction, largely shaped in an asymmetrical power relationship, might affect their Arab identity and language. Similarly, Bowen's (2009) ethnography of 'French Islam' argues that in everyday lives Muslims in France have a pragmatic relationship with the state.

June Edmunds (2012) argues that new forms of governmentality which seek to confine religion to the private sphere sees religious or cultural symbols in public sphere as a threat in Western Europe. Thus, *hijab* is perceived as a threat to national identity and security. The social cost of being a European Muslim has multiplied as governments identify them as Muslim first and citizens second. At the same time, Edmunds (2011) projects Western European Muslims as empowered agents who are using the language of human rights and citizenship to protect themselves against religious and cultural discrimination. Being Muslim and British are not necessarily separate things in their perspective. Her finding, thus, challenge Roy (2004) and Kepel (2004), who claim that young male Muslims are radicalised by Saudi-based Salafi ideas and they represent the 'enemy within' or 'home-grown' Muslim terrorists.

Kuru (2005) sheds light into the reasons behind these different routes (retreatism, essentialism and engagement) that Muslims and their institutions might take. He bases his argument on three Turkish Islamic movements, demonstrating that those Muslim institutions that benefit from international opportunities and tolerant normative framework tend to have a positive relationship with globalization, modernity and the West while those that do not benefit tend to have a negative attitude to the West. For instance, a very influential Muslim movement is the Gulen movement, which is supportive of globalization and the West. It emerged in the late 1960s as a local group in Turkey. Today, as a transnational movement with its presence in at least 50 countries, the Gulen movement operates hundreds of dormitories, preparatory schools and high schools, in addition to six universities. The movement has been very successful in English instruction, and has been influenced by the writings of Said Nursi (1876-1960),

who based on an interpretation of the Qurʾān, opposes violence and politicisation of Islam. He encourages interfaith dialogue and appreciates the world coming closer. The movement organised an Inter-Civilization Dialogue Congress in 1994 in response to the 'clash of civilizations' thesis. The movement also coordinates annual meetings on interfaith dialogues and Abrahamic faith relations. On the other hand, the Haydar Bas movement developed an anti-globalization and anti-Western view in the 1990s in Turkey. Its normative framework is parochial and it holds hostile view of other religions. It sees Islamic and Western civilizations as contradictory. The third movement, Millî Görüş (literally, National Vision), founded in 1969, is one of the prominent Turkish diaspora organisations in Europe. It started as a nationalist anti-globalization and anti-Western movement and has transformed into a pro-globalisation and the pro-European Union movement in recent decades. Inevitably, Kuru argues that the educational initiatives of Gulen and Millî Görüş movement and Haydar Bas movement promote different attitudes to the West depending on how they benefit from international opportunities and tolerant normative framework.

A number of studies present differentiated view of Muslims' relationships with the West based on age, gender and in-group association, among other factors. A small number of studies have focused on differences in the levels of tolerance demonstrated by different Muslims communities. For example, Koopman's (2014) empirical study on fundamentalism concludes that in Europe Sunni fundamentalists demonstrated high hostility compared to Alavites from Turkey. Tinker and Smart (2011) support this differentiated view of Muslims arguing that in the West, Muslim identity is wrongly constructed as collective. Berglund's (2011) study in Sweden on Islamic RE in three schools suggests that teachers' perception of connectedness in terms of them as Muslims and wider Swedish society differed as their emphasis on various aspects of their identities differed. Abu el-Haj and Bonet's (2011) study of young Muslims uncovers that within the same family different attitudes co-exist. For instance, after 9/11 a sister accentuated visible markers of being Muslim in the West, whereas her brother hid his Arab identity so as not to identify with Islam and Arabness. Edmunds (2010) argues that younger generations of 'elite' Muslims are more global in their outlook, more aware of their identity as Muslims and have more civic participation than older generations.

Some studies take into account race, ethnicity, and access to political power and economic resources, and the Western government's attitude towards Muslims. Muedini (2009) notes that even third and fourth generations of Muslims are not treated as truly European. The European Muslims have remained largely working class. Edmunds (2013) suggests that Europe considers itself a source of cosmopolitan values but fails to reconcile with Muslim cosmopolitans who have a 'thick' attachment to their religious identities. Muedini's (2009) survey of the feelings and experiences of Muslims on college campuses five years after 9/11 found that they felt discriminated, othered and under surveillance. Similarly, the British Muslim students in universities feared that if they kept a beard or donned *hijab* they would be perceived as fundamentalist and radical (Hopkins 2012). Zine's (2001) many Muslim students felt intimidated as immigrants in Canadian school settings and their teachers did not have high expectations of them, which affected their educational attainment. Their experiences intertwined with discrimination, peer pressure, racism and Islamophobia.

Olsson's (2009) study of textbooks in Sweden finds that they stereotype Muslims negatively as being inherently violent. The Sewall Report (2008) published by the American Textbook Council even rejects any tolerant portrayal of Islam. Revell's (2012) book shows how fears and misconceptions are perpetuated in education through textbooks, the curriculum and the recent guidance to teachers of religious education in the UK schools. This tendency in the West can be seen as anti-liberal and anti-pluralistic. This situation has an impact on Muslim individuals' social relationships.

Overall, it appears that Muslim attitudes to the West are not generalizable: there is active collaboration, tolerance and negotiation as well as resistance, exclusion and discrimination. In educational settings, Islam becomes a battlefield of resistance as well as a resource for dialogue.

Attitudes Towards Muslim 'Other'

A major gap in the literature is a systematic study of Muslim attitudes to the Muslim 'other' globally. One of the most controversial issues in Muslim societies is how 'Islam' is to be understood and taught. It is common to see each Muslim faith group upholding a notion of chosen one, best and saved one. Haqqani (2002) suggests that Sunnis view Shias as apostates and themselves as role model Muslims and the desire of the Salafi to

return to an imagined 'pure Islam' has created antagonism in many parts of the world. For example, Newland (2000) shows that Sudanese villagers settled in West Java in Indonesia face challenges in being recognised as Muslims as purification movements seek to impose their version of Islam on them. Similarly, Desplat (2005) observes that in Ethiopia a local group is resisting the essentialist view promoted by the reformist movement. Thus, in Muslim societies there appears to be contestation over 'true Islam'. This has implications for the way Islam as a school subject is taught. Some madrasas are in fact concerned not with denouncing non-Muslim 'others', but rather Muslim 'others'. For instance, Alam's (2008) study of madrasa in India finds that they focused on other Muslims as the enemy and did not see Hindus as enemies.

It appears that there are two approaches to teaching of Islam in Muslim RE. Wan Daud (1989), who promotes a monolithic concept of Islamic education, represents the first. He assumes that there is a single body of knowledge that could be taught as 'Islam' and sees diverse understanding of Islam as deviations. The second approach to Islam argues that diversity within Islam must be recognised as historical and legitimate in Muslim RE (e.g. Esmail, 1995; 1996; Baidhawy and Thoyibi, 2005; Panjwani, 2005; Thobani, 2010).

Studies situate the sectarian politics of Muslim education in historical and political contexts. Rohde's (2013) study suggests that in Iraqi textbooks under Saddam Hussain there was a Sunni bias and Shia were only symbolically acknowledged. However, after 2003 under international actors Sunni bias was accentuated. Rohde asserts that education is influenced by politics and sectarianism and outside agencies do not really understand. Karolewski (2008) examines how the Alevi tradition came to be labelled as 'heterodox Islam' in the academic field in the late 19th century under the Ottoman Empire. Its basis was the socio-political power struggle between the Sunni Ottoman Empire and the Shia Safavids. Turcoman tribes, who later self-identified as Alevis, supported the Safavid order from 14th century onwards. In the conflict between the Shi'i Safavid and the Sunni Ottoman Empire, both parties began to emphasise religious differences between each other to legitimize their aggression against the Muslim neighbours. Hence, in the Ottoman educational initiatives, the Alevis, came to be seen as unbelievers and heretics. In Bosnia, Islamic Religious Education depicts Bahá'i's and Ahmadis as followers of corrupted teachings and in conflict with Islam (SMAJIĆ 2008). Wahabism is presented as a conservative interpretation of Islam and Sufism is given a

greater space and importance in teaching due to the Sufi heritage of Bosnia. However, there have been revisions to the Islamic Religious Education textbooks to remove negative evaluations of the 'other'. In Bosnia the religious education curriculum's approval depends on historians and politicians rather than religious representatives.

Issues of terrorism and fundamentalism divide Muslims. For instance, Yildiz and Verkuyten (2013) observe that Muslims in Netherlands draw boundaries of Islam in a way that puts terrorists outside Islam and support tolerance as Islam. On the other hand, groups such as Islamic State and the Taliban justify their acts of violence in the name of Islam. Abdulla's (2007) study of online forums notices that 43% of Muslim participants condemned the act of violence of 9/11, 30% saw the justification behind it but considered it as a political issue rather than religious one.

The differences within Islam take hostile form when confronted with inequality based on factors such as caste, ethnicity, status, access to economic resources and power. For instance, Omelicheva (2010) finds that in Central Asia Muslims are fighting against Muslims along ethnic lines. Similarly, Sikand (2002) argues that in India low caste *dalit* Muslims use theology of liberation demanding their voices to be heard and challenge the established high caste Muslim leadership as spokesperson of Islam. Philippon (2011) notices that in Pakistan there are Sunnis against Sunnis and the issue is intertwined with socio-economic and political factors.

This is where one might ask what the term 'Umma' means, who uses the *Umma* discourse and for what purposes? According to Encyclopaedia of Islam (Bearman et al. 2012) *Umma* means 'people, community'. In later history, *Umma* came to mean the Muslim community as a whole based on exegesis of the Qurʾān. Marechal and Zemni's edited book (2013) argues that at the individual level most Muslims do not care whether the other is Sunni or Shia but on social and political state levels these differences become an issue. Malik (2004) offers an enlightening analysis drawing upon the experiences of James Piscatori and Muhammad Khalid Masood. When the two met, apparently Piscatori argued that *Umma* is only a Muslim aspiration, while in practice Muslims fight Muslims. Masood argued that it was a social concept. When they arrived together in Morocco for an academic event, airport Customs let Piscatori breeze through with his American passport despite being a Christian but Masood got a 'hard time' in a Muslim country despite being a Muslim. Piscatori questioned where his *Umma* was at

the time. Once they left the airport and got into a cab the Muslim driver addressed Masood as his brother and treated him with a familiarity that he did not extend to Piscatori. Malik argues that the concept of *Umma* ruptures at the political level, but that at a social level the connection of being Muslim is felt. Muslims may be indifferent to Muslims in Muslim majority countries, but they unite when challenged by non-Muslim adversaries or on issues that affect them all. This perhaps is one of the reasons why diaspora Muslims feel greater connection to the concept of the *Umma*: in the diaspora, their nationality of origin may become secondary to their religious identity and religion may even become the primary context of self-identification in second and third generations. In this way a bewildering variety of Muslims feel they are embraced by the *Umma* bond. Therefore, Malik argues that the concept of *Umma* is not an essentialising bond between Muslims; rather, it is a bridge that brings together differences, hybrid identities and promotes intercultural interaction.

Overall, it appears that Muslim attitudes to the religious 'other' and Muslim 'other' are not homogenous and they are shaped in wider social, political and historical context. At an individual level, most Muslims might not be overly concerned whether the other is Sunni or Shia but on social and political state levels these differences can take hostile forms.

Attitudes Towards the Religious 'Other'

Muslims' attitudes towards wider religious differences range from outright hostility to ecumenism. For instance, a number of studies argue that Muslim RE promotes an unfriendly view of the religious 'other'. Gilliat-Ray S. (2005) study highlights the closed and rigid attitude of Deobandi *dar ul-uloom* in Britain. Waghid's (2009) study notes that in South Africa, while Islamic education does not foster terrorists, neither does it sufficiently prepare individuals to respect the 'other'. He argues that madrasas do not see it as their function to prepare learners to become democratic citizens. They approach Muslim RE as if being a good person is unrelated to being a good citizen in a democratic post-Apartheid South Africa. They are occupied with teaching a form of pristine Islam, which can remain untainted by issues of everyday life in a country. Waghid argues that if madrasas teach that Islam is the universal religion and that only Muslim can secure a passage to paradise, then it might not lead to Muslims respecting the views of the others. In Pakistan, educational material in government-run schools are

said to breed intolerance to a greater extent than the madrasas (Nayyar and Salim, 2002). School subjects promote the view that Pakistan belong to Muslims alone, that Islam must be forcibly taught to all the students irrespective of their faith, and that Islam must be internalised as the ideology of Pakistan and that Hindus and India must be seen as enemy (2008). Moaddel and Karabenick (2008) observe that there is a rise of fundamentalist attitudes in Egypt and Saudi Arabia among the young.

In contrast, some studies portray Muslims and Muslim RE as promoting tolerance. Pohl's (2006) study shows that in Indonesia, an innovative and successful brand of Islamic boarding schools, the *pesantren*, uphold the principles of civil society, gender equality, anti-violence, pluralism and social economic justice. In Indonesia and Singapore there are efforts to instil pluralism based on theology, philosophy and Islamic jurisprudence (Baidhawy and Thoyibi 2005). State Islamic Universities such as Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, use historical, sociological and empirical methods to recognise the human socio-historical realities facing Muslims (Tan 2011). Likewise, Milligan's (2008) study of the Philippines' three Islamic models of educational institutions portray that they integrate secular and Islamic education and aim to build a peaceful rather than a radicalised society. Sikand's (2008) article discusses the outcomes of an educational programme, the *Jeevan Talim* (Life's education) implemented by an Indian madrasa associated with Deoband in collaboration with other local non-governmental organizations in Gujarat. Reforms were grounded in theological resources of Islam and it had a positive impact on social cohesion and countering stereotypes in communally polarised region.

These approaches to Muslim RE suggest that it is possible to address the value of plurality through confessional-oriented Islamic schools. Religious diversity is assigned a positive value not in spite of a principled commitment to Islamic tradition but precisely *because* of it (Leirvik 2004). These studies make a case that peace is not only a Western discourse — Islam can be an effective resource for peace in everyday lives (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana 2008).

Some of these experiments are criticised by conservative elements in Muslim communities. For example, in Indonesia a council of *'ulema* argue that the University of Indonesia has departed from authentic Islamic traditions, influenced by the Orientalist agenda (Gillespie 2007).

It appears that political situation affects the nature of relationships between Muslim and other communities in local settings. Milligan, Andersen, and Brym (2014) assessed tolerance in 23 countries and suggest that it is not Islam as a religion that has an impact on tolerance but the socio-economic political regime in which Islam is practiced. The studies highlight that political events impact on the way Muslims relate to the 'other' and vice versa. For instance, Ma'Oz's (2011) edited book examines the way Muslims' societies and states relate to Jews and Israel. Ma'Oz observes that although there is a theological basis to the relationship between the Jews and Muslims, in practice these relationships are blurred, ambivalent and are linked to local factors. Cohen (2011) observes that in the Middle East the attitude towards Jews became negative since the 1930s with the rise of Zionism, as Judaism came to be seen as a form of imperialism. Ahmadov's (2011) case study of Azerbaijan finds that in general Muslim attitudes to Jews while not intrinsically negative, are nonetheless shaped by the Israel-Palestine conflict. Burdah (2011) writes that in Indonesia the attitude towards Jews is worsening due to coverage of the Israel-Palestine issue. Similarly, Nachmani (2011) argues that anti-Semitism among Muslims in Europe is affected by events unfolding in the Middle East. Similarly, the 9/11 attacks have strained the relationship between Islam and the West. Edmunds (2012) notices in the aftermath of 9/11, Bush declared 'war' against an 'axis of evil' using rhetoric couched in quasi-religious language. This language invoked God and suggested that the rule of law, human rights, democracy came out of Christianity, thereby promoting an allegedly 'superior' set of Western values rooted in Christianity, which had to triumph over the supposedly barbaric values of Muslims. Such rhetoric has increased intolerance of Islam and Muslims in the West.

The nature of interaction between Muslims and their religious 'others' thus plays an important role in defining Muslim individuals' attitudes towards other religious communities. Hunt (2009) argues that in Malaysia, Muslim identity and narrative is not fixed in some essentialised definition, but is defined through participation in a particular social trajectory towards an emerging goal. The trajectory is at least in part forged in relation to the 'other'. Merino (2010) notices that in the USA, exclusivist interpretations of Christianity have become increasingly less accommodating of Muslims. However, contact with Muslims appears to have a positive impact on attitudes. The Muslim relationship to the religious 'other' also seemed to be affected by whether they enjoy a minority or majority status in a country. Janmohammad (2013)

studied the attitudes of Muslims in Gujarat ten years after the Gujarat Riots, which had taken place in 2002 after the Babri Masjid incident. He argues that Muslims affected by the Riot, instead of focusing on Hindus as the enemy, were more interested in talking about education to uplift their situation. Janmohammad heard the word 'education' rather than 'riot' over 200 times.

To summarise, it appears that Muslims or their educational avenues do not have a united stand on their attitude to religious 'other'. It is closely intertwined with local and international politics of relationships between different religious groups and socio-economic factors.

Gap in the Literature

The current literature available in English language on Muslim RE in the context of religious diversity overwhelmingly focuses on the Western state education's approach to Muslim RE and madrasa and there is a need to hear how different Muslim faith communities are approaching RE in terms of religious plurality. Little seems to be written about the various indigenous traditions of Muslim education in different geographical locations from the Far East and China to Africa. Current scholarship also does not sufficiently take account of modern developments in Muslim RE involving transnational educational institutions of Muslim communities such as the Ismaili Muslim community's international religious education programme. Nor do they sufficiently evaluate the new and innovative pedagogical approaches responding to plurality in Muslim education. Therefore, this thesis responds to a niche in the study of Muslim RE in two ways: a) it examines a contemporary transnational institutional expression of Muslim RE in the Ismaili Muslim context; b) it contributes to our understanding of innovative religious education pedagogy with a 'civilizational, humanistic and normative' approach to religious plurality.

There is a dearth of empirical studies on the extent and exact nature of the representation of intra-Islam differences in Muslim education in different parts of the world. There is a lack of empirical data on how Muslim students handle differences among themselves regarding doctrine, ritual practice and other matters of faith in educational settings. There are almost no studies of Muslim faith communities' efforts

to build intra-Islam competency in their followers. The literature is also silent about how Ismaili Muslims handle differences among themselves with regard to matters of faith, how they view differences within Islam and relate to wider religious plurality. Precisely, this is why this study makes a useful contribution to the debate on faith-based approaches to RE, especially Muslim RE.

Conclusion

There are varied and contradictory voices in terms of how RE must respond to religious plurality in Britain as well as in Christian and Muslim contexts. Notions of 'religion' and religious education do not seem fixed but their meanings and purposes change depending on who is using them.

As far as Muslim RE is concerned, a diversity of responses show that far from there being an uncontested, static and homogenous Islamic educational tradition, it is diverse and highly responsive to socio-political circumstances. The relationship between religious communities in Muslim RE seems socially contingent. Paul Tillich (1963) points out that differences are not a problem but misuse of difference is a problem. There is a tendency for the religiosisation of conflict on issues that are historical, long term, economic, political and ideological (Rizvi 2004). Differences can take hostile forms when confronted with inequalities based on factors such as caste, ethnicity, status, access to economic resources and power. However, at the individual level, hybridity and interculturality appears to challenge 'othering' (Russell 2006).

4. The Research Process

This chapter reflects on the particular choice of research methodology and research methods and examines the ways in which the researcher influences the research process. This chapter, accordingly, has three main sections; methodological considerations, research methods and a reflection on the actual process.

Methodological Considerations

In social science, it has been well acknowledged that the researcher's philosophical assumptions deeply influence research (Neuman 2005; Bryman 2012; Cohen et al. 2013). Dunne et al. (2005, 14) suggest that these questions are prior and continuing questions. They are prior because they determine how research is conceived and continuing as these philosophical assumptions are revised throughout the research study. I explore three key methodological considerations as follows:

The 'Islam' of Social Science

The first epistemological consideration was of the various ways in which social science tends to views 'Islam'. There are at least three views of 'Islam' in modern scholarship. The dominant tendency is to consider Arabo-Persia as the 'centre' of Islam and the other parts of the world as peripheries of Islam. This approach demonstrates a scholarly bias towards Arabo-Persian centric Islam as the 'correct', 'pure' or 'authentic' Islam and treats Arabia as the 'core' of Islam as if a well-defined form of Islam went into the other regions and in the process became syncretistic or got degenerated. For example, Asim Roy's (2014) work on Bengali Muslims refers to Bengali Muslim tradition as syncretistic to show its distinctness from Arabo-centric Islam. Thus, he assumes that the latter is 'pure' and free of cultural negotiation. Secondly, he describes the syncretism of Bengali Muslims as a stage towards Islamisation. This implies that Roy does not consider medieval Bengali Muslims yet as Islamic. A similar bias is found in Gellener (1983), who argues that Islam cannot change. An essence remains constant.

Another social science lens is its 'textual' view of 'Islam'. This promotes a narrow understanding of Islam by confining it study mainly to the text. It assumes that the core texts of Islam has an essential meaning that exists irrespective of contexts of the reader's gender, socio-economic status, rural-urban setting, political context, and other aspects of human experience. This virtually ignores the lived experiences of Muslims. For example, Geertz (1971) claims that the myths and text of the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth* fully explain Muslim behaviour. These assumptions are also found in the *Scriptural Reasoning* promoted by the University of Cambridge's Inter-faith Programme.

Both the Arabo-Persian centric and textual approaches have considerably influenced the social scientific and popular view of 'Islam' as a monolithic and timeless essence shaping over one and a half billion Muslims' lives everywhere in the same or similar ways. Even in the field of Ismaili studies, these classical approaches have long dominated the field, albeit with a different understanding of core and periphery and religious texts.

The third, more recent, approach to 'Islam' is intercultural. This approach emerged in the 1980s (see El-Zein; 1977; Gilsenan, 1982*;* Asad; 1986; Abu-Loghod, 1989). It takes into account the role of historical, cultural and political contexts in the way people practice their faith and their agency. It shows that even the supposed Arabo-Persian centric Islam and text of the Qurʾān are not free of cultural negotiation. Muḥammad's message was interpreted through already existing symbols, customs and practices of Arabia. The Qurʾān itself mirrored the social, economic, political, and cultural context of the time in which it occurred. This approach suggests that whether it is the Arabian, the South Asian, the Chinese or any other expressions of Islam, they have evolved from within their respective cultural and historical contexts resulting into multiple and diverging views about their religious tradition. Thus, there is no definitive Islam with capital 'I', but there are numerous 'islams' (Eickelman and Piscatori 1990).

In this study, I have taken an intercultural view of Islam. My adoption of this approach is shaped by my understanding of how 'religion' has come to be understood and defined in the modern time. The concept of religion as referring to systematic belief systems evolved from the post-Enlightenment thinking in the 17th and 18th century (Smith 1991). The concept was used to delineate groups within Christianity and to classify what was seen as equivalent phenomena in non-Christian cultures during the colonial period. The

idea that all religions have an 'essence' and possess sacred scriptures, devotional rituals, dress-codes, codes of behaviour, a story of origin, revered figures and the most importantly the notion of God, came to dominate legal, educational and academic understandings of religion.

In recent decades, a flexible way of presenting religious tendencies has emerged. Many ethnographic studies show the permeability of religious boundaries (for example, Geertz 1973; Clifford et al. 1986). Smith (1991) has even argued that the term 'religion' must be abandoned in 'religious studies' as there is no general agreement about what the term religion means, how to decide when some pattern of human activity or belief is religious, or where one religion ends and another begins. When individuals call their ways of life 'religion,' they may have, observes (Griffiths 2001), precise ideas about what it is to be religious but their ideas are not necessary widely shared by other communities.

This means that the term 'religion' can be approached flexibly or inflexibly (Baumann 1999). An inflexible approach sees religion as a reified identity, whereas a flexible view sees it as dynamic process. The inflexible view of religion will associate it with particular forms, ignoring the diversity of ways in which individuals in reality might relate to their religious identities in their everyday lives. Once a closed view is adopted, it becomes a criterion for classifying people, for instance as 'true' Muslims or stereotyping them in order to discriminate against them (Jackson 2004). Depending on factors such as context, social actors' agendas, and socialisation, different understandings are employed in different situations.

Therefore, in this thesis, following Wittgenstein's (1972) work *On Certainty,* I consider that the meaning of this terms such as 'religion' and 'Islam' lies in their use by individuals, organisations and communities. I have worked with the assumptions that Islam can be approached flexibly or inflexibly depending on factors such as context, the agenda of social actors agenda and socialisation. The participants in my study reified religion and this thesis is not free from reification. Reification (and non-reification) in this thesis is contextual. When mentioned in an abstract sense the thesis invokes an idea of Islam which often acquires reified connotations and when discussing empirical observations, Muslims are seen as active agents in interpreting their Islam with the resources from their socio-cultural and religious heritage within their contemporary

'conditions of belief'. Therefore, an affirmation of pluralism is embedded in my social scientific view of 'Islam'.

Field work in a Transnational Community

Another significant aspect of my epistemological considerations was my view of 'field work'. The participants in my study were situated in a transnational space as part of an international religious teacher education programme. The participants were internationally mobile throughout the programme and their learning experience included computer mediated activities such as using email, mobile phones, blogging and processing information on screens. Consequently, a classical view of ethnography was inappropriate to the study of these transnational communities. In the last 15 years, a small but growing body of work is redefining the notion of fieldwork to take account of such transnationally located individuals and field sites (e.g. Vertovec 2001; Malesevic 2002; Hine 2005; Hesse-Biber 2011; Neuman 2013). In the following pages, I outline how I adapted to these shifts in my study.

The field site: from bounded place to a translocal space: Traditionally, 'the field is a physical setting' (Schensul et al. 1999, 70). However, in globalised spaces social relations are not necessarily perceived as linked to a specific geographical location in a straightforward way. In addition, the concept of time and space does not remain static for the population inhabiting the same location. This has implications for the way the field site is defined in transnational contexts today (Brosius and Wenzlhuemer 2011). The field becomes a *space* (Marcus 1998). In this movement of objects, individuals, ideas, and media become central.

The field site of my study, the international teacher education programme, is a dynamic transnational space, created by flow of students and teachers, from many countries. The field site involves the transnational movements and interconnections between people and institutions from several countries. During the two-year research period the participants move back and forth between several countries. Thus, drawing upon Appadurai's (1999) conception of 'translocal', I consider my field site as neither global nor local but as a context, which is both, transnational and local.

'Being there' as a ''hybrid presence': Fieldwork in the most generic sense is 'being there' (Watson 1999, 2). The classical social researchers immersed themselves in their settings by physically locating themselves there. Today's technology-mediated modes

of social interaction challenge the idea of physical immersion as the basis of authentic knowledge (Jordan 2009). George Marcus (1998) argues that the study of an increasingly globalised world requires 'multi-sited' ethnography or at least a multi-sited research imaginary. Since my field site was translocal, I sought to understand the participants' experiences through a 'hybrid presence'. I coin this term to refer to my immersion in the field site as both, physical and online presence. I visited the field site online using email, Skype, Face Book, Virtual Learning Environment and Moodle and went to the classrooms, library and residential areas offline. It also changed the nature of data, field notes, and observations.

From offline research methods to hybrid methods: The conception of fieldwork as hybrid presence meant a blending of online and offline research methods. It has been argued that virtual world is different from the real world (Garcia et al. 2009). However, in the emerging trend online interaction is not seen as separate from other aspects of human action and experience (Lyman and Wakeford 1999). Studies suggest that computer mediated communication reinforces already existing social networks offline (Drake 2003). They also suggest that different media supports different types of relationships (Wellman and Haythornthwaite 2002; Baym and Markham 2008). In my study, Face-to-Face and digital modes of connection both provided meaningful context of fieldwork as there was continuity between offline and online interaction.

From homogeneous and native to diverse and translocal participants: Traditionally in social science, a relative cultural homogeneity among residents of a specific physical location was assumed. However, the research participants were active part of geographically dispersed personal communities from many different countries and cultures. They spoke several different native languages. Thus, the participants were considered neither homogeneous nor native to the field site.

My ease of navigating the transnational field site, engaging with the diverse and mobile research participants and using the hybrid research methods came from my own experience as an international student who lives a mobile and computer mediated life.

The Researcher's Relationship with Religion

The third vital aspect of methodological considerations was my relationship to religion. Sanders and Roberts (2005, 301) observe that 'our personal biography influences how

we choose our objects of enquiry'. My study had evolved out of my association with the Ismaili community and therefore, I was specifically concerned about how to negotiate my identification with the Ismaili Muslim community in my social scientific research about the Ismaili community.

Sociologists have placed themselves in relation to religion in many different ways. Early sociologists were dismissive of religion. For example, Durkheim, born into a family of Jew Rabbis, dedicated himself to proving that religious phenomena stemmed from social rather than divine factors. He saw religion as pre-modern and whose purpose was to develop solidarity among people. With the advent of science he saw the need for religion as declining (Durkheim 1995). During the course of the 20th century 'methodological agnosticism' gained popularity (Heelas et al. 2013). Gradually, the fact that sociologists do hold personal faith commitments was recognised, although they are not expected to be partisan to it in their sociological enquiry. I chose James Beckford's (2003) 'social constructionist' approach. According to Beckford, it does not deny *a priori* possibility that there is a sacred to which human beings relate. However, it considers this question as irrelevant from a social scientific point of view as social science cannot investigate the phenomenon independent of human agency. Beckford suggests that social science can heed Wittgenstein's advice to put a full stop at the point where nothing can be said. At the same time, the way human beings 'do religion' is possible to know. My research question and my relationship with the religion as a researcher were, therefore framed with this understanding of religion.

Thus, these three aspects: my social scientific view of a flexible 'Islam', my notion of translocal field site and my relationship with religion was core to the methodology.

Research Design

Crotty (1998, 216) suggests, 'as researchers we have to devise for ourselves a research process …that helps us more than any other to answer our research questions'. This section explains the way the research process was designed to fulfil the aim of the research.

The Research Sample

The research aimed to understand the way trainee-teachers engaged with religious diversity in the STEP in the course of two years. Accordingly, I chose a Cohort who were starting their first academic year, so that I could follow through to the end of it. In this particular cohort of the STEP, A majority of the students had come from India, Pakistan, Canada and USA and a minority hailed from Syria, Tajikistan, United Arab Emirates, France, and Tanzania.

I secured 14 volunteers (37% of the class). This was a reasonable number to follow through to obtain an in-depth understanding of their experiences over the two years. I also obtained six participants for the focus group discussion. Thus, altogether 21 out of 38 trainee-teachers participated in the study.

The participants had lived in 13 different countries spread over North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. They spoke more than ten different languages and dialects among themselves including Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Persian, Shugni, Peshai, Malagasy, Gujarati, Kutchi and English. They belonged to four different geo-historical developments of the Ismaili tradition from South Asia, the Arab world, Central Asia, and the West. Seven of them had come from regions where they were settled historically and seven were part of immigrant populations. A majority of the participants were ethnically South Asian and a minority was the Arab and the Central Asian. A large majority of them were between 20 to 30 years old and female. The ethnic, age and gender distribution reflected composition of the programme. These participants had grown up in rural or urban settings and had lived in homogeneous or pluralistic societies. Their backgrounds were also marked by democratic or non-democratic political contexts. Socio-economically, a few of them had suffered harsh conditions and others seemed to have come from middle class families.

The participants showed a high degree of motivation to study in the STEP. Some of the primary reasons they had joined the STEP were to serve their Imam and the community, to achieve higher education abroad, to widen their knowledge about their religion, to fulfill their calling as teachers and to raise their socio-economic profile. They looked at it as a 'package' that provided them with the opportunity to serve their Imam and the community and develop themselves along with job security. Most had some experience of volunteering as a religion teacher before they had applied to the programme. A majority had changed their career to become a STEP teacher from as varied fields as

linguistics, literature, management, marketing and pharmacy. A small number of them had studied religion or education prior to the STEP. All of them had lived independently in urban areas for some time before they had moved to London.

Marking the Field Duration

The fieldwork was spread over three phases. The first took place during their first and the second academic terms that being their 3 to 6 months into the programme. The second phase took place in the first term of their second year that being 12 to 13 month into the programme and the last round of interviews were held after the completion of their two-year programme before their graduation. At this time, they were already in their home countries working as religion teachers. The purpose of this phased research was to find out how their perceptions had developed over time.

Data Collection Methods

As a qualitative study my research warranted the 'means of dealing with the direct experience of people in specific contexts' (Cohen et al. 2007, 11). I chose the following methods to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives.

In-depth semi-structured interviews: It was essential that the participants were given an avenue to express their experiences of the programme. The interviews fell on the continuum of what Powney and Watts (1987) identify as 'respondent' and 'informant' type interviews. In the 'respondent' type, the control of the interview lies with the interviewer who directs the interview in order to satisfy his or her questions though not necessarily in a prescribed order. In an 'informant' interview, the goal is to obtain insights into the perception of an informant rather than making them respond to the predetermined questions. I combined both approaches. It helped me understand their experience of engaging with diversity and yet left scope for unexpected or unanticipated answers (Appendix III: Interview Questionnaire).

I interviewed participants using Skype Instant Messaging (IM), traditional Face-to-Face interview and Skype Video Conferencing. Initially, I interviewed participants through Skype IM. It is a form of instantaneous online conversation. In this, participants and the researcher conversed with each other by sending each other written texts instantaneously and simultaneously online. I also interviewed the participants Face-to-

Face and probed them deeper on the aspects they had already expressed to me on Skype IM. During the second and the third round of interviews, I used Skype Video conferencing method in addition to the Face-to-Face interview method.

Two participants had dropped out of the main sample in the second round of interviews. One participant declined due to personal reasons and the second was busy for some time due to additional family responsibilities. Since data had already, shown saturation in terms of finding new information it did not seem necessary to pursue them. The two participants re-joined for the third round of interviews.

Focus group interview (FGI): I conducted a focus group with six participants from North America, South Asia, Middle East and Central Asia. The reason I conducted an FGI was to generate a lively discussion on the topic of diversity in the mixed group. I wanted to generate rich data through their exchanging information, experiences and anecdotes, asking questions and arguing, teaching and joking and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view in ways that was not possible in one to one interviews (Kitzinger 1995, 299).

Documents as a source of data: I read the course outlines, reading materials, course descriptions, participants' assignments, and their feedback on the programme. These gave me further insights into their perspectives, learning and experiences in the STEP. In order to interpret data I considered the purpose of these modes of their expressions, its intended audience, and the time of writing.

Observations: There were many opportunities to observe participants in both formal and informal situations. They helped me to make better sense of what they had said in their interviews. Formal situations included seminars and lectures on topics such as cultural encounters, rituals and the purpose of religious education. Informal and casual interactions with participants occurred frequently at locations such as library, lunch area, their residence and social events. I transferred many of my observations in my field notes. I also wrote a detailed reflection on the fieldwork. These helped me remember some critical observations, clarify my thoughts and provided data for later analysis.

These methods helped me not only to 'triangulate' to ensure validity but also contributed to deeper understanding of the participants.

Reflection on the Research Process

In this section, I deliberate upon the way the research process worked out in practice:

Negotiating 'Insider'/'Outsider Identities in the Field

In the sub-section, I will explicate how my insider/outsider status, particularly in relation to characteristics such as religion, ethnicity, and education have influenced this study. While doing so, I will reflect on the usefulness of employing an insider/outsider distinction. I have chosen to focus on three factors, religion, ethnic background and educational identity as they predominantly affected my interaction with the participants.

As far as the issue of researcher's religious identity/affiliation is concerned, it is not possible to employ the insider/outsider distinctions neatly in practice. It has been debated whether being an 'insider' when researching a particular religion is a good thing (Hinnells 2010). Salomon and Walton (2011) suggest that there are two camps. One argues that one has to pursue the study as an outsider, as a disinterested researcher for proper diagnosis; whereas, the other argues that the outsider have an 'epistemic disability' as they may be prone to reproduce categories tied to their religious and intellectual worlds. Some have counter argued that it does not matter even if one is an outsider as long as they can shed their own intellectual baggage (McAuliffe 2006). The others have found it debatable whether an insider or an outsider a scholar can shed their biases. Therefore, my first conclusion is that whether one is an insider or an outsider in relation to religion, he or she still faces the charge of not being 'objective'. It is not possible to have an objective understanding of phenomenon, as it is not possible to get outside one's skin. We all are 'located knowers' (Code 2002, 243). My association with the transnational Ismaili Muslim community has influenced my choice of approach: I am empathetic to the community's struggle to affirm its Muslim identity within the diverse mosaic of Islam.

Secondly, there are many ways of being an 'insider' in relation to religion in social science. For example, Fatima Mernissi (2004) positions herself as a Muslim feminist sociologist and as a 'critical insider', who works with Muslims to understand women's rights. On the other hand, Heilman's (1995) approach is that of an admiring insider, who describes himself as a modern Orthodox Jewish sociologist, who found his way

back into the traditional synagogue via the tools of his social science. My positive appraisal of the Ismaili community's response to plurality suggests admiration because I see pluralism as a necessity today. At the same time, I am critical in the sense of describing pluralism as a 'modern' discourse of the community rather than seeing it as a given essence or perennial ethical value of the community, a view that the Secondary Curriculum seems to ascribe to. Therefore, the degree of criticality and admiration that I demonstrate in this study is context dependent and nuanced rather than a sweeping stance.

Thirdly, a plurality-conscious view of 'Islam' renders the issue of insider/outsider problematic. Which particular view of Islam do I hold to locate myself as an insider or outsider to it? Depending on my participants' view of religion, I was at once both, an insider or outsider for different individuals at different levels. Therefore, the issue of insider is a contested one. Mernissi has written about the issue (Salomon and Walton 2011). She positions herself as a 'critical insider', however, the editor of an Islamic Journal discounted her as misrepresenting the Islamic tradition. For him she was an outsider. This gives rise to the questions (Salomon and Walton 2011): what determines someone as insider or not? Who makes these decisions? Are these permanent categories or do we traverse these categories creatively and contextually? The answers to such questions are difficult in the context of Islam, because the notion of 'authentic Islam' has been contested throughout history. Thus, I propose that the distinction outsider/insider is useful as long as it is not seen as one-dimensional, sweeping and static stance in social science.

During the fieldwork, one of my worries was the impact that my faith identification may have on the participants' responses. Chapter 8 explores ways in which the participants dynamically and contextually articulated their relationship with their faith in front of different audiences. There was a distinction created in the programme between 'believer' and 'academic' study of religion (see Chapter 8). The following are some of their responses that I received when I stated to them my academic interest in this research:

Researcher	Participants
My interest is academic.	Anaya: <u>I know</u>[1] <u>that's why</u>[2] I am saying that…
I am really interested as an academician.	Focus Group participants (all at once, nodded): <u>Yeah, yeah</u>[3], <u>no problem</u>.[4]

Points one and three suggest that the participants assumed me an academic. Point two indicates that it had an impact on their responses and the points two and four suggest that they were open to sharing their views with me.

While my research participants perceived my research as an academic endeavour, they did see me as an insider to the community. This assisted me in my research. They could take my familiarity with what they said for granted. Two students asked me if I was an Ismaili mainly to make sure that I understood what they were referring to. The following excerpt is relevant to understanding this:

> Ahmed: I have always been a volunteer in Jamāʿat-khāna as well. Actually it stems from them [my parents], their involvement. Are you Ismaili as well?
>
> Laila: Yes.
>
> Ahmed: We would be in Jamāʿat-khāna in volunteer uniform...(continued).

The advantage of them perceiving me as an insider to the community was that they then did not hesitate to tell me in detail about the private aspects of community life. The *Jamāʿat-khāna* activities are an example of that. Thus, my third conclusion in relation to my religious identity is that being perceived as an 'insider' helped to smooth the process of research and made it easier for the participants and me to relate to each other.

Having discussed the issue of insider/outsider in relation to my religious identity, I will elaborate on the influence of my ethnicity and cultural background. Tharp (1979) claims that ethnic matching has little relevance but culture matching does affect a researcher's insider status. According to him, being a member of the same culture facilitates

understanding and communication. The participants from South Asia used Urdu, Hindi and English languages interchangeably and spoke at length with me, mainly due to shared linguistic and cultural background between us. Nevertheless, I also seemed like an outsider to them as I have been in the UK for many years. It distinguished me in the eyes of some of them. There was also a sense of shared culture with many participants from the West as most of them were originally from South Asia and had moved to the West many years ago. At the same time, I felt like an outsider to those who were born in the West.

The participants from the Arab and Central Asian backgrounds initially spoke in constrained manner but not in all cases. They found English to be limiting their self-expression. Though not sharing their ethnicity and language made me feel like an outsider to them at one level, they seemed to treat me as an insider at another level. Following is an excerpt from the conversation that took place when they stayed back especially to speak to me after a group discussion:

> *Amal: I actually feel more comfortable when there is an Iranian or Tajik. I can say more things.*
>
> *Aly: Likewise, I say things in front of you [referring to Amal], not in front of them [South Asian students who had just left].*
>
> *Amal: Here majority are from one tradition, right? Even if you want to express an idea or something I feel like, I cannot say…because they are the majority here…*

It was interesting to notice that each time they referred to the Ismailis from South Asian tradition or from South Asian origin, they did not include me in it. My academic identity seemed to transcend my ethnicity as well as my affiliation with the South Asian Ismaili tradition in this particular research relationship.

My most helpful identity was our shared sense of being student-researcher. Although, I was an outsider to the STEP, I was an insider to them as a student-researcher, who was like them studying and researching albeit in another programme of study. Like them, I was part of transnational educational space and was internationally mobile throughout the programme. My learning experience also included computer-mediated activities such as using email, mobile phones, blogging and processing information on screens. This made me insider to the international and diverse student community in UK of which STEP participants were also a part. Our shared identity as international students

and student-researchers helped us relate to each other's' experiences better. I sensed a great deal of empathy for me, especially at the second round of interviews. At the time, the participants were preparing their post-graduate research proposals and planning their field visits. They empathised with the research endeavour and therefore, were open to express their views and feelings.

My identity as a female researcher was helpful to connect with a majority of the participants, as out of 21 participants, 16 participants were female. My gender identity did not seem to exert as stronger influence as the three factors mentioned above, nor did it seem to be much of a problem with male participants given a highly gender-mixed environment of STEP. Moreover, my research methods were primarily interview based rather than involving observations of male spaces where my female identity may have been an issue. A limitation in my research is that I do not take account of gendered experiences of engaging with diversity. This dimension may have enriched the project further had that also been the focus of the study.

In light of the discussion above on my religious, ethnic and educational identities as insider/outsider, I propose that the application of the distinction outsider/insider is not sweeping, single-dimensional and static in practice. There are layers of being an insider and outsider in the field that are constantly negotiated depending on the context, the researcher's personal attributes and the characteristics of participants to an extent that when insider status ends and outsider begins cannot be described neatly. While, the theoretical distinction of insider/outsider is useful as a tool to reflect on the research relationships, their actualisation on the field intertwines with multiple factors in subtle ways. Coffey (2000) rightly concludes that relationships in the field are 'gendered, racialized, sexualized, embodied and emotional'.

Research Ethics

I mainly followed the University of Sussex' ethics approval procedure, British Educational Research Association's (BERA) Ethical Guidelines (for educational research) and Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (March 2002). I ensured that the study demonstrated ethic of respect for person, knowledge, academic freedom, democratic values and the quality of educational research.

The process of selecting the participants was democratic, voluntary and fair. All trainee-teachers received an open invitation to participate in the study from me via two emails. I also made a presentation to them explaining my research and answered their queries. I provided them with the Informed Consent Form to read, which those who wanted to participate in the study signed. They had the option to withdraw at any time during the two-year study.

A very critical part of the research ethic is how to move from the 'context of discovery' to the 'context of presentation' (Plath 1990, 376). It involves moral, epistemological and political issues in 'getting 'their' lives into 'our' works' (Sparkes 2002, 9). In this section, I discuss three of the ethical dilemmas faced in presenting the findings and possible solutions to them.

The first ethical concern was that, despite the claim to present the participants' worldviews, my findings were only a '(re) presentation', therefore, it was bound to lose 'something in the translation' (Bagley 2008, 53–54). In order to protect against this as much as possible, I followed Miles and Huberman's 'fairly classic set' of six common moves as described by Punch (Punch 2005, 194). I first transcribed all the interviews. Then I listened to the recorded interviews twice in order to immerse myself into the data. I read my field notes again to remind myself of non-verbal issues and the contexts in which the interviews took place. Then, I summarized the data, labelled pieces of data and identified patterns and relationships between them. During this process, a major challenge was ensuring that there was no significant loss of information and that data was not deprived of its context. Using the techniques of data display, I ordered pieces of the data in a logical flow and kept changing their places as the data analysis progressed. This was not a linear process. I kept drawing conclusions and verifying them. I also looked for gaps in my knowledge, weighted evidence in terms of whether the data was only a single voice. I also checked if I was risking going beyond data while drawing conclusions. I used NVivio software to code data generated in the first phase of fieldwork and did the same manually after the second phase of fieldwork. The reason for this change was that manual coding allowed me to stay much closer to the transcripts as the codes were still embedded in the transcripts and I was able to make sense of them within the context of what the participants had said before and after. I benefitted more from working closely with each transcript on a one to one basis throughout the data coding, analysis and writing process.

The second critical ethical dilemma was the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Changing names of the participants was not sufficient. Some of the participants from the main sample were still identifiable. This was because what they said was directly connected to their country and they were the only participants from their country in the sample. This worried some of those participants and me equally. As a solution to this, I resorted to creating 'ambiguous identities' in this thesis using the following techniques:

- I provide a broad generalized overview of the profile of participants rather than separate biography of each participant;
- I situate them within broader regional locations where possible so that they become part of a larger group of participants;
- In their quotations wherever they made references to their country, I have replaced it with 'a country' or 'my country' as needed;
- I avoid an in-depth exploration of the way their prior contexts has played a role in shaping their identities and experiences. This compromises a rich contextual understanding of findings. To this extent, the research is limited.

Despite these efforts, it was possible to betray the identities of the participants. Therefore, I consulted participants in relation to their representation in the thesis and revised it further to protect their identities.

Given the public profile of the institutions, IIS and IOE, I chose not to make them anonymous. Ess and Jones (2004, 31) state, 'The greater is the acknowledged publicity of the venue, the less obligation there may be to protect individual privacy, confidentiality and rights to informed consent'.

The third ethical issue was the fair representation of diverse perspectives. Out of 21 research participants, most of the participants either were from South Asia or had South Asian origin (15) and only a minority were from the Central Asian and Arab backgrounds (6). This posed the issue of a balanced representation. I needed to make sure that my thesis was not simply reflecting views of the majority. Through focus group and informal communications, I was able to speak to many more participants from the Central Asian and Arab backgrounds beyond the main sample. It gave me a wider and deeper understanding of their perspectives.

In addition to the above ethical considerations, I also avoided observing the trainee-teachers in their teaching practice to protect the interest of vulnerable young people and children. I also took relationship with my funders, sponsoring institutions and academic body seriously and negotiated a balance between obligations and academic freedom.

Assessing the Efficacy of the Hybrid Research Methods

It seemed inevitable and indispensable to exchange emails, make Skype calls and send each other IM or Face Book messages throughout the programme due to geographic distance as they or I travelled to different parts of the world during the two and a half years. We also shared assignments and documents online. This obviously promoted a 'multi-sited' imagery of the field (Marcus 1998). In this section, I particularly review the way Skype Instant Messaging (IM) and Skype Video Conferencing worked as research methods.

As far as Skype IM was concerned, there were certain advantages to using it as an interview method that traditional offline Face-to-Face Interview did not have. It was much more convenient and easier to schedule Skype IM interviews than Face-to-Face interviews. The participants and I were able to speak to each other from the comfort of our homes even when we were scattered across the continents. The transcripts were also instantly available to us.

Despite these advantages, Skype IM method of interviewing did not work for me. I missed the personal human bond that I consider very necessary for successful research. For me it is a basis for establishing a trusting and open communication. In addition, there were other issues with Skype IM due to it being a written conversation and a lack of understanding of 'IM-etiquettes' on my part. I was not sure when it was appropriate to ask the next question or when I was interrupting their thoughts. Sometimes I posed the next question when they were still completing their response to the earlier one. Other times I assumed that they were still writing when they were actually waiting for me to ask next question. Occasionally, communication seemed to happen in parallel. Secondly, I was unsure what affirmations or nod to give to keep the conversation flowing. In Face-to-Face conversation, verbal node and non-verbal signals are central to propelling a richer conversation. However, I felt confused in terms of how it worked on Skype IM. Third, it took longer to express oneself in writing than in verbal

communication. It took twice the time than required in a Face-to-Face interview to cover the same set of questions. Often the participants did not have that much time in one go. It was also exhausting after about 45 minutes. Fourth, some participants' responses seemed much shorter in Skype IM. Fifth, communicating one's thoughts and feelings through writing did not seem to suit everyone. Sixth, sometimes language seemed prone to misinterpretations in the absence of facial expressions and non-verbal clues that enrich face-to-face conversations. Seventh, sometimes some participants took longer to respond to questions. It left me wondering if they were facing some difficulty, they were reflecting on the question or my messages were not reaching them soon enough. On one occasion, it seemed to me that the participant had perhaps popped out or had distracted for some time. When interruptions occur online, the other party may not know how to respond to it and online waiting time feels different from Face-to-Face waiting time. The last, but the most important point was the issue of trust and confidentiality. It required trust that the participants were responding to questions themselves and there was no one else around them who might influence their expressions.

As a result, I switched to Face-to-Face Interview and probed them deeper on the aspects they had already expressed to me. One of the participants had preferred Skype IM method over Face-to-Face interviews. Therefore, I continued to interview him on Skype IM.

The question is when is Skype IM good to use? My first conclusion is that it is indeed a valuable tool for interviews upon establishing trust and good rapport between respondents and researcher. It is only after I had spent an extended period getting to know participants in an offline setting over many months that the online IM interaction became much richer. Secondly, online interactions such as the Skype IM have their own written online instant messaging culture and norms, which I call 'IM-etiquettes'. An understanding of it is necessary; this understanding too, evolved over time in interpersonal relationship.

The Skype Video conferencing, which was a form of online Face-to-Face Interview worked as effectively as the offline Face-to-Face interview. In some cases, the Skype Video conferencing was more effective than offline Face-to-Face interview. In the third phase of the interviews, since the participants were in their home countries, this method

of interviewing was indispensable. Some participants interviewed in this manner expressed that they had felt at ease to express themselves at length as it gave them a homely and informal feel. They were in the comfort of their home, while I was in mine. It was much easier and convenient to schedule Skype Video interview than offline Face-to-Face interview. It avoided the need for travelling anywhere for both the researcher and the participants, did not need much advance notice to schedule and was possible to do even in the late evenings when the participants felt relaxed at home.

Overall, online avenues and tools supported the research relationships. There was an essential continuity between offline and online interactions. Thus, I consider their combination as indispensable to study the complex nature of contemporary social life.

Validity

According to Maxwell (2002, 41), in the broader sense validity 'pertains to the relationship between an account and something external to it'. Unlike natural science research, whereby validity comes from *correspondence* of results with external and objective reality, in qualitative studies, events and situations often have multiple interpretations. This study is one of many possible readings of participants' engagement with diversity. Therefore, the measure of validity for this thesis is *consensus* and not *correspondence*. If the participants and I agree with the observations about them in this thesis, then I suggest that the findings are valid. Therefore, I submitted my thesis to the participants for feedback on whether the findings and observations of this thesis authentically reflect their experiences. Out of the 21 participants of my study, I heard from ten participants at the time of submission of the thesis. Each of them corroborated with the findings. Following are the sample comments:

> *This is a lot of fun to read. I have gone through several pages, and am enjoying reading the conclusions — conclusions that I think the cohort might agree with. Well done! (Ahmed, email)*

> *Thanks for your email. I went through your thesis and it is really interesting. I am fine with my presentation. (Ria, email)*

> *I can recognize myself but it was difficult in the beginning. I do not think others will identify me (and you did not mention 'my country' so it is completely fine). (Reema, email)*

> *I have reviewed the draft. I am comfortable with way you have recorded me. Best luck. (Sheela, email)*

Zeba rewrote her quotes to convey more clearly, what she had felt during the programme and the changes in her perspective. This was because she had used her native language during the interviews and her representation was in English language. It stayed true to what she had expressed then. Zulfiqar wanted me to change his earlier pseudo name because it resembled his real name and Naila alerted me to two different spellings used for her pseudo name. Participants appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their learning and experience of the programme. Some of them also remarked that they had found interviews as 'safe' environment to express their thoughts and feelings.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the reasons why I chose the particular methodology and methods and how it worked out in practice, while also examining my identity as a researcher and ethical issues.

Dividing the fieldwork in three phases proved valuable to capture the participants' learning over a period. The use of hybrid research methods was indispensable as it supported research relationships and provided for the meaningful context of fieldwork. It made field work a multi-sited endeavour rather than geographically bounded.

The issue of power was mitigated. Participants had the opportunity to provide feedback on the manuscript of the thesis.

The research process itself was a lived experience of engaging with differences. It facilitated further reflection on the way the participants and I engaged with diversity.

5. The Secondary Teacher Education Programme's Approach to Religious Plurality: 'An opening of windows, not a demolition of homes'

This chapter explores the Secondary Teacher Education Programme's (STEP) approach to religious plurality. It argues that in the STEP, while its overall ethos is pluralistic, exclusivism and inclusivism are involved in different degrees on different matters.

There are two main sections in this chapter. The first examines STEP's 'civilizational, normative and humanistic approach in relation to religious difference, and the second brings the lens closer to the issue of inter-faith, intra-Islam and intra-Ismaili differences in STEP curriculum. Since STEP aims to equip trainee-teachers in skills and perspectives necessary for teaching the Secondary Curriculum, the focus of this chapter will be on the Secondary Curriculum as the heart of the STEP. Data for this section is also drawn from the STEP modules, reading materials, classroom observations and the learning environment of IIS.

The Civilizational, Humanistic and Normative Approach

Chapter 3 broadly discussed two major strands of RE in a multi-faith and globalised setting: pluralistic RE and truth-claims centred RE. Pluralistic pedagogies do not claim to nurture children in religions that they teach, but treat religion as a phenomenon of human culture. In contrast, truth-centred approaches are concerned with the relative validity of religious claims. Owing to its 'civilizational, humanistic, and normative approach', STEP brings together these two models, synthesising what is seen as useful in them both.

The way STEP employs the term 'religious education', denotes both the kind of approach adapted in the English state funded schools and the 'religious nurture'

approach. STEP seeks inspiration from the 'liberal' tradition of RE. A directive from the Aga Khan (2001) states, 'The notion of normativism has a broad dimension in the Ismaili tradition that we are not going to be indoctrinating, but educating the young minds'. Thus, STEP does not seek to 'indoctrinate' in a sense that only the Ismaili interpretation is right. What it seems to be doing is to 'educate' students in a variety of perspectives, albeit with a view to provide grounding in the Ismaili faith to Ismaili individuals. One of the 'educational aims' of the Secondary Curriculum is,

> *Nurture in students an intellectual and ethical commitment to their own faith, while also encouraging them to understand and respect the traditions and beliefs of other people (Department of Curriculum Studies, 2013a, 7).*

Esmail, the former Dean of the IIS and one of its Governors since 1988, is an influential voice in providing direction to the STEP and the Secondary Curriculum. He (1996) has explained the 'civilizational' approach,

> *Contrary to the modern habit (for it is modern) of speaking of Islam as 'a tradition' (or still more narrowly, as a 'religious tradition'), it is truer to history to regard classical Islam as a framework of institutions, languages, world-views, aesthetic forms, technologies and intellectual systems, essentially of urban origin, but coexistent with numerous rural, vernacular cultures… And if we must have a name for this historical complex, the term 'civilisation' approximates it far closer… than any other one at our disposal.*

The *civilizational* approach allows the STEP to interpret 'Islam' broadly to be inclusive of a multiplicity of worldviews, cultures, institutions, languages and artistic expressions prevalent in Muslim societies. In this approach to RE, doctrines and religious beliefs are considered as important, but these are not taught exclusively. Tradition is seen as expressed through art, architecture, institutions, literature, music, politics, economics and intellectual traditions in addition to doctrines (Department of Curriculum Studies 2013a).

In order to teach Islam as a civilisation, *humanistic* perspectives from the social sciences, literary criticism, philosophy and the humanities are integrated with religious content in STEP. It helps STEP to teach religious tradition historically and comparatively, as dynamic and evolving in a variety of historical, political and socio-cultural contexts with a range of viewpoints.

STEP, however, points out an important caveat in terms of how it uses social scientific perspectives. The Secondary Curriculum emphasises that its approach to using social

scientific tools in the study of religion is different from other religious studies approaches to RE. The ways social scientific tools are normally used in British pluralistic RE treats religion as a social phenomenon and a cultural artefact. In contrast, the (Department of Curriculum Studies 2013a, 6) explains that in the STEP religion is not reduced to a set of doctrines,

> *Equally, religion is not reduced to being simply a social manifestation, but students are led progressively to reflect on the place of the sacred in human culture.*

As far as the *normative* dimension is concerned, the Secondary Curriculum seeks to foster religious pluralism as a normative stance of the community. This approach echoes Hull's (1982) 'practical theology' in which he argues for the replacement of parochial RE with a plurality-centred RE based on theological grounds. Hull argues that the respect for diverse religions must be fostered as a faith commitment. Teaching tolerance of other religions is not enough, but this interpretation should become part of the self-understanding of the religious communities themselves. The Secondary Curriculum seems to aim at this objective.

The normative stance of the Secondary Curriculum in terms of religious diversity can be described as 'theological pluralism'. In this approach, pluralism is seen as an Islamic value, integral to the message of Islam and the Ismaili interpretation of Islam. The tendency is to see diversity as divinely willed and evidence from religious sources and history are explored to justify this position. In backing pluralism in Secondary Curriculum, the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth,* the life of the Prophet Muḥammad and Muslim history serve as resources. Islam is seen as inclusive of other messengers such as those of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Jesus. In addition to the Qurʾān, examples from the history of Muslims are also discussed in the STEP programme to illustrate Islam's positive stance on religious diversity. The paradigmatic examples of pluralism and tolerance are often drawn also from the reign of the Ottomans, Moorish Spain, and the Fāṭimids in Egypt. Additionally, internal diversity within Islam is seen as attesting to its pluralistic nature. The existence of several schools of jurisprudence and mystic groups such as Ṣūfīs is cited as examples of pluralist tendencies within Islam. This approach in turn contributes to the development of what Walzer (1996) calls 'thick motivations' for tolerance that are grounded in and sustained by deep confessional convictions.

A small group of scholars associated with STEP, however, seem ambivalent about theological pluralism. They agree that Ismaili Muslims must draw upon historical moments and perceptions from Muslim history and religious texts that engage positively with diversity, but they want this without making pluralism an apologetic endeavour. They see generalising pluralism across fourteen centuries of Ismaili history as a highly problematic proposition.

Consequently, the everyday top-down discourse in STEP is informed by two parallel approaches to pluralism. A group of tutors believe and teach that pluralism has always been a message of Islam. Other groups of tutors draw upon religious resources to cultivate pluralism among the STEP trainee-teachers with awareness that just as the exclusivist interpretations of Islam have developed in a historical context; pluralistic ideas have also evolved in a context to serve particular interests. Nonetheless, in STEP pluralism is seen as a 'religious virtue' as this aspect of Ismailism is repeatedly emphasised by the current Ismaili Imam, the Aga Khan. Therefore, in broad terms, the ethos of 'theological pluralism' prevails in STEP.

In general, the key messages that the Secondary Curriculum in relation to religious diversity promotes are:

- Diversity is a fact.
- Diversity is 'strength', 'opportunity', 'blessing', 'healthy' and 'enriching'.
- A positive engagement with diversity is a 'religious virtue'.
- Pluralism is a necessity of the globalised world/21st century for 'stability', 'unity', 'sharing of skills and knowledge' and 'flowering of civilisation'.
- The 'ethic' of pluralism requires deliberate cultivation.

The STEP's approach to RE is intercultural. STEP sees religions and cultures as historically interactive rather than clashing with each other. For instance, one of its MA modules *Literature of Muslim Societies* explores a rich literary culture, which spans several languages and appreciates intercultural exchanges that led to shared literary genres, themes and authors across different linguistic contexts from Africa to China. Similarly, the *Traditions of Enquiry module* describes intellectual exchanges between different civilisations. Thus, the STEP demonstrates a plurality-fostering approach.

The Three Concentric Circles

This section examines closely how the STEP deals with inter-religious, intra-Islam and intra-Ismaili plurality. The overall approach of the Secondary Curriculum to religious plurality can be conceived through the model of three concentric circles. In this, the Secondary Curriculum sees the Ismaili community (the smallest circle) as part of the diversity of Islam (the middle circle) and Islam is seen as part of larger humanity (the biggest circle). Thus, the Ismaili community is understood to be at once in relationship with both — Islam as well as the wider humanity.

Inter-Religious Diversity

In Chapter 2, I noted that the history of the complex relationship between Jews, Christians and Muslims could be read through an exclusivist narrative as well as a pluralist narrative depending on what is warranted. Since STEP is plurality-fostering RE, it supports a pluralist narrative. An example from the Secondary Curriculum module *Muslim Societies and Civilisations'* Student Reader (Vol. 2) on 'Muslim Spain' (Department of Curriculum Studies 2013b, 113–116) is illustrative. I have summarised it below:

The Secondary Curriculum's 'Muslim Spain'

'The Blending of Peoples and Cultures'

While teaching about Muslim rule in Al-Andalusia in Spain in the medieval period, the Secondary Curriculum (SC) conveys that diverse people lived in the cities of al-Andalusia, including Arabs, Persians, Berbers, Visigoths, and Slavs. Muslims, Christians, and Jews also lived together. It tells pupils that 'By interacting with one another all these people created a unique and brilliant culture. This peaceful, tolerant way of living is now called *convivencia*, a Spanish word meaning "co-existence"' (113). The students are also informed that 'Things did not always run smoothly though; there were uprisings, riots and even persecutions at times' (113). However, attention is quickly drawn back to how the societies, cultures, and religious communities lived peacefully together and how minorities flourished even in the reigns of the ʿAbbāsids and the Fāṭimids. The chapter then goes on to explain the benefits of peaceful co-existence.

This is further emphasised by the speeches of the Aga Khan, delivered in 2006 in Spain and Portugal presented under the sub-titles 'Intercultural affection and intercultural respect' and 'A truly enabling environment' respectively (115). In both, the Aga Khan takes note of intercultural exchanges that took place between Jews, Muslims, and Christians many centuries ago. The Aga Khan (2006) is quoted:

> *The reality is that our world is pluralistic and multi-cultural and destined to remain so. Ought we not, then, to focus our attention on period of history when pluralism was happily embraced?*
>
> *This brings me to Toledo, which has so successfully preserved, over many centuries, the evidence of its threefold culture: magnificent churches, synagogues, and mosques. This was an era when each of these cultures, Christian, Jewish and Muslim, retained its independent identity while all worked and came together in a glorious intellectual and spiritual adventure. The legacy was a truly enabling environment conducive to prosperity, harmony, scientific, discovery, philosophical insights and artistic flowering-all the defining features of a thriving civilisation.*

After reflecting on extracts of the speeches, the pupils are asked to be cultural historians and select a society or community in the past, examine its relationship with other groups, and think about what pluralism means and how it might help to achieve harmony (116).

As can be gleaned from the above module extract, STEP offers a modern rereading of Muslim history to facilitate pluralism. It does not necessarily provide enough opportunities to admit to intolerant notions in Muslim historical experience. It does what Filali-Ansary (2003) has recommended: exercising our power to reject these and embrace the more liberal and tolerant principles of our tradition.

Like any historical religion, some of the Ismaili community's assertions and history sit somewhat uncomfortably with the pluralistic ethos that it seeks to promote. For instance, Islam's monotheistic emphasis and the mission of the Prophet to 'reform the polytheistic society of Arabia' by definition seem to exclude traditions that do not share monotheistic conceptions. However, the Secondary Curriculum seems to go beyond the 'truth-claims oriented' approach to the 'shared-ground oriented' position (see Chapter 2 for three approaches to religious pluralism). In the 'shared-grounds oriented' approach, finding common positions beyond the truth-claims assumes a much greater significance. This approach does not require the endorsement of pluralism about truth or salvation but the affirmation of universal values such as love, care, forgiveness, and serving others.

The 'One World Many Hopes' module sensitises pupils to various issues that Beck describes as part of the 'risk society' (1992) such as natural disasters, environmental issues, global conflicts, fear of destructive weapons, political, social and economic issues. The pupils are encouraged to work for the advancement of education, the eradication of hunger and poverty and the creation of an enabling environment for all humanity (Department of Curriculum Studies 2010a). Caring and 'working for the good of all' are promoted as ethical values. 'Enjoining what is good' is interpreted as a responsibility to safeguard the planet so that 'it remains a home to all human beings' (Department of Curriculum Studies 2010b, 115). The module cites the relevant verses from the Qurʾān generously in order to inculcate in pupils a sense of responsibility towards the planet as its 'guardians' rather than merely as consumers.

Moreover, STEP presents itself as an outward looking endeavour. It collaborates with educational institutions and faculty members upholding diverse religious and non-religious beliefs. The programme is situated in London, which is seen as an opportunity to access cosmopolitan cultural events and an international network of friends. This shows STEP's efforts to engage with plurality beyond a narrowly defined doctrinal approach.

Intra-Islam Diversity

A central theme that runs through STEP is the appreciation of the enormous diversity of Muslim societies. The MA in 'Muslim Societies and Civilisations' offered by STEP does not confine the study of Islam to a particular geographical location, a sacred text or to a particular historical period. This intercultural approach creates room for collective historical memories other than the Arabic and Persian cultures. The Shia Ismaili tradition of Islam is situated within the diversity of Muslim societies and is studied as an example of one of the many readings of Islam.

Esmail (1995) distinguishes between 'Islam' as a *fact* and an *idea*. He argues that it is important to reject a tendency to see 'Islam' as a fixed entity independent of the intellectual and social constructs of the society in which the term is invoked. In different times and places, societies have envisioned Islam in different ways. It is, therefore, best to see 'Islam' as a phenomenon, which is evolving, changing, and developing. An implication of Esmail's thinking on STEP is that a Muslim is able to question, what *idea* of Islam might be the most relevant to live in contemporary times. He or she can then choose from among many options including fundamentalism and traditionalism. This perspective has informed the Secondary Curriculum as pupils are asked to reflect on what attitudes, values, ideas and beliefs are facilitative to live as a good Muslim in the present time. For instance, the Secondary Curriculum (Department of Curriculum Studies 2010b, 9), encourages pupils to think about:

> *The challenges of our times raise the question of what kinds of societies we want to help create for the future. In addressing these issues, we have to consider what beliefs and values will guide us towards better societies.*

The Secondary Curriculum, thus, claims to make it possible for students to live their lives in contemporary times as Muslims without retreating to an imagined past.

The STEP rejects the dichotomy between 'religious' and 'secular' and 'traditional' and 'modern'. According to Thobani (2007, 13), presently the Head of the Department of Curriculum Studies at the IIS, in any case 'religious' and 'secular' and 'traditional' and 'modern' are not static, absolute and ultimately irreconcilable categories. Thus, in my view, the STEP has an *idea* of a pluralistic and dynamic Islam and it seeks to shape the STEP participants' *idea* of Islam in this mould.

A positive engagement with plurality is not a straightforward exercise. The issue of how to nurture loyalty to its own creed, while also maintaining respect for plurality within Islam is a delicate one. This is especially the case when the doctrinal claims contradict each other and those have been a cause of historical hostility between different Muslim communities. I use the example of G̲h̲adīr K̲h̲umm (Department of Curriculum Studies 2013c, 75–93) to examine the way commitment to particularity and respect for plurality is balanced in the Secondary Curriculum. G̲h̲adīr K̲h̲umm is an extremely significant event that divides Sunni and Shii communities on the legitimate successor to the Prophet Muḥammad. I have summarised the Secondary Curriculum's presentation of it in the following text box:

The character of ʿAlī is introduced in detail and time is spent on cultivating respect and affection for him, before entering into the *Saḳīfa* debate and introducing Abū Bakr. [16]

G̲h̲adīr K̲h̲umm in the Secondary Curriculum

The Student Reader suggests that the event of G̲h̲adīr K̲h̲umm is central to the formation of Shia belief that the Prophet appointed ʿAlī as his successor. The Reader describes the event that on the Prophet's return to Medina from his last pilgrimage, the Prophet received a revelation to deliver God's message to people and not doing so would amount to 'not delivering God's message'. Hence, the Prophet gathered his followers and ordered that 'He whose *Mawla* I am, ʿʿAlī is his *Mawla*'. Upon this, according to Shia sources, another revelation was received by the Prophet suggesting that on that day God perfected His religion for people (5:3). The Reader narrates this event drawing upon widely respected Shia, and Sunni sources. It then goes on to quote *Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn* (Ḥadīth of Two Weighty Matters) which was attributed to the Prophet four times from three widely respected Shia, and Sunni sources and suggests the significance of respecting his family that includes ʿAlī.

The Reader then devotes significant attention to the noble characteristics of ʿAlī and the warm and supportive relationship between him and the Prophet. Having developed affection for ʿAlī's character among pupils, the Reader presents the event of *Saḳīfa* that takes place in the aftermath of the Prophet's death, which sees the appointment of Abū Bakr as the head of a large group of the Muslim community after the Prophet. ʿAlī is depicted to be busy with the Prophet's funeral at the time. After this, Abū Bakr is introduced to pupils in the Reader in a positive light.

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[16] A similar observation is noted by a STEP teacher in her MA dissertation.

This is how the educational aim of inviting pupils to 'affirm their loyalty to the Imam' and yet maintaining respect for plurality is responded to in the Secondary Curriculum. Clearly, pluralism for the Secondary Curriculum is about 'an opening of windows, not a demolition of homes'(Esmail 1995, 487).

Intra-Ismaili Diversity

STEP represents a shift from a locally driven negotiation of identity to a centrally driven construction of a global Ismaili Muslim identity. From its inception, bringing together students from different Ismaili traditions to learn from each other was seen as a crucial advantage of STEP (Nanji 2005, 2). A meta-narrative of the worldwide Ismaili fraternity surrounding the STEP presents all Ismailis as spiritual brothers and sisters united by the Imam as their spiritual father. There is a constant reinforcement of 'unity in diversity' in the Aga Khan's guidance to the community. As far as differences in religious practices among different Ismaili communities are concerned,   matters of the faith are seen as the prerogative of the *Imaam al-Zamān,* the Imam of the time.

One way the differences are made acceptable is through parallelism. For example, *Ginans* are often regarded as equivalent to *Madhos* or *Qasidas* of Central Asian and Arab Ismaili traditions. Traditions are divided along particular pīrs (i.e. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, pīr Sadardin). The language of ṣalāt, ritual prayer is Arabic while the language of other devotional activities and religious/non-religious dialogue is the local languages. IIS and other community institutions regularly hold lectures, seminars and workshops on the theme of plurality for the community. The IIS has established research units to better understand the history, culture and traditions of different Ismaili communities and make them available to a wider audience.[17] The international RE programmes such as the *Talim* and the Secondary Curriculum are designed for the religious and cultural education of Ismaili Muslim students, parents and teachers worldwide. The translations of the *Talim* and the Secondary Curriculum materials are

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[17] Some of the examples are: *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines* (1992); *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Ismailis* (1994), *Mediaeval Ismaili History and Thought* (1996) and *Historical Dictionary of the Ismailis* (2011b). In addition, Ismaili scholars such as Jiwa (2009); (2013) and Eboo-Jamal (2002) have also made significant a contribution to these aims.

available in a number of languages including Arabic, Persian, Tajik, Urdu, French, Portuguese and Guajarati.

Conclusion

This chapter explored how STEP responds to religious plurality through its civilizational, humanistic and normative approach to RE. STEP promotes that diversity must be recognised as a fact and a positive feature of society. Pluralism is a normative ethical value. Wherever, doctrinal affinities support pluralism, STEP draws upon them to include the religious 'other', as in the case of the Abrahamic traditions and includes the rest on the grounds of shared values and a shared commitment to the betterment of humanity.

However, inclusivity is not without its challenges, given the need to inculcate in pupils loyalty to the creeds of the community. In the STEP, exclusivism and inclusivism are involved in different degrees on different matters.

Having mainly explored in this chapter the top-down ethos on religious pluralism as reflected in the STEP, the next three chapters examine the way the STEP trainee-teachers engage with religious difference and the impact that the STEP has on them.

6. The Experience of Intra-Ismaili Differences: Developing an 'inter-tradition' competence'

This chapter investigates the research participants' experience of engaging with differences within the Ismaili faith in STEP and its impact on them. There are two key findings. The first is that a prolonged engagement with the trainee-teachers from diverse Ismaili groups led to a pattern of adaptation among participants, over a period of time, of redefining what it meant for them to be an Ismaili Muslim. It involved a five-pronged educational process: Fascination, Problematisation, Adjustment, Ambivalence and Connections, albeit not without the issue of power and representation. In this, the participants moved from 'ethnocentrism' and 'tradition-centrism' to the cultivation of a degree of 'inter-tradition competence', also referred to as 'intra-Ismaili' and 'intra-faith' competence in this thesis. The second key finding is that in the course of the programme, social and cultural factors contributed a great deal more to the participants' experience of intra-faith diversity than religious differences. Factors such as language, age, gender, prior travelling experience, personal characteristics, social status and social confidence contributed to the way they engaged with differences.

This chapter is a useful resource for educators, students and policy makers in intra-faith settings as it provides analytical tools and the vocabulary to understand individuals' participation in intra-faith education. There are two main parts to this chapter. The first provides a broad theoretical overview of the five-dimensional process and the second examines each dimension in greater depth with substantial evidence from the empirical data.

The Five-Dimensional Model of the Intra-Faith Experience

Insights from cross-cultural studies suggest that normally people experience a number of phases during their adjustment to an intercultural setting (Cushner et al. 2011). Cushner et al. (2011) propose the 'U-Curve Hypothesis' in their significant work *Human Diversity in Education: An intercultural approach*, describing intercultural experiences as entailing four key phases as depicted below:

Figure 6.2: U-Curve Hypothesis
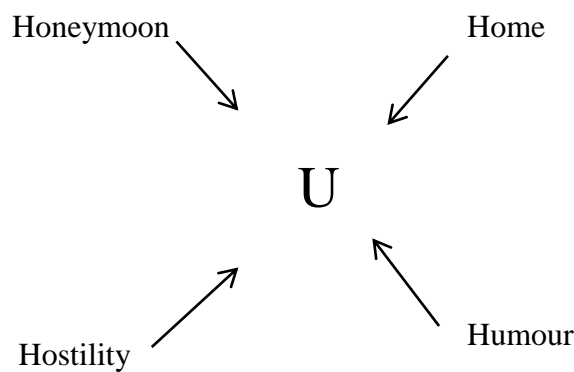
This model suggests that when an individual encounters people from new culture, he or she may be thrilled in the beginning (honeymoon), but soon may face the pressure of adjusting to the new stimuli and making sense of new ideas and values leading to a sense of discord (hostility). Gradually the individual may begin to understand the difference realising the erroneous preconceptions (humour) and develop a sense of comfort with difference eventually (home).

I have extended the above four-phased model of Cushner et al. (2011) in three ways: first, I have combined the stage of 'humour' and 'home' into the phase of 'adjustment' in my intra-faith model and have added two more socio-psychological states i.e. 'ambivalence' and 'connection'. Secondly, the five-dimensional model extends the work of Cushner et al. to the field of religious diversity. Thirdly, this five-dimensional model, unlike Cushner et al. does not claim to be linear. One can experience 'ambivalence' at any stage and/or all stages and feel the 'connection' with the 'other' at different levels through the stage of fascination to adjustment. Thus, for most STEP

participants, intra-faith experience involved a five-dimensional educational process as depicted below:

Figure 6.1: The Five-Pronged Model of the Intra-Faith Experience
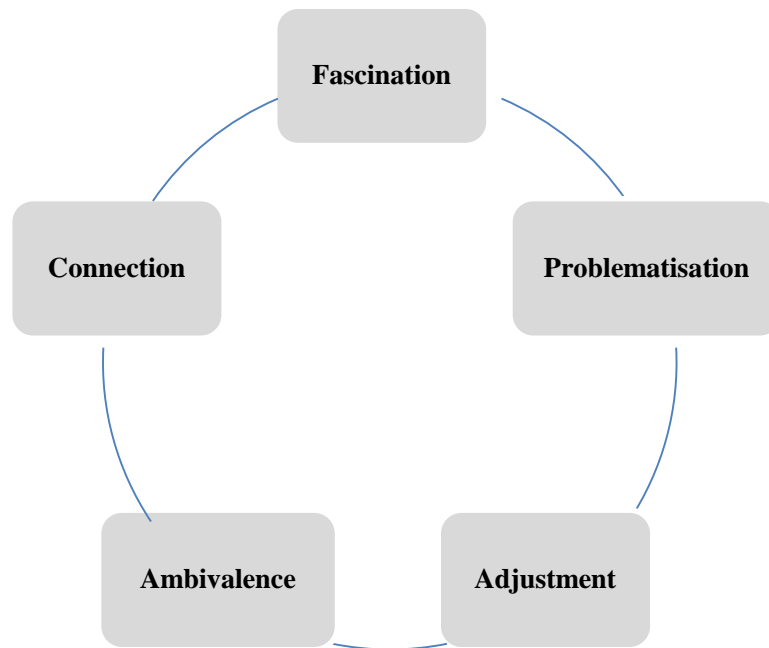
Fascination: Initially, most participants were intrigued and even enraptured by the prospect of meeting their internal religious 'other'. They had some pre-conceived ideas about what the different Ismailis would be like and how they might integrate with them. This phase can be appropriately termed as the fascination or honeymoon phase, where things were new and fresh; there were different Ismaili traditions to meet and it felt exciting to discover new things about their faith. Many participants also experienced the feeling of being out of their comfort zone.

Problematisation: After some time, however, the participants faced pressure of adjusting to the new stimuli when their ideas were challenged. Many found this stage difficult to manage. Most participants reacted to the stress by entering a state of hostility and moving down the left side of the U. In this phase, the participants felt that other people's behaviour sometimes did not make sense to them or their own behaviour did not produce the expected results.

Adjustment: Gradually, the individuals began to learn how to function effectively within the new intra-faith setting. Thus, the participants moved from the reactive phase to the right side of the U, referred to as the humour phase or adjustment stage. A minority of them, however, retreated from an intercultural situation, which they found difficult, out of frustration. In this phase, most individuals started to develop a better understanding of their differences and began to laugh at some of their earlier misconceptions and mistakes. This eventually led to most of them feeling at home with the intra-faith experience, moving to the top right side of the U. The individuals now showed indications of becoming more appreciative of differences. This is the point where their faith identity began to be redefined from homogenous and 'ethnocentric' to pluralistic. However, this should not be seen as them developing intra-faith mastery.

Ambivalence: As the participants moved through these stages, they experienced dilemmas and there were no ready-made answers while adjusting to new perspectives.

Connection: In the course of the programme, factors such as language, age, gender, motivations, prior exposure, personal characteristics and social confidence contributed a great deal to the way the participants connected with each other.

These dimensions were not necessarily mutually exclusive. It can be said that in the beginning of the programme 'fascination' for the internal 'other' was heightened, followed by 'problematisation', while 'adjustment' and 'connections' occurred gradually. These went hand in hand with experiencing 'ambivalence'. The participants' experience of each dimension differed depending on factors such as their previous exposure to diversity and their personality traits, such as social skills.

Empirical Data

This section provides empirical data to conceptualise each dimension in greater depth.

Fascination

> *I was completely shocked with that. I knew they [the Syrian and the Tajik Ismailis] existed but seeing them was, 'WOW'! (Neha, FGI, Phase 2)18*

At the start of the programme, most participants seemed to experience a heightened sense of excitement at the novelty of meeting their internal 'other', which was mainly due to the breaking down of their prior 'ethnocentric' imagination of Ismaili Muslims in terms of the languages they spoke and their own ethnic attributes. Zulfiqar, who grew up in a small Ismaili community in South Asia, was taken aback to see the Ismailis belonging to Mongolian and English ethnicities, and those that spoke Portuguese and French as their first languages. Similarly, Ahmed, from a small community in North America, expressed his wonder:

> *Whenever I thought of Ismaili before, I thought of somebody who just looked like me and now I realised that it could be completely... Some of the Ismailis I have seen here, I had never seen Ismailis look like that in my life. (FFI, Phase I)*

In this phase, their shared faith served as a bond that gave them a sense of fraternity. Moreover, their Imam's guidance on embracing diversity had already pre-disposed them to meet the internal 'other' positively. Zeba noted:

> *Here the entire class is sitting with the mind-set that we are learning from each other and we are sitting with this idea that we should practice pluralism, sitting with this idea that we are meeting people from different countries, and probably that's why Hazir Imam wants us all to be here (FFI, Phase 1)*

Initially, many of them felt insecure and confused in terms of how to relate to individuals from different backgrounds. Some of them felt worried about their command of the English language and their ways of dressing. Some of them also felt

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18 Since the participants expressed their views in three phases of the programme; the beginning of the programme (Phase 1), at the end of the first year of the programme (Phase 2) and at the end of the second year of the programme (Phase 3), I have denoted the phase in the bracket so as to understand the participants' quotes in the context of when they said it. The participants' names have been changed.

apprehensive about their ability to make inter-cultural friends and succeed in the programme. As a result, being in a new country and a new setting, initially they looked for support from among those who spoke the same language and shared the same culture. Pedersen (1995, 3) aptly describes fascination as a state 'where the newly arrived individual experiences curiosity and excitement, but where the person's basic identity is rooted in the back-home setting'.

Problematisation

> *It is not an easy thing. You know that your thinking is going to be challenged and your boundaries are going to be pushed. That itself requires a lot on your part. It is one thing to hear the word diversity and another thing is to live with it. (Aly, FGI, Phase 2)*

Very quickly, fascination for the internal 'other' was often followed by problematisation of faith identity. It is a process whereby previously taken-for-granted assumptions become questionable. This phase invokes strong emotional reactions to some differences among the participants. According to Cushner et al. (2011) in this phase, individuals' emotions can quickly be aroused when they see unpredictable behaviour on the part of others or when their own behaviour does not produce an expected response. The nature and strength of these emotional reactions often overwhelm the people involved.

When the STEP participants had left their countries, they had packed their bags with certain ideas about what being an Ismaili Muslim meant, including the definition of a 'good Ismaili' and aspects that they thought were 'essential' to the practice of their faith. When they encountered their fellow Ismailis from different countries, these assumptions were tested and the notion of a 'good' Ismaili Muslim became a contested phenomenon. A majority of the participants saw ethical living and belief in the living Imam as essential to being a good Ismaili, but they differed in their interpretation of the Imam's guidance and their vision of what constituted an ethical life. The participants also emphasised different aspects of faith as being the most meaningful to them. Some considered ethical values, while the others saw mediation and rituals, as being the most important to practice of faith. Inevitably, the idea of 'essential'' and 'fundamental' Ismaili rites and practices became problematic.

Sheela narrated an incident that took place early in the programme. She and her colleague had a major argument about why there was no *sira* at the Ismaili Centre of London:

> *When we first moved here [to London], my friend and I had a big argument about sira. I was arguing why there is no sira in the Ismaili Centre? The girl from North America goes like, 'Maybe because of carpet'. That's not a good enough reason for me. Why it's not everywhere in the world, everywhere there is carpet? We had a big argument about this. The Syrian girl comes in, 'We don't have sira in Syria at all'. And we were like, 'Oh? Okay!' Something, which seemed so fundamental to me and her... We had many situations happened like that where things seemed so absolutely fundamental to let's say East African or South Asian culture don't even exist in Central Asian or Syrian culture. (FFI, Phase 1)*

The participants' attitudes towards different religious texts also differed. Those influenced by South Asian Ismaili traditions held the *Ginans* very dearly and considered it to contain the meaning of the Qurʾān, while those influenced by the Arab-Central Asian traditions saw the Qurʾān as more significant. Nishi, originally from South Asia but born in the West, mentioned, 'For me *Ginans* are very, very important. I can't tell you why I feel that way' (FFI, Phase 1). On the other hand, Aly from a Central Asian tradition had reacted with astonishment upon discovering that some of his South Asian colleagues did not have a copy of the Qurʾān in their homes, 'Are you kidding me? The Qurʾān is supposed to direct the way you should live… I have to have the Qurʾān in the house before I even enter it'. (FGI, Phase 1)

A major debate took place among the participants in the first few weeks of the programme. A participant from the West proposed that the Qurʾān should be presented with rap music to make it more appealing to the younger generations. Zeba from the South Asia found it a highly disturbing proposition. She felt 'upset with the debate':

> *For a person like me it's a no no...Because the Qurʾān in itself has its own music/rhythm and why one should want to intervene into it. Why can't we just keep it as it is, away from other music types specifically rap music? … I can't think of rap music with the Qurʾān, it has too many beats for me to bring myself into a submissive mode [required for the Qurʾān]. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Nishi from North America defended the proposition, suggesting that:

> *Ask my brother, 'Are Ginans important?' He would tell you, 'I can't connect to it... It's in another language and it does not resonate well with me. I might as well rap the Ginan'.… But if you ask someone from [a country in South*

> *Asia], they are completely against it. They would tell you that's disrespect.*
> *That's actually giving it respect, giving it value. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Nishi replaced the word Qurʾān with *Ginan* while narrating the debate that had taken place in the class to me. Clearly, Zeba and Nishi's approach towards religious texts differed.

The issue of power and representation figured prominently in this process of problematisation. Adapting Gollnick and Chinn's (2012) use of the term 'ethnocentrism', I suggest that there were elements of 'ethnocentrism' and 'tradition-centrism' in participants' attitude to their internal 'others'. In ethnocentrism, in the absence of an extensive experience of people who think and act differently, individuals tend to interpret the behaviour of other people in terms of their own cultural frame of reference. Similarly, in tradition-centrism, individuals automatically treat their faith tradition as innate and the only natural way to practice the Ismaili faith. Other Ismaili traditions are compared with ours and are evaluated by our standards. It becomes difficult to view another Ismaili group as a valid alternative different from our own.

The issue of power and representation was reflected in four overlapping respects.

The idea of the 'mainstream'

Initially, it appeared that the dominant narrative of what it is to be an Ismaili seemed to privilege the perspectives of the somewhat Westernised version of the South Asian Ismaili tradition presented by East African diaspora and Western Ismaili participants, most of whom had roots in the South Asian Ismaili traditions. Initially, many participants from South Asian Ismaili backgrounds tended to assume their tradition as being the 'mainstream' and viewed Tajik and Syrian traditions as different from the 'mainstream'. Nishi mentioned:

> *Our Syrian friends, Tajik friends, have very different understanding of what*
> *it means to be Ismaili, what it means to be Muslim. To put these ideas [from*
> *South Asian tradition] into practice... have them go to Chandrat first time,*
> *get Chhanta for the first time... (FFI, Phase 1)*

This may be the case because the participants from South Asian backgrounds constituted a majority. Out of 38 trainee-teachers, 32 (85%) had come from South Asian backgrounds, while only six (15%) participants were from Syria and Central Asia. In addition, the programme was being conducted in the UK where most Ismailis had their

roots in the South Asian Ismaili tradition. Moreover, participants from the West seemed to exert a special influence in the privileging of the South Asian tradition.

Subsequently, the participants from India and Pakistan were hailed as having better 'knowledge' of history and practices of faith than their non-South Asian colleagues. Like Sheena, many from North America said that they sought help from them on their assignments:

> *When we were transitioning between Umayyad, ʿAbbāsids, the different reign that Islam was going through, I needed a lot of help and that was something I went to all of the Indians and Pakistani friends. (FFI, Phase 1)*

It seemed ironic to some Syrian participants that despite their fluency in the modern Arabic language enabling them better to understand the Arabic of the Qurʾān and being part of the early history of Islam, the majority of STEP teachers looked up to South Asian participants.

Jamāʿat-khāna attendance had emerged as the tangible standard to judge one's 'Ismaili-ness' at the macro-level. The *Jamāʿat-khāna* has served as a place of worship and social gatherings for the Ismailis from South Asia for centuries. When some of them migrated from South Asia to East Africa and later to the West they established the *Jamāʿat-khāna* wherever they went. In Syria, it was introduced only in late 19th century, after their contact with the Imam who lived in South Asia at the time and in Tajikistan, the first Ismaili Centre was only built after 2005. For many South Asian participants *Jamāʿat-khāna* had played a formative and central role in their lives since their childhood. The attendance at *Jamāʿat-khāna* was seen as near mandatory especially on Fridays and special occasions. Anaya from South Asia explained that in her country:

> *You go to Jamāʿat-khāna every day or at least you do not miss on Friday. We have grown up with that. So even over here, when I am dead busy and its Friday, I am like, 'I can't miss Jamāʿat-khāna '…If I don't go, I have guilt trip, feel something is going to go wrong in the day… For us it's like, 'Oh my God, I have to go'. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Reema recounted a telling event that occurred at the beginning of the programme. The festival occurring on the 11th July, known as 'Imamate Day', is celebrated by the UK Ismaili community. The present Imam took over the mantle as the Imam of the Ismaili Muslim community from his predecessor on this day over fifty years ago. Every year this day is celebrated with a lot of enthusiasm in *Jamāʿat-khāna* worldwide and

attendance is perceived to be near mandatory in South Asian Ismaili tradition. Reema from a Western country, was astonished to hear that some Ismaili participants from non-South Asian backgrounds did not attend *Jamāʿat-khāna* on that day:

> *I wasn't here on 11th of July but one group of CAPLETS [English Pre-sessional students] was here and one girl from [a South Asian country], said that you know they didn't come even on 11th of July! I said, 'wwwow'! It was strange for me, YEAH. Because it for us is soooooooooo BIG DEAL! Like it's you know, Immmmamat day! We have to celebrate it properly. (FFI, Phase 1)*

The bias in favour of the South Asian tradition, led to an emphasis on 'assimilation'. It is the process by which individuals are expected to adopt the 'behaviours, values, beliefs and lifestyle of the dominant culture' (Bennett 2010, 55). The South Asian Ismaili participants also quoted the Imam's guidance on the necessity of *Jamāʿat-khāna* attendance. Such emphasis on *Jamāʿat-khāna* attendance made participants from Syria and Tajikistan feel uncomfortable. One of them expressed his frustration:

> *They were saying that why don't you come to Jamāʿat-khāna regularly and there is a farman of Hazir Imam... they were telling me in the way that I am not an Ismaili. I felt terrible. I don't think that someone comes and tells you that ok practice this and practice that, our Hazir Imam loves this. Of course, of course, I know what our Hazir Imam wants. OK!*
>
> *...Then I was very nervous always people asking me such and such question, why don't you go to Jamāʿat-khāna, why? It makes me angry! (FFI, Phase 1)*

Naila shared her vexation:

> *I feel judged. Last time Karina, Sania and Shana came to me five times, 'You should go to Jamāʿat-khāna , you should GO, NOW GO'. I said, 'Yes, I may'. Then I told her, 'Karina, don't ask me to go. It's not your right to ask me to go or not to go. It's up to me. She said, 'No, but I still want you to go'. I said, 'Yeah, I won't promise you'. The next day she said, 'I didn't see you there. Why didn't you come?' (FFI, Phase 1)*

The concept of *Jamāʿat-khāna* is not indigenous to the Central Asian and Arab Ismaili traditions. Several factors appeared to inhibit their attendance to *Jamāʿat-khāna* in the UK. It included the fact that the languages of the *Jamāʿat-khāna* rites and practices were mainly Gujarati and Kutchi, also significant were differences in ceremonies, unfamiliar surroundings, and there was pressure to dress up in clothes that they were not used to. The participants also noted differences in the purpose of attending *Jamāʿat-*

khāna Some participants saw *Jamāʿat-khāna* as a place to socialise, form networks, provide help to those in need and gain new information, while others saw it as the place of worship and mediation.

The participants' different attitudes towards *Jamāʿat-khāna* generated two crucial debates among them:

Is faith private or congregational? Kabir, from a Central Asian background, emphasised that one's faith was private, a 'secret'. During the Communist era when religions were banned for decades, the followers of different religions practiced their faith in secrecy throughout Central Asia. Therefore, for Kabir, 'Everyone has their secret in their hearts, deep in their hearts, confidential. How can I approach and ask him, please tell me your secret?' (FFI, Phase 1) On the other hand, some participants, mainly from South Asian backgrounds, emphasised the significance of participating in their congregation.

What is important in faith — understanding or conforming to traditions? Anaya from South Asia debated that while understanding was desirable, it was not necessary. She explained:

> *We accept that it's ok if we don't understand as long as you are being part of it. By being a part of it, we will automatically get into the understanding of it…They [Syrians] want to understand everything the way it is going on. I come from family, culture, we just accept it and we try and get ourselves engage any ways just because it's part of being there, congregational prayer. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Amal from Syria, on the other hand, argued in favour of understanding:

> *It's not just about going to Jamāʿat-khāna . It also means the notion of intellect. My father would say you are an Ismaili and remember that our faith is intellect so you have to think about it every day, question everything and think about everything. (FGI, Phase 2)*

Because of emphasis on the South Asian Ismaili traditions, some Arab and Central Asian participants felt less assured of their Ismaili identity. For instance, Amal felt the need to adopt the South Asian Ismaili tradition as even the Imam appeared to her to be from the South Asian tradition. Some participants from Central Asia seemed to see their difference as a deficit as they underestimated their understanding of faith in relation to the South Asian participants. Kabir said:

Of course, there are people from America, from Canada, from India and Pakistan; ...Certainly, they are closer to faith than we are...Imagine half your life you are in Communist Party... There are certain people who are close to Imam, because they practice it for generation to generation... Mawlana Sultan Mohammed Shah was in Pakistan or India. (FGI, Phase 1)

However, he argued that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, 'to the *Hazir (present) Imam* all the Ismails are equal'.

An Arab and a Central Asian student stayed behind after a group discussion to express how they felt to me. The following is an excerpt from their conversation:

Amal: Here majority are from one tradition, right? Even if you want to express an idea or something I feel like, I cannot say. Even if I say, I am aware that there are a lot of people who would comment and they would say other things about this tradition or [judge that] I am not committed, because they are the majority here... when it comes to a point that you are judged about it then I don't feel comfortable.

Aly: Then you find indirect pressure.

Amal: Yeah, I find pressure. (IC, Phase 2)

Cushner et al. (2011) suggest that in intercultural settings, individuals tends to experience anxiety about whether their own behaviour is appropriate. If there is a stronger emphasis on assimilating to the dominant view, some individuals develop a strong desire to avoid the situation altogether because of their anxiety. They may become upset or uncomfortable. People may feel rejected as outsiders and they may become alienated from the classroom or school. They may even have difficulty paying attention to their studies. One of the Syrian participants seemed noticeably upset. She even dropped out of this research study.

It appeared that eventually the participants from South Asian backgrounds began to realise their hegemonic influence on defining faith. Sheela, originally from South Asia, living in North America, recalled one of her conversations with a student from Syria who had become visibly upset:

I think South Asian culture definitely dominates the way we should interpret things and practice faith and I am from that culture and I never had problem with it until I came here and I hear from people who are not from that culture and they tell me that... I have Syrian friends they feel like 'I am not getting heard, or my traditions are not as important, or my way of thinking is not as important'. I can see that. (FFI, Phase 2)

The issue of language

Language seemed to have played a vital role in further reinforcing biases in favour of the South Asian Ismaili tradition. English is the language of instruction and this meant that those who spoke it fluently had an advantage in terms of representing themselves and their traditions over those who struggled to express themselves in English. According to Cummins (1979), a non-native English speaker may not do well where a deeper level of linguistic competence is required. Cummins also asserts that a non-native English language student may need between 5 and 7 years to develop a deeper level of competence. The articulation of complex ideas about one's identity falls into this domain. The participants from Central Asian and Arab backgrounds reported some difficulty in expressing themselves adequately in English. Naila said:

> *It is a cultural thing. I have a lot to say, but many times I don't speak because of English. Then I chose to say in one sentence. It is hard for me to elaborate. Sometimes there is no chance or time permits, so I have the feeling of uncomfortable. I don't express myself as I am truly because of the language. (SIMI, Phase 1)*

A similar challenge in terms of articulating complex ideas in English was reported by many participants from South Asian backgrounds but they had access to another solution. Most of the 85% participants spoke Urdu, Gujarati or Kutchi languages to varying degrees. Aisha from South Asia explained:

> *I communicate with them in Urdu and they get the actual meaning of what I am trying to say. It does not mean that I don't feel comfortable with others but they don't understand Urdu... Majority class understands Urdu... but only Tajik and Syrians don't understand. Out of 38 only six or eight participants don't understand Urdu. (FFI, Phase 1)*

In the beginning, having access to several shared languages helped participants from South Asian, East African and Western backgrounds to form connections with each other more easily than the participants from Syria and Tajikistan, who had to rely exclusively on a language in which they lacked confidence to express themselves adequately. It made them feel alienated to some extent. Ria said:

> *You know something is really the language. Because when we used to go like with the Pakistanis or with Indians, so they speak in their language.... May be they have someone like me, from Syria or Tajikistan, who don't speak the language, so they have to speak in English, which, maybe they don't prefer. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Ria's impression was not completely out of place. Some participants accepted that they avoided socialising with those with whom they had to speak in English, due to their lack of confidence with it. Thus, shared Indic languages appeared to have empowered participants from South Asia to form connections with a majority of participants in the class, which enabled them to represent their ideas better.

Acculturation into certain ways of studying religion

Furthermore, the programme, being based in a Western country, inevitably privileged certain ways of studying and teaching religion. While the South Asian participants were seen as having a better knowledge of the history of faith and religious practices, the Western participants were seen as having better tools to study faith. Amal said that initially she struggled as 'The Western participants can articulate better than I can. I used to be among the top 5 student in Syria but here it's different context' (FFI, Phase 3). Arguably, this process is one of acculturation: the participants, mainly from non-Western backgrounds, felt that they were more appreciated when they demonstrated certain ways of studying, writing and teaching religion.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes refer to 'any sort of summary representation (or prototypic image) that obscures the differences within a group' (Cushner et al. 2011, 94). These negative stereotypes are often internalised and become part of one's identity. The STEP participants tended to stereotype countries and cultures based on their experience of one or two individuals' behaviour. The participants created binaries such as liberal and conservative and Eastern and Western cultures. Certain kinds of ideas, approaches and lifestyles were labelled as 'liberal' and the others as 'conservative'. This raised interesting questions in terms of how the criteria to judge someone as liberal or conservative were determined, and from whose perspective. The fear of being in-grouped or out-grouped either as conservative or liberal, depending on what is valued in a given context, initially kept many participants from expressing their opinions in the class. The following is an excerpt from a conversation with Aly from Central Asia:

> *Me: You said it's not easy to live with diversity.*
>
> *Aly: Because of perceptions and judgments, which you have, if you have certain point of view then it is looked at as old fashioned, you see. (IC, Phase 2)*

Eastern and Western cultures were cast as having different approaches to practising faith and understanding Islam. Many participants considered the West as being religiously tolerant, while some Asian countries were positioned as conservative, traditional and lacking tolerance for religious diversity. Conversely, the West was viewed as lacking in knowledge of faith, while India and Pakistan were as assumed having a solid knowledge of the same. The East was portrayed as conforming to traditions without critical reflection, whereas the West was considered as practicing faith through critical understanding. Critical reflection was viewed as progressive and desirable. Imran from the Middle East noted a major difference in Eastern and Western ways of looking at things:

> *East and West have complete different way of looking at things. If we have discussion their [students from the West] role would be something different than what we used to. What they used to say was entirely different... for example recently we were doing the Qurʾān module. In seminar we all are from mixed backgrounds. We all gave our interpretations what Asian think about that. When it comes to the Western, it's completely different. Their way of answering it, their mind-sets, how they see the Qurʾān , how they see Muslims, their practices… (FFI, Phase 1)*

People from Eastern and Western cultures were also seen as having different outlooks on issues such as ethical values, lifestyles, attitudes towards family, social habits and clothing.

While the negative stereotypes made some participants feel judged or underestimated, positive stereotypes empowered some of the others. The relationship between the two constructs East/West and geography was not necessarily fixed in all circumstances. Nishi from North America said:

> *All of us have very different perspectives on religion. Some of us are very liberal; some of us are very conservative. Then there is whole idea of depending on what issue you pull out of hat, some may go this way and on another issue you may be completely opposite way. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Thus, the process of probematisation involved the issue of power and representation. It entailed a degree of bias and stereotyping in favour of the South Asian traditions, as far as the practice of faith was concerned and in favour of students from the West, as far as the tools of understanding and teaching religion was concerned.

Adjustment

> *We are able to see one big identity like of Ismailism from different a perspective, which kind of strengthens it. It enriches it. (Zeba, FFI, Phase 2)*

Adapting from Brislin and Yoshida's (1994) notion of inter-cultural competence, I suggest the term 'intra-faith competence' to mean that over time the participants were able to manage the psychological stress that came with intra-faith interactions and they were able to understand and communicate more effectively across intra-faith contexts.

There were five overlapping elements present in the participants' inter-tradition competence as follows:

Contextual understanding of intra-faith differences: According to the participants, their biggest learning from the STEP was developing an understanding of how social, cultural and historical context influences religious sensibilities. This facilitated greater reflection on how their own prior backgrounds and education had influenced their *idea* of faith. Sania said:

> *My perception of being good Ismaili or proper Ismaili has changed. I can't judge a person who is coming from a very different context. Now I know why she [referring to a Syrian student] is talking about using intellect and why I am saying that a person should go to Jamāʿat-khāna regularly because her context is totally different. She is coming from Nāṣir-i-<u>Kh</u>usraw perspective and I am coming from more of Pir context (FGI, Phase 2).*

A contextual understanding fostered greater toleration for differences in the participants, whether they agreed with aspects of difference or not. For instance, Nishi and Zeba who represented different stands on the issue of whether the Qurʾān should be presented in rap music, seemed to rethink their positions after several months. Nishi who favoured rap music became more sensitive to understanding that in a different context it might not work and Zeba had become more open to the use of music with the Qurʾān, depending on the context.

Many of those who had previously felt judged understood where people were coming from. This developed a greater space for people to express themselves more fully than before. Sheena noted:

> *In the beginning of the year there were challenges. I had hard time adjusting to it... I felt judged. I don't think it was personal thing but that changed once I found out where people were getting their ideas from. You need to realise people have different ways of living, the way they are brought up, they may not be right or wrong for you. I took it personal but I don't think it was personal. (SVI, Phase 3)*

Plurality-conscious redefinition of faith: The awareness of different contexts in which faith is practiced made participants open to diverse definitions of being an Ismaili

Muslim, albeit still retaining the centrality of the Imam to the Ismaili faith. They acknowledged that their previously held definition of being a good Ismaili was not adequate in a new situation. This eventually lessened the initial emphasis on *Jamāʻat-khāna* as a criteria to be a good Ismaili. Sheela said:

> *Before I was very much into, I was like 'Oh my God', this person does not even come to Jamāʻat-khāna and oh my God this person did this in Jamāʻat-khāna and they don't even participate in voluntary service, I had these viewpoints growing up. But now looking at it I am like who am I to judge your faith? (FFI, Phase 2)*

Intra-faith plurality-consciousness became part of the very definition of Ismaili faith. Reema, who was initially astonished to hear that some Ismaili participants from non-South Asian backgrounds did not attend *Jamāʻat-khāna* on 11th July stated:

> *Being Ismaili is accepting different cultures. Being Ismaili is not just about going to Jamāʻat-khāna and rites and ceremonies all. It is understanding different cultures that are part of us. (SVI, Phase 2)*

Enhanced confidence in their differences: The participants felt that their experience of the internal diversity had enhanced their identification with their own tradition. Even Syrian and Central Asian participants who had initially felt unable to represent themselves, eventually felt able to articulate their interpretation of the Ismaili faith confidently. Amal noted:

> *In the beginning it made me question 'am I right Ismaili or not'? I am now more comfortable to express it. I used to feel that someone would challenge my ideas that this is not right. Now I feel more comfortable to say. Now I can ask question, put in context and support my position with academic literature. (FFI, Phase 3)*

Increased reflection on the issue of identity and belonging: Many incidents in the STEP raised questions in terms of what defined one's ethnicity, culture and belonging. Was it the language, place of birth, passport, where they grew up, their skin colour or where their parents came from? Neha for instance, was born and brought up in North America. Her parents came from South Asia. She had never identified with her parents' cultural heritage as much as she did after a few months into the programme. She felt that she was 'more of a Pakistani' now as she spoke better Urdu than before. When she identified herself as Pakistani some trainee-teachers disagreed with her on the grounds that she did not understand the culture of Pakistan and her outlook and lifestyle were different. It offended her as she felt that she had some claim to being Pakistani because

her parents had come from Pakistan and she spoke Urdu. Neha also felt 'more Ismaili' than before, as she was studying her faith and was surrounded by mainly Ismaili friends. Similarly, Ria from Syria expressed that she had begun to question her identity more in the STEP:

> *I was not used to ask myself, who am I or how I define myself but now because of the classes this question appears more in life like who are you and who are they. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Some participants felt that they had assimilated various identities within themselves through cultural encounters in the programme. Living in a culturally diverse London for a year had contributed to their personal growth. Nishi from North America said:

> *Being in London…you encounter a very metropolitan way of life, which coming from [a country]; it's not the situation because you drive everywhere. You are only around people you want to be around. At schools you have a pretty standard ethnic compilation. I just feel like being in London, using public transportation, living in facility where you are constantly surrounded by people from nine different countries... it has been a growing experience. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Deconstructing the stereotypes: The participants noted that they had begun to reject a tendency to generalise about people. Sheela narrated an incident. In the new batch of the STEP, two participants from an Asian country had missed their English pre-session due to visa issues. Referring to them, a student from the new intake of the STEP said, 'Oh my God, these people from [a country] have such horrible English!' Sheela said that if she had not gone through the programme she would have taken this comment at face value but now she questioned such generalisations about people and countries (FFI, Phase 2). Ahmed noted that he had become less certain than before of his ideas about people:

> *I feel that I know less now than when I started the STEP. What I mean by that is I feel less assured of things. I felt that Ismailis were certain way. All those expectations have been blown out of the water... Now things are not as clear as they were before. Things are not as linear, from black and white to fifty shades of grey! (FFI, Phase 2)*

Ambivalence

The above process went hand in hand with the experience of ambivalence for the participants. They shared three key dilemmas. First, the greater awareness of the relationship between faith and culture made them wonder what was religious and what

was cultural, the assumption being that everything that is cultural is not necessarily religious. Therefore, some of them felt the need for clear criteria to distinguish between what is guided by faith and what is merely cultural. There was also a fear of relativity. They appreciated diversity but did not feel open to 'anything goes'. Zeba expressed her fear:

> *When we speak of diversity especially religious pluralism if I am expected to accept something based on different contexts and cultures, where do I know where am I to intervene? What will guide me if everything is so contextual? I would want to refer to Farmans. But in our discourses, even Farmans themselves have different interpretations. And then you don't want to make playground of Farmans. (SVI, Phase 3)*

> *Having a relationship before marriage, for me it's I just cannot do it. For others it's just like they even don't think about it. For me, the reason behind is I feel it's religious. But after I came here, I feel may be its more cultural rather than religious. We are from different cultures. I thought this is religious, but may be this is cultural. But I am still questioning whether this is religious or cultural. Till now, I do not have answers. (Ria, FFI, Phase 2)*

Secondly, some participants noted the issue of homogeneity and diversity. They speculated that globalisation and greater awareness of internal diversity would change the way historically different Ismaili communities have understood their faith. Certain commonalities would emerge in concepts, rites and practices. They observed certain differences between their local traditional understanding of the Imam and the representation of the Imam in the Secondary Curriculum. This, they saw as an area of negotiation. Zeba expressed her concern that in the process of forging the contemporary homogenous identity of the community at the global level, certain traditional beliefs were seen as relative to the historical and cultural context in which they had emerged but not seen as relevant expressions today. This made her question how she was able to trust her current understanding of faith, which might not be considered relevant tomorrow. She also wondered about the effect of where IIS was located on her faith perspective. Zeba asserted:

> *We speak of diversity but sometimes I feel that at times even they [IIS]… may not understand contextual realities…IIS is in London and we are coming here... Those who are not from this context view IIS as a benchmark... But I wonder, if the IIS was in 'x country', I can't think of it in 'my country', it would be different. If the IIS was in 'x country', they would have responded differently or viewed certain perspectives more important than other. What I mean here is that yes critical perspectives are there but there are also faith perspectives… But because curriculum is prepared under Imam's guidance, I don't question curriculum itself. (SVI, Phase 3)*

Participants noted two languages of articulation, one that was increasingly expected to be shared by the Ismaili communities worldwide and the other that was tied to the local traditions in their respective contexts. The participants, who acknowledged the significance of a common public expression of the community that was sensitive to the globalised multi-faith world, at the same time were ambivalent in terms of how the local related to the global language. Zeba, for instance observed:

> *I asked one teacher, what do we do about past theories, which were formed in different contexts? The teacher explained to me, which I was happy about, if today anyone believes in Neo-Platonism[19] theory and feels happy with it, or someone in the concept of Nav Avtaar [Nine Incarnations] [20] then they can carry this at personal level but not institutionally... for the communal representation in any given time is articulated by the Imam of the Time, is believed to be the most appropriate for that time and therefore must be adhered to. (SVI, Phase 3)*

Their dilemma was also related to the space for teaching their local home knowledge in the community's religious educational setting. Clearly, some participants were attached to their local understanding of the faith and in some ways wanted it to be retained, while also acknowledging the need for a shared public articulation of the community.

The third dilemma, which overlapped with the first two dilemmas, was that some of the participants felt ambivalent about readjusting and re-contextualising what they had learnt in the STEP in their home country. By the end of the first year most participants, especially from South Asia and the Middle East, felt apprehensive about negotiating the changes in their attitudes and outlook with their local communities, families and friends back home. Amal said:

> *I am afraid like when I go back home. People would say now you think like this? People might say, 'Oh you lived in UK and you start to think, its ok, its ok'...When I talk to my family and if I say something or I question something my parents would be surprised like why are you saying this we don't do this. (IC, Phase 2)*

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[19] During the medieval time, Neoplatonic ideas influenced the philosophical and theological works of Muslim, Christian and Jewish scholars in Arab and Persian lands. Neoplatonic texts were translated in Persian and Arabic languages. The medieval Ismaili communities of Syria and Persia also interacted with Neoplatonic ideas. (Walker 2008)

[20] According to a version of *Nav Avtaar* doctrine, Vishnu, deity manifests in every era to save the world from the rise in sins. The religious worldview of Muslim communities of Indian subcontinent, including the Ismailis is influenced by these ideas.

When Zeba went back home during the summer holidays after one year into the programme, she 'felt very different. I felt that everything around me is the same but I am not the same inside me'. The participants felt that the perspectives that they had gathered in the programme were not necessarily the perspectives shared by their families and the community in their home contexts. There were also generational and gender differences in the experiences of faith. However, most participants seemed empathetic towards these differences. Aly felt prepared to negotiate the differences:

> *Scholars in IIS, they say one thing, when we go home we deal with families, I think this is two extremes. One is well read and they can explain us to why this person is who hasn't read is, why the way they are. You become more accepting of diversity, you take that diversity with you. You take those readings with you, they become part of you. (FGI, Phase 2)*

Some of the participants, like Amal, had developed considerable interaction with her parents by the end of the second year, explaining to them what she had been learning and had found a way to re-contextualise her learning.

Connections

> *She is my sister from India. When she shares food with me, she shares more than just the food. (Faiz, IC, Phase 3)*

Faiz from Central Asia and Khushi from South Asia were sitting together at their graduation event, where I had joined them. Faiz expressed how fortunate he had felt for the opportunity to get to know the Ismailis from different cultures. Most of his learning and bonding had taken place informally, for example over food. This was a common sentiment among the participants.

In the course of the programme, the factors that played a much greater role in engaging closely with diversity went beyond the participants' faith backgrounds. Factors such as language, age, gender, prior travelling exposure, personal characteristics and social confidence contributed to the way the participants engaged with diversity.

The participants developed 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' Cushner et al.(2011). They divided others into those with whom they were comfortable with and could discuss their concerns (in-group) and those who were kept at a distance (out-group). Initially, their cultural and linguistic identities served as a vital bridge in forming a sense of belonging. Zeba remarked:

Initially, Pakistanis used to be within them and Indians separate and then American and Canadians were separate. Then, whose first language is not English at all, Syrians and Tajiks were separate. It was just in the beginning. (FFI, Phase 1)

As the days passed the students seemed to develop closer ties based on each other's personalities. Zulfiqar said:

Zulfiqar: Initially everyone facilitated each other.

Me: And now?

Zulfiqar: Everything depends on how the person is. As we know each other well, it depends on the person rather than their backgrounds. (FFI, Phase 2)

However, these in-groups and out-groups changed when their needs differed. Shared local languages were not considered useful in an academic setting where English was valued. Aisha said she avoided working with her own country mates:

When we gather and work on any particular topic, then we just start speaking in Urdu and we don't care about English language. At that time I think that it is a lost opportunity for us. We have to talk in English because we have to write paper in English and we have to give presentation. (FFI, Phase 2)

Shared culture was not necessarily a guarantee that one could get along with everyone from their background. Some participants found it difficult to share some of their innermost thoughts with participants from their own background due to the fear of being judged and they felt more comfortable opening up to those from different cultures. Naila shared her experience:

Naila: I enjoy with them [other trainee-teachers from her country]. I still share many things. But sometimes I feel that they don't understand me…

Me: You feel better understood by Americans? [continuing the conversation that had preceded]

Naila: More comfortable. I mean I can express myself without the fear of judgment. I can talk about anything…Sometimes I encounter new experience, I can't tell others from 'my country'. I can't because I feel that I don't belong to my culture. (FFI, Phase 1)

Participants who were socially confident and curious about different cultures seemed to form friendships more easily than those who lacked social skills. Some participants expressed the view that their experience of alienation changed greatly when they took the initiative to make friends. Some participants' history of migration in different

cultures had equipped them with the skills to relate to different sets of people successfully.

Also, the participants' identity as international students and the STEP trainee-teachers' sharing common goals and vision, assignments and challenges contributed to their building bonds with each other over the year. Anaya expressed:

> *We want to help each other because we understand what struggle each one goes through in writing, orally, in communicating. ..Initially in the first month though I had this fears about will I be able to cope up with academic system. But the idea that there will always be support in some way or the other made me feel comfortable. (FFI, Phase 1)*

For some participants gender played an important role in building relationships. Some of them felt more comfortable to be friends with same-sex participants. A few participants felt that they were older than the rest of the participants and their experiences in life had put them in a different position than many others. This also had an impact on the way they related to others. Sheela suggested:

> *Sometimes experiences in your life do play a role in the person you are. I feel like a lot of students because they are young, they are still going through a lot of things that I have already been through and passed. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Thus, social and cultural factors contributed a great deal more to the way they bonded with their internal 'other' than the intra-faith differences. Participants accentuated their different identities and behaviours, as they needed to adjust to different situations. For example, in certain circumstances their gender became pre-dominant, on other occasions their religious beliefs were prominent. These contributed to the outcomes they achieved in their intra-faith experience.

Conclusions

This chapter described the STEP participants' experience of engaging with diversity within the Ismaili faith in the STEP and its impact on them. It was observed that for most participants intra-faith experience involved a five-pronged educational process: Fascination, Problematisation, Adjustment, Ambiguity and Connections. Initially, most participants were enraptured by the prospect of meeting their internal 'other'. After some time, however their ideas were challenged leading to problematisation of their

pre-conceived notions. As the participants moved through these stages, they experienced ambivalence. In the course of the programme, social and cultural factors contributed a great deal more to their intra-faith friendships than their religious differences. Gradually, their faith identity began to be redefined from homogenous and traditions-centric to pluralistic and the participants developed a degree of intra-faith competence. Together these five-dimensions were experienced by different participants to different degrees. These dimensions were not necessarily mutually exclusive and sequential. Their experience of intra-faith challenges and learning from it was heightened during their first year.

Having discussed, the STEP participants' attitudes to internal religious diversity, the next chapter examines the following question: How did the STEP participants relate to intra-Islam and wider religious plurality over the two-year period of the programme?

7. The Experience of Intra-Islam and Wider Diversity: Towards academically informed pluralism

This chapter examines the attitudes the participants held towards faith communities and worldviews other than their own, particularly intra-Islam, inter-faith and atheist perspectives and the impact of the STEP on them. It appears that the participants were 'selective pluralists'. Initially, they seemed to make space for other religious communities and worldviews on 'theological', 'humanistic' and 'instrumental' grounds but were selective about how they embraced it. Over a period, their attitudes seemed to be informed by academic perspectives, resulting in increased understanding of and openness towards the 'other', while strengthening their identity as Ismaili Muslims. They continued to demonstrate selective pluralism characterised by ambivalence and instrumentalism.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the participants' attitudes to religious difference at the initial stage of the programme. It is followed by an investigation of the impact of the programme on their attitudes to religious difference during the course of the programme.

Theological, Humanistic and Instrumental Pluralism

At the beginning of the programme, the participants appeared to demonstrate a general sense of openness to the 'other' primarily from three key perspectives: 'theological', 'humanist' and 'instrumental'. The first approach was 'theological pluralism'. In this, the participants saw all religions as theologically valid and leading to one God. They considered diversity as divinely willed. Zeba observed, 'Allah says that if He wanted to create them as one community, He would have done it' (FFI, Phase 1). Imran citing references from the Muslim history and the Qurʾān, explained, 'In Islam, even at the time of *Ḥaḍrat ʿAlī*, they had pluralistic society. The Qurʾān says we have created men and women and we have allocated you in tribes' (FFI, Phase 1). The participants focused on common theological elements across religions. Within Islam, they spoke

about the belief in one Allah, the Prophet Muḥammad and the Qurʾān as the common ground. They were inclusive of Christianity and Judaism as the Abrahamic traditions and the 'People of the Book'. All other religions were seen as sharing the same goals and principles. These participants' believed that ultimately all religions led to salvation. Sheela remarked:

> *Had I been born a Jew, a Christian, or a Sunni Muslim, I think I be that still and I probably won't see any reason to change that, because all of them lead to the same idea at the end of the day… At core of it all, what does it talk about? It talks about humanity… and soul reaches final fulfilment then every religion is valid in themselves. (FFI, Phase 1)*

A crucial similarity between the participants' theological pluralism and Hick's (1989) thesis (Chapter 2) is that different religions are seen as different ways to follow the same God. However, unlike Hick, the participants viewed differences as divinely willed. In short, theological pluralism means respecting different ways of reaching God as equally valid on theological basis.

The second approach to the 'other' was 'humanistic pluralism'. The participants upheld that everyone had the right to choose their beliefs and deserved respect on humanitarian grounds irrespective of their religious beliefs. For them theology was not an issue; it was the actions of individuals — the ethical conduct — which mattered the most. Ria said:

> *I feel and especially with the Sikhism and Hinduism, they are so peaceful. They have their own beliefs and they are just dealing in a good manner with people. They worship God, for me its fine. It's better than the Muslim who prays, reads the Qurʾān but does not deal in a good way. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Nishi saw affinity between human beings as far more important than religious divisions.

> *Even in that class [her previous multi-religious class at a university] I felt that the connection between individuals was far more important than saying, 'Hey, I am a Muslim, I am a Christian, I am a Jain and I am a Jew'. Where are you going to go with that at the end of the day? (FFI, Phase 1)*

In this approach the participants did not require the endorsement of pluralism about truth or salvation, but the affirmation of common values. They assumed that all worldviews share values such as love, care, forgiveness and serving others. In short, pluralism in this sense means respecting people's right to choose their beliefs and living together based on common moral values. This position is closer to the 'shared-grounds' approach (see Chapter 2).

The third approach to differences was 'instrumental pluralism'. The participants considered pluralism as a political necessity. Some participants, whose friends and family members followed different religious orientations, thought that mutual respect was vital for the survival of their relationships. The following quote from Reema expresses this well:

> *I don't stop connection with them because sometimes they are very close friends or very close family too. We have the same blood so no; it's not an issue for me. They just have to respect my belief. Don't criticize my belief, I am not criticising your belief. (FFI, Phase 1)*

In this approach, the pluralist stance is primarily concerned with social cohesion and not with truth claims or values. The assumption underlying this approach is that religious differences can be problematic and therefore, a rational consensus is required. Pluralism in this sense could mean putting up with differences. It could also mean liberal acceptance that individuals have a right to assert the validity and truth of their traditions and even claim it as the only true way, just as they can.

The participants used similar reasoning in relation to atheism[21] as well. A student saw atheism as one of the paths to reach God. Anaya said:

> *If you look at from religious perspective you may feel that they are not on the right path, but if you look at as human way everyone is on the right path as long as they are trying to maintain values of being nice... As long as they are doing all that, you are reaching your God in your own way. (FFI, Phase 1)*

They looked at atheism as faith. Belief in God's existence and non-existence both were seen as a sort of faith.

> *I think even atheism is a set of beliefs, it's just like any religion and if they strongly believe then they are committed to their faith. (Imran, FFI, Phase 1)*

> *When you think about atheism and when you think about faith. It is difficult to prove that God exists and it is difficult to prove that God does not exist. That's where faith comes in. (Ahmed, FFI, Phase 1)*

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[21] The Oxford dictionary (2013) defines atheism as 'disbelief or lack of belief in the existence of God or gods'. This definition is limited because it assumes God as essential to defining religion and it means certain version of Buddhism would be considered as atheist. In this thesis, I did not offer any definition of atheism to participants. They seemed to assume the dictionary definition of atheism in their responses.

Most participants demonstrated humanistic acceptance of atheists. They tended to avoid religious discussions with those who did not believe in God to ensure harmony. They believed that the ethical conduct of human beings was far more important. Ria commented:

> *I can understand them. As I told you before if they are really good and they are doing good for the benefit of the society, they are dealing with people [in good way], they are not hurting people. They are good human beings. Then, I don't care. (FFI, Phase 1)*

The participants argued that one's beliefs were shaped by individual circumstances and life experiences. Sheena showed empathy as the following quote illustrates:

> *We may have difference of opinions but that does not mean they are bad person or anything bad. It means that their experience in life is that, like what I experienced, they could experience something else. It's all dependant on that. (FFI, Phase 1)*

In general, participants drew upon theological, humanist or instrumental grounds to include the 'other'. Theological pluralism was about respecting diversity because God created it, humanistic pluralism was about accepting everyone's right to choose their beliefs and live together morally and instrumental pluralism assumed peaceful co-existence as the necessity. The participants did not necessarily make these distinctions themselves, nor were they static in their stances. These viewpoints reflected contextually in their everyday interactions about the 'other'. Their Imam's guidance reverberated in their perspectives. Heena said, 'As Hazir Imam said, we have to make a bridge' (FFI, Phase 1).

The Selective Pluralists

The participants' endorsement of pluralism did not necessarily mean that they were pluralist angels in that they were selective about how they embraced differences. Being selective was an act of boundary making. The participants appreciated certain elements while rejecting others and through doing this, they seemed to construct their identity as Ismaili Muslims. They created a boundary between them and the 'other' around three key ideas.

First, the participants assumed their Ismaili Muslim interpretation as more advantageous than others. There was an assumed theological upper hand. Kabir commented:

> *Ismaili to me is the straight, the shortest way to Allah in my opinion. The right and the shortest way because our Hazir Imam concisely, just shortly tells us, what to do and what not to do which is very important in our lives... I am not saying that we are the best, we are the shortest one. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Being born into the Ismaili faith was described as being 'lucky', 'fortunate' and 'a matter of pride' primarily due to having a living Imam. Imran said, 'We are lucky that we have living Imam, who interprets for us; he guides us in each and every problem we have' (FFI, Phase 1). Similarly Anaya felt, 'We know that Hazir Imam is at the highest level' (FFI, Phase 1). They invoked the abstract idea of 'right path'. They believed that it was possible for people to be misled onto the wrong path and therefore, a guide was needed. Kabir said, 'There is a line of people who go astray. That's why God is sending prophets, to different people' (FFI, Phase 1). They also viewed the Ismaili faith as being open-minded and allowing them the freedom to think and understand faith, which other religious institutions may not be open to. Sheela explained:

> *I am lucky that I am given opportunity to read and understand a lot more. This is something this community and institution allows me to. It may have been difficult in other faith-based programmes. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Second, the participants saw themselves as leading a 'meaningful' and 'enlightened' life as religious people in contrast to those who did not believe in God. They saw atheists as 'wonderful people' but also as 'confused'. Anaya remarked, 'It is just a way of running away from the situation'. According to Heena, 'Their lives are empty without mediation and spirituality. I think this is one big gap actually'. Ahmed felt sorry that atheists did not 'have the opportunity for the salvation'. Zeba empathised that they struggled inside due to the yearning of their soul to reach God, 'I am sure that somewhere in their hearts there must be some struggle going on… the soul is within them' (FFI, Phase 1).

Some participants also experienced a varied degree of social and psychological comfort with those who did not believe in God in everyday life. They did not feel comfortable reasoning with them on the issue of God as 'it might hit your faith rather than you being able to tell them something' (Heena, FFI, Phase 1).

The third way of boundary making was on the issue of human rights. The participants questioned the applicability of certain interpretations in contemporary times. They were

also critical of religion becoming a tool to justify political and patriarchal interests. Reema spoke about certain groups of Muslims:

> *They are practising their faith according to that time [1400 year ago] and I don't know if they are right in interpreting... So sometimes, I just feel that people just say that it's in the Qurʾān, authority is the Qurʾān, but they don't understand really what is in the Qurʾān. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Ria disagreed with the way the issues of women's rights, child custody and adultery were dealt with in certain Muslim societies:

> *Women especially not having the right of keeping children after the divorce, it is very bad situation for women... if they make adultery, they stone them, until they die... I am not convinced... it is inhuman to deal with people like this. Go away from religion or from the Qurʾān if it says this. Our Qurʾān is really merciful but we interpret it like in a way that serves our authority. (FFI, Phase 1)*

In contrast, the participants saw Ismaili Muslim interpretation as 'enlightened' and 'practiced according to the time' and 'following human rights'.

These sentiments of the participants were akin to 'the best route' syndrome, meaning the belief that one's own tradition is better equipped than many other traditions in getting him or her to the desired destination (McKim 2012). McKim's (2012) observation is applicable to these participants in the sense that many of them believed that as Ismailis they were special, that their ideals and the ways in which their religious perspective exceptionally equipped them, were superior to those of others.

These sentiments also show that the participants' pluralism extended over a spectrum. The participants were closed to certain religious differences that they either saw as no longer relevant or not in accordance with human rights and they were open to those views that overlapped with what they believed in. Their pluralism assumed a certain value preference.

Contextual Experiences of Plurality

The participants' endorsement of pluralism also did not necessarily mean that they were at ease with differences. The complexity of their engagement with diversity must be seen against the background of their life-experiences. There is an underlying connection between their insistence on respect for religious difference and their struggle to exist as a valid community within Islam.

Based on their home country experiences, it appeared that there were at least three types of socio-political situations which shaped their experience of the religious 'other': a) in Muslim-majority states where they lived as a minority Muslim community (e.g. Pakistan, Syria, Afghanistan, Gulf states); b) in the Western countries where there have been repercussions on the image of Islam post 9/11 (e.g. USA, Canada, UK, France); and c) in non-Muslim majority countries where they lived as a Muslim minority (e.g. Tanzania, Madagascar, India).

Within Muslim communities, the participants were often required to respond to questions on the legitimacy of their belief in the living Imam and their rites and practices. In some Muslim regions, they noticed a higher degree of tolerance within the Muslim groups towards Christians and Jews than was demonstrated towards fellow Muslim groups. Within some Western communities, the participants often felt insecure about expressing their identity as Muslims and felt pressured to justify how peace, tolerance and democracy were compatible with Islam.

The participants often did not feel sufficiently equipped to respond to questions about their Ismaili Muslim identity. Their confidence to articulate their Ismaili identity ranged from 'very confident' to 'not at all' depending on the perceived tolerance of the wider community that they lived in. In some Muslim societies, they chose not to reveal their identity as Ismaili Muslims; instead they identified themselves with the majority Muslim community that surrounded them. Heena shared her experience of teaching in her home country in the Middle East:

> *On Friday we went to the desert on field trip to teach them [pupils] the context in which the Qurʾān was revealed… we were told to say we are from the Aga Khan Scouts and Girls… We hid [our] identity because… what if they [the politically dominant Muslim community] have something in their*

mind against us? In our area there is a church, but they are other religion so it does not matter but we are in Islam. (SVI, Phase 3)

Another participant Aly from a particularly sensitive area of Central Asia shared the following:

I didn't grow up being told that I was an Ismaili until the age 15. The first time [when we migrated to Pakistan] I was taken to Jamā'at-khāna in Peshawar and shown that there is such a thing as Ismaili. (FFI, Phase 2)

Heena and Aly's stories reveal that in certain parts of the Middle East, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the majority Muslim states, the Ismailis observe a high degree of vigilance. Aly and his family had practised their faith along with the Sunni majority in the Sunni form prevalent in their area for years. Aly's father had married a Sunni woman who had also not known about the Ismaili affiliation of Aly's father for a long time. Thus, the family seamlessly integrated with the Sunni majority population in terms of social, political and personal relationships as long as Ismaili identity was not brought into the equation. Similarly, after returning to their home country, the participants based in certain parts of the Muslim majority states did not identify themselves as Ismaili Muslim religion teachers to avoid possible misunderstanding by the Sunni state. They even spoke with great caution on Skype Video conferencing, something that was not the case when they were in London.

In contrast, in some non-Muslim states the participants identified themselves as Ismailis with little identification with the wider Muslim community. Reema said, 'In my country you don't connect with Muslim people in general. [We say] I am not Muslim, I am an Ismaili' (FFI, Phase 2). Post 9/11, some participants felt uncomfortable about articulating their Muslim identity in certain settings in the West. Sania shared her experience:

In America I [do not] walk around saying that I am a Muslim… Especially after 9/11 I stopped. I worked with the government, so, after 9/11, my name was not Sania Ahmed, it was just Sania… One of the words used was terrorist. I was like, 'Oh God, you think I am a terrorist? No, no, I am not'. But it never occurred to me that my name…Then, when I went to Canada, it's a little bit more liberal in that sense. So I was like 'Oh yeah, I can wear Allah necklace and I can walk around as Muslim'. (FGI, Phase 2)

It appears that Islamophobia had an impact on the participants' self-image as Muslims in the West. Being a Muslim was an active negotiation in terms of what aspects of their identity to disclose and which aspects to keep silent about, depending on perceived

reactions from those they interacted with. Their experience, however, differed based on where they lived and worked in the West.

In addition to different political settings and societies, some of the participants had to negotiate religious plurality within their own homes. This included engaging with the family members that did not share their religious beliefs. Sania explained:

> *My one uncle is Sunni, my aunt is Sunni. One aunt is a Hindu who has converted to being a Shia…So my cousins are all mixed… It was kind of skewed being Ismaili. Where do I fall? I questioned because my cousins questioned Hazir Imam. (FGI, Phase 2)*

In general, religious identity for the Ismaili Muslim individuals seemed a problematic rather than a latent dimension of their personality. Therefore, their generalised acceptance of religious differences on theological, humanistic and instrumental grounds must not be taken to mean their comfort with it.

Academically Informed Pluralism: From difference to diversity

After over a year into the programme, the participants' attitudes to the 'other' seemed to be informed by academic perspectives. I will refer to it as an 'academically informed pluralism'. During the course of the programme, the participants began to interpret religious tradition as evolving in a number of historical, political and socio-cultural contexts expressed through art, architecture, institutions, literature, music, politics, economics and intellectual traditions in addition to doctrines. They developed a view of religions and cultures as historically interactive. They began to distance themselves from presenting things in black and white and making judgements in terms of right and wrong as far as religious beliefs were concerned. They began to see historical complexities, a lack of irrefutable evidence and different perspectives on the matter. Consequently, their earlier generalised openness to differences was replaced by greater understanding of differences. Zeba sums up:

> *Yes, shift in a sense more acceptance not general acceptance that I had before. I still have that acceptance but now it is with understanding. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Academically informed pluralism is a form of 'religious literacy'. Moore (2006) defines religious literacy as entailing 'the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses'.[22] Many participants had viewed religions as divinely sanctioned earlier. Having been exposed to various socio-cultural tools there was a change in their outlook.

> *I used to think that if Allah wanted he would have made everyone one, but now as I know more content, I think this is more of people… They wanted power. Due to political conflicts there are different interpretations. (Zulfiqar, FFI, Phase 3)*

> *The more you read, you realise what circumstances and situations led to what and why is it we now stand where we are. (Sheela, FFI, Phase 3)*

This achieved at least two tangible outcomes as follows.

Developed a degree of 'intra-Islam competency':

By intra-Islam competency, I mean that the participants developed greater appreciation of the differences within Islam and learnt to situate their position as Ismaili Muslims within intra-Islam diversity with a greater sense of comfort and confidence than before. For instance, Reema did textual analysis of a Qurʾānic verse cited in favour of Ghadīr Khumm in Shia sources for an assignment. Reema explained:

> *For example Ghadīr Khumm event, I realised that it is not written in the Qurʾān. It's not written in black and white but it has been justified through a verse in the Qurʾān [by Shia Muslims]. If you show this same verse to a Sunni, he won't interpret the verse in the same way. He would say it was not revealed at Ghadīr Khumm. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Celina shared that STEP had challenged her previous learning about other Muslim communities and had made her more pluralistic than before:

> *In my context I still remember the way my teacher taught me history, it was more of Shia perspective, very, very Shia perspective, in which we were made to think that Ḥaḍrat Abū Bakr, Ḥaḍrat ʿUmar and ʿAbbāsids were enemies of the Ismailis. If I were to teach the same thinking to my students now, I think I will not do good job. I think coming here and studying in academic perspective has made me more of a pluralistic person or informed person than I was. (FFI, Phase 2)*

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[22] http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/4.1/moore.html.

The programme shifted their perspective from seeing them as competing with other Muslim communities on doctrinal truth, to a community who has a valid space within the diversity of Islam. The participants felt that it had encouraged them to connect with other Muslims better. Before coming to the STEP, Sheena had assumed that the differences between the Ismailis and other Muslim communities were 'vast' as if other Muslims were 'kind of different species or what'. Similarly, Reema had grown up in a multi-cultural context where the Ismaili community did not identify itself as Muslim. She could not agree with it anymore. She expressed her desire to inculcate in her students when she went back, 'We are Muslims. First we are Muslims, then we are Ismaili'. Heena explained this with the analogy of 'three concentric circles':

> *Our perspective is Muslim as well… By raising issues [of differences within Islam] at least they [pupils] know that it is not a big deal...Children will be confident of their Ismaili identity soon. They are used to being in the little circle, Ismaili circle. We are taking them in the big circle and then making space for the little circle. (SVI, Phase 3)*

According to the participants, a narrow approach to teaching religion was feasible in the past because 'before things were hidden from us and now are not due to globalisation'. They became aware that Ismaili history did not exist in isolation from the wider history of Islam. Moreover, knowing about the achievements of Muslim civilisation in arts, literature, architecture, science and other fields and how they have contributed to modern civilisations and science instilled pride in them as Muslims.

Greater understanding of intra-Islam diversity strengthened the participants' identity as Ismaili Muslims. Earlier, they thought that they were the only ones different from everyone else within Islam but the STEP made them aware that diversity has been the rule and not the exception in Islam. They also developed an informed understanding of how they were situated within the broader Islamic diversity. Ahmed mentioned:

> *I had been practicing it but not understanding it [Ismaili faith]. To lot of extent it was blind faith. I feel like now having this historical background, the history behind it, I understand where its place in the Qurʾān and I understand lineage of the Imam through the Prophet a bit more now, the spread of Islam over the years and how it has come to reach me. (FFI, Phase 2)*

It also enhanced their ability to articulate their position within the diversity of Islam. They felt able to provide different perspectives and draw upon the Qurʾān and history to explain themselves to other Muslims in a 'politically correct', empathetic and non-

judgemental manner. Ria, who lived as an Ismaili minority in the Middle East, said that she now had the tools to discuss the issues:

> *Now I have that confidence that there is academic discussion and there is academic material that I can use to support my ideas. So I will not be discussing from just believer point of view that that this is my belief and not accept the other...Now when someone argue with you I would be more comfortable to talk about this.. I can now understand differences and why they argue like that and how you can discuss these issues. (FFI, Phase 3)*

When Zeba from South Asia was asked a few questions on rituals by a student from another Shia Muslim community living in her student hall in London, she was able to draw upon his doctrinal resources to respond to him. It surprised her greatly:

> *Seriously when it happened, I was like what is this? Where did this answer come from? I have never answered in life before like that. I never knew that answer could be given like that. My friend, she was like, 'Oh that was a nice answer!' (FFI, Phase 2)*

Similarly, when Kabir went back home in the summer to Central Asia, he found himself having to justify to his Sunni neighbour his stance as an Ismaili Muslim. Kabir was able to show why they should treat each other as brothers. He exclaimed:

> *STEP opened my eyes a lot. Now I can probably say that I know about my history just enough that I can protect myself, not with sword but of course with knowledge. I feel more confident. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Growing up in an inter-faith family Sania had felt uncomfortable about responding to the questions of her family members in the West. She shared her experience:

> *I now have a better understanding of who I am... So when I go back home now, when I met my uncle who is Sunni, the Qurʾān says this and that. I said, let's look at from this lens, what does it mean? I was able to explain this is what us as Ismailis believe in. (FFI, Phase 2)*

The students' felt confident not only because they had developed a better understanding of diversity within Islam and their position as an Ismaili Muslim in it but also because now they were able to speak from different perspectives. A participant captured it with this statement: 'It's presenting different views that are not only faith based' (FFI, Phase 2).

Increased openness to inter-religious and inter-worldviews differences:

During the course of the programme, the participants developed greater interest in other religions than before as reflected in the following comments:

> *Never it was like that I should go to church or meet them. Now I feel more interested, more curious… A few times we went to cathedrals in London and we saw how everything happens. (Imran, FFI, Phase 2)*

> *I am more interested now in knowing about other religions. One day I hope I will read the Bible and the Torah to understand what their religions are about. (Reema, FFI, Phase 2)*

London being a multi-cultural and multi-faith city had also impacted on their outlook on pluralism. Ria said that coming to London had been eye opening for her. In the Middle East, she had grown up being told that other religions such as Hinduism and Sikhism were wrong but in London she got to know these communities for the first time and it made her revise her position.

There was also an increased confidence to dialogue and learn from their religious 'other'. Imran recounted his experience of engaging in a conversation with a Jew:

> *I met one Jewish person in London. He asked me a few questions. In media there are many negative perceptions. I said, these things depend on where you are getting this information from and which texts you are reading. Media has its own agenda. I explained the concept [of Jihad that he asked]. I showed him different interpretations on the internet… Before, I never used to articulate in this way. I have changed now. I asked what things are in your religion. He explained it to me. This is true pluralism. He got a platform to explain to me and I got a platform to explain it to him. (SVI, Phase 3)*

It appears that the participants' confidence in an inter-faith context had increased due to gaining the ability to present different perspectives and draw upon different interpretations of the Qurʾān.

Some of the North American participants also voiced the opinion that they would have liked to know more about Christianity and Judaism so that they could present themselves confidently to people from those faith backgrounds.

In the inter-faith context, some of the participants had assumed commonalities among religions rather than reflecting on theological differences and many had not known

much about the doctrinal differences across different communities to start with. When probed that certain religious ideas might contradict each other in different religious communities and therefore not all can be considered equally valid, it did not seem to affect their stance. Zeba shared:

> *I would love to have friendship with Christians, I have no problems. I found a Christian friend. She was so peaceful, I found similarities. If she excludes me from salvation, it is fine. It doesn't hurt me. She can believe that. For us you are as worthy of salvation as we are. (SVI, Phase 3)*

Anaya explained:

> *Saying that they got it wrong is quite abusive to them in a way. I am confident of my beliefs and feel comfortable about it, even if they feel the same that is fine… It does not mean they are right and we are wrong or we are right and they are wrong. (SVI, Phase 3)*

This shows that the participants clearly rejected exclusivist approaches as far as truth-claims and salvation was concerned. They actively tried to seek commonalities in matters of values, doctrines and aims of religions. If they came across exclusivist tendencies in other faiths, the confidence in their own faith prevented them from questioning the plausibility of their own beliefs.

The participants also seemed to be more curious to know about atheist perspectives. Imran said:

> *I don't have atheist friends. Yeah I would actually be interested in knowing how do they actually believe in? How do they don't believe in such things? What brought them in those? I'm really eager to know how, their views and practices. (FFI, Phase 2)*

It appeared that in absence of much academic understanding of atheist perspectives the participants continued to draw upon theological, humanist and instrumentalist grounds to relate to them.

In short, informed by academic perspectives the participants reported increased openness to differences in general. The greatest shift seemed to be in their understanding of diversity within Islam, leading to strengthening their identity as Ismaili Muslims. Subsequently, the participants noted that for them 'differences had become diversity'.

Selective Pluralism Revisited

The participants continued to demonstrate selective pluralism, however there was a shift. One of the ways that most participants initially had constructed a boundary around them and 'other' was through seeing the Ismaili Muslim interpretation as having the upper hand due to them having a living Imam. Some participants had re-examined their views in this regard. Reema acknowledged:

> *[I used to say] I am so proud to be Ismaili; I am so proud to have an Imam that is guiding me bla bla bla...this approach means that you are not really open minded to other religions. You don't realise that how your religion is important to you, their religion is important to them. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Similarly, Aisha, who had earlier described herself as 'lucky' to be an Ismaili, said: 'So don't say that Islam is the right religion and those who are born into this are all lucky. Whichever religions you are born into you are lucky' (FFI, Phase 2).

Despite such revision in their view, they continued to demonstrate a sense of pride and privilege in being an Ismaili Muslim. It was not based on the truth-claims of the community. They felt affinity with the community because of the sense of belonging that was nurtured in them since childhood and their pride in the humanitarian work of the Aga Khan through the AKDN. Amal shared:

> *I am Ismaili because I want to belong to the community. But what if they are right; what if imam is not from the progeny of Muḥammad, what if the Qurʾān is not real Qurʾān?... I don't want to believe in this… because I want to be part of this community. I feel proud of being open, as Ismaili being open… How he [the Imam] does a lot of things for humanity. It makes me feel attached. The AKDN is built on ethics of Islam. It makes me appreciate Islam and love him. (FFI, Phase 3)*

There was a sense of privilege that their Imam was keeping them 'a step ahead from the rest' (Aly, FGI, Phase 2).

Another way of boundary making was around the issue of human rights. Most participants continued to find it difficult to accept certain religious interpretations on human rights grounds. While they believed that everyone could be on the right path, they questioned the applicability of certain interpretations in the contemporary world.

> *It has to be within human right framework. If they don't harm people then they are all 100 % right. (Zulfiqar, FFI, Phase 2)*

On the other hand, Ahmed protested against value judgements:

> *Sometimes I hear people talking about Wahhabis, 'Oh Wahhabis they are so fundamental. It makes no sense'. I think to myself who are we, who are you to make that value judgement?...It can certainly be argued that they are not. But when we start to make value judgements instead of observations then it becomes dangerous. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Some of the participants seemed to be ambivalent about the extent of their openness to accepting differences. On the one hand, Sheela valued being open and non-judgmental:

> *One thing that he [a tutor] said really worked for me… the true meaning of openness, is to be open to everyone… who am I to judge what is right and what isn't? (FFI, Phase 2)*

On the other hand, Sheela found it difficult to accept certain interpretation, 'If it's against mental, physical, spiritual development then I have problem with that'.

This shows that the participants' pluralism extended over a spectrum. The participants remained closed to certain religious differences that they either saw as no longer relevant or not in accordance with human rights and they were open to those that overlapped with what they believed in. Their pluralism assumed a certain value preference. They continued to see the Ismaili Muslim interpretation as more advantageous than many others as far as their lives were concerned.

Complexity of Respecting Contrasting Particularities

The participants were ambivalent about fostering respect for plurality as religion teachers in certain aspects of teaching. As far as inter-faith context was concerned, some participants experienced ambivalence when the doctrinal claims of Islam or Ismaili faith were exclusivist towards the local communities among whom the Ismailis lived. The participants felt unsure in terms of how to teach certain Ismaili doctrinal claims without compromising the educational aim of fostering respect for plurality. A STEP trainee-teacher from an earlier cohort reflected on one such issue in her MA dissertation, whereby the Secondary Curriculum's aim of engendering 'historical empathy' for the mission of the Prophet conflicted with the Secondary Curriculum's aim of fostering respect for religious plurality:

Prophet Muḥammad urged the people of Arabia to discourage worshipping idols… Prophet Muḥammad and his followers... destroyed idols in and around Ka`ba. Now, in India, the students live among and interact with a significant population that worships idols. The teachers mentioned several concerns in teaching these events…, which can affect their relationship with the communities around. Also, several times students raise questions, which become a little tricky for the teacher to handle as beliefs are involved.

Similarly, in the intra-Shia context, the issue was felt strongly where the Secondary Curriculum and the local Shia communities did not necessarily share the same perspectives. For example, in South Asia some of the pupils lived in areas where every year the martyrdom of the Shia Imam al-Ḥusayn and his family at the hands of the Umayyad army is mourned by their Shii neighbours.[23] The Ismaili communities tend to share these sentiments with their other Shii neighbours. The Secondary Curriculum's aim to foster pupils' appreciation for the contributions made by the Umayyad dynasty to Muslim civilisation did not sit easily with some participants as they felt that this was a sensitive issue in the Shia context.

Insofar as intra-Islam differences were concerned, the participants experienced confusion over how to present contradictory claims to be equally valid yet cultivate devotion towards one claim over the other in their pupils. One of the critical instances was teaching about the succession issue after the death of the Prophet to their pupils. The Sunnis believed Abū Bakr to be the rightful leader and the Shias upheld ʿAlī to be the rightful successor of the Prophet. Salim spoke of his struggle to me before he was due to deliver the lesson on the succession issue in a religious education centre. His objective was to inculcate devotion for ʿAlī as the first Imam of the Ismailis without invoking hostility towards Abū Bakr:

It is challenging, I am afraid what will happen this Saturday. I have been preparing this lesson plan for entire nine days. How am I going to put Abū Bakr there that my students respect him and do not reject him rudely, simultaneously do not shake their faith [in ʿAlī]? (FGI, Phase 2)

Later, some participants noted that in practice it was not an issue as the pupils already had developed affinity for the Shia Ismaili interpretation and they already knew that differences existed. It appeared that the participants were comfortable teaching about differences as long as the Ismaili interpretation was not threatened.

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[23] The Prophet Muḥammad's grandson and the son of the first Shia Imam ʿAlī, al-Ḥusayn and his family were brutally killed by the Sunni Umayyad army in 680AD in the battle of Karbalāʾ (Bearman et al. 2014a). Since then, this event is mourned by many Shia communities around the world.

Despite difficulties, fostering respect for plurality in intra-Islam context mattered to the participants also for instrumental reasons. They saw it as important to make a valid space for themselves as a minority within Islam. According to Salim in his country where 97% of the population was Sunni Muslim, it was critical for Ismailis to be respectful to them. Aly made a similar argument:

> *If you teach them to respect Abū Bakr then you develop an understanding that perhaps others should also respect our point of view and if you allow them to make fun of Abū Bakr then, how do you want them to accept our interpretation? (FGI, Phase 2)*

Given the strong consciousness that they lived as a minority among different religious communities and within Islam, most of the participants were not driven by the necessity to settle truth claims. Even if they raised these issues, it was due to their concern for how to teach their particular faith beliefs with respect for plurality.

This shows that the faith community's engagement with plurality in its religious education is a complex endeavour.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the participants' attitudes to religious differences and the impact of the STEP on their attitudes. It appeared that the participants were selective pluralists. Initially, they seemed to make space for religious differences on theological, humanistic and instrumental grounds but were selective about how they embraced it. Over a period of time, their attitudes seemed to be informed by academic perspectives resulting in an increased understanding of and openness towards religious differences, while strengthening their identity as Ismaili Muslims. They continued to demonstrate selective pluralism characterised by ambivalence and instrumentalism.

This chapter is an important contribution to the current literature on religious pluralism. There is little empirical work done on pluralism in Muslim communities in contemporary society. It is, therefore, a timely contribution to help to stimulate further discussion about how Muslim religious education responds to the challenge of sectarianism and religious plurality today.

8. Social Science and Religion: A relationship conducive to pluralism

This chapter examines the way the STEP participants applied social scientific tools in the study of religion and its impact on them. In literature, there has been a debate about the nature of the relationship between faith and social science as to whether they are antagonistic or compatible. Social scientific examination of their Scriptures and religious history is not new in Christian and Jewish contexts and it has provoked outright hostility to creative synthesis by Christians and Jews (Bowden, (2005, 17–18). However, the use of social scientific perspectives is relatively new in Ismaili Muslim religious education and therefore it is worth asking the questions raised by Bowden (2005, 17–18).

> *What happens when critical methods are applied to the very process by which sacred scripture, tradition and dogma were established, casting doubts on the legitimacy of the development?... once you begin on the slippery slope of the investigation of the past by Enlightenment methods, where do you stop?*

Milbank (2006, 5) postulates that today the church and social science together promote a 'secular consensus'. The findings of this thesis suggest a more complex relationship between theology and social science. The participants applied social scientific perspectives in the study *of* and *from* religion, differently, for different purposes, in different contexts. As a result, over the course of two years of the STEP, there seemed a shift in the participants' attitude towards faith. These perspectives not only developed greater contextual, socio-cultural, and historical awareness of religion in them but also augmented their ability to make space for faith academically and enhanced their ability to relate to religious difference. In short, the way a majority of STEP participants engaged with social scientific tools seemed to further strengthen their religious identity on the one hand and generate an appreciation for diversity on the other.

At the outset, the chapter explores how the participants conceptualised the notion of 'critical thinking' and the key dilemmas that they experienced in the process of engaging with it in the study of religion. Then it examines the way they reconciled their dilemmas and the impact on them.

Critical Thinking

Most participants highlighted 'critical thinking' to be one of their most significant learning in the STEP. Broadly, the participants conceptualised critical thinking as 'a way of looking at things' informed by social scientific perspectives. The key features of it were asking 'why' questions, taking account of different perspectives and developing their own opinions. It was about 'going deeper' and being sceptical. The following are some of the ways the participants spoke about critical thinking.

> *One thing I learned is that there is always a question, 'why' to everything. I mean, I started thinking critically. (Zulfiqar, SIMI, Phase 2)*

> *If I read something on a piece of paper… I can say, actually let me find out more. You don't take anything on face value; you become more critical. (Aly, FGI, Phase 2)*

> *[Before] I maybe looked just one source and one type of argument rather than looking at different arguments… Now I think twice about what I am learning. That's where those critical thinking skills have come in. (Sheena, FFI, Phase 2)*

It was about 'not saying that one is right and one is wrong'. Zulfiqar mentioned, 'I used to try to find black and white but then I got to know that there isn't. When you give judgment in black and white you lose criticality'. (FFI, Phase 2)

The participants contrasted critical thinking with their prior way of relating to faith. It brought in a new reflexivity about their tradition and identity.

> *I have grown up in an environment, which confirms to things, where you let things as they are. You don't mess with them. You have to do them. Ceremonies you do them. You know why? No, but we are doing it… because that's the way they are done. No one critically analyses. (Sheela, FFI, Phase 1)*

> *When you have faith-based knowledge, you are not critical at all. We were before like Alwazez [preacher], giving information, never questioned things… the best thing is to question, when you question, even when you doubt, it's good to have doubts. (Reema, SVI, Phase 2)*

It can be summarised that critical thinking for participants was asking questions, taking account of different perspectives, constructing arguments and understanding faith differently from before drawing upon the tools of social science.

The next section explores the dilemmas and tensions they encountered in using critical reasoning in the study of religion.

Dilemmas

In the first few months of the STEP, the participants' key dilemma seemed to be how to reconcile the difference between some critical social scientific perspectives and some of their traditional beliefs. Gellman (2000, 402) has observed that as long as a person's religious belief does not 'squeak' or get challenged for her, she will continue to believe unreflectively. A few of the religious beliefs of participants, when challenged by different social scientific perspectives, squeaked. Sheela observed:

> *The research materials they give you, the reading that you do, really do test your faith. Now you are looking at everything that you have believed in, from an academic perspective. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Two examples often cited by participants can be seen as 'critical cases'. The first was the compilation of the Qurʾān and the second was controversy surrounding the sanity of an Ismaili Imam in history, Al-Hakim bi-Amr-Allāh (996-1021). Some reading materials challenged the participants' belief about the Qurʾān's authenticity and completeness (Wansbrough 1978; Crone 2004; Cook 2004; Esack 2005). According to Muslim belief and tradition, the Prophet Muḥammad (d.632 AD) received revelation from Allah over two decades, from 610 AD, until his death and the Qurʾān is available to Muslims exactly as it was revealed to Muḥammad. Some studies claim that the scattered verses of the Qurʾān were collected over two decades after the Prophet's death and relied on the memory of people. There were several versions of the verses and early Muslims had contested which were authentic. In response to variations, the third caliph ʿUthmān (d. 656) canonized a particular version of the Qurʾān as the correct version and it came to be hailed as the authentic and sacred Holy Book of the Qurʾān (Rippin 2006). Today questioning the authenticity or completeness of the Qurʾān is considered unthinkable and blasphemous in the collective imagination of ordinary Muslims.

Another critical case was the issue of the infallibility of the Ismaili Imams. According to the beliefs and traditions of many Ismaili Muslims the Imam possesses divine knowledge and thus is immune from making mistakes in his guidance to the

community. The trainee-teachers were introduced to historical writings questioning the sanity of an Ismaili Imam, Al-Hakim bi-Amr-Allāh (e.g. Asbridge 2005; Bonner 2008; Walker 2010).

Studies like these made the participants feel that the 'very basis of their identity was challenged'. Shabana found herself calling her parents:

> *The first time when I was questioned anything about Ismailism even Muslim in general, when we did the Qurʾān module and they brought out the fact that Qurʾān might not be complete. At that point, I remember calling my parents, 'Is Qurʾān not complete, seriously?' We have this core fundamental belief it is complete. (FGI, Phase 2)*

Mehnaz, referring to a historical piece of writing about Imam al-Hakim, described how difficult she found it:

> *Imam Hakim was considered heretic and insane. There is no consensus if he was or he wasn't…it's something I have had hard time with. How is that possible? How can someone tell that about Imam? How can someone say about the IMAM? (FFI, Phase 1)*

Sheleza had fallen into crisis for a while:

> *I was very confused. There was a day when I sat here on the floor and cried that now I am studying here my belief was not true… I was uneasy at that time, cried for some time and I said this is not the true way I am following. I expected they [IIS] would just provide me with those articles, which justify our beliefs, but they did not. I cried, I discussed with my friends, I was critical of teacher's beliefs as well. (SIMI, Phase 3)*

It is worth noting that not all of the participants necessarily experienced discomfort.

Secondly, the participants experienced ambivalence over the extent to which they could question their beliefs not only personally but also in the class and in their assignments. They felt concerned about critiquing their central religious beliefs. Sheela said that while writing essays:

> *I was not able to argue a lot of points. I guess I was perhaps afraid or I wasn't afraid but I wasn't sure, if I really wanted to argue something or not because at the end of the day oh my God, it's like it's about imam we are talking about, its history. (FFI, Phase 2)*

It raised a crucial philosophical problem: Is faith about submission or questioning? Those who believed in submission emphasized listening and understanding and those

who believed in investigation argued for critical discussions in the class. Zeba supported a submissive approach to faith:

> *If you talk about spirituality, first, you must submit. If someone is telling you something about spirituality, you should listen first, rather than asking questions outright, rather than simply preparing yourself to critic and ask another question.(FFI, Phase 1)*

On the other hand, Nishi favored questioning: 'What interests me about STEP is that it's a way to search for answers but not necessarily to provide answers'. (FFI, Phase 1)

This led to a dilemma as STEP teachers wondered were they to inculcate faith in the Ismaili children or make them think critically about faith. Noor expressed his confusion:

> *One of the goals of STEP programme is to enhance the devotion of followers to their manifest Imam and for me this issue is the most challenging. Sometimes when I am approaching the assignment, I am confused how to critique particularly Imam. I challenge a lot how to keep balance between this is what I think and what I do. (FGI, Phase 2)*

Nishi supported non-confessional teaching:

> *Initially, I had trouble because there are some people who just wanted you to... Oh teach about what it is to be an Ismaili, your ancestors, you way of life. I am not a teacher that way. It is up to the individual to come to that realisation. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Thus, in broad terms the key issue was how to reconcile critical thinking with religious beliefs. Inara mentioned: 'I think everyone has been through that… either you are a believer or an academician' (FGI, Phase 2). This tension was experienced by different participants to different degrees.

Academic vs. Believer Dichotomy

A major observation from the above data is that the participants' dilemma was due to a distinction between the academic and believer perspectives. The question is: what is it about the modern universities or modern approaches to religious education that make the dichotomy between academic and believer possible? Prior to the 17th century, in many societies 'religion' was not distinct from non-religious aspect of society; it was simply a way of life and therefore encompassed every aspect of life (Asad 2003). In

Europe, for instance, theology was the 'queen' of the sciences and all areas of study were seen as lying within its scope. Knowledge of nature and knowledge of God, prior to 19th century, were seen as being connected and frequently undertaken in works of 'natural theology' (Jenkins 2008;Oliver and Warrier 2008). Religion and science were seen as intertwined.

However, a shift in thinking occurred in early modernity, when Christianity came to be narrowly defined as a 'religion' in Europe (Jenkins 2008). A range of 'secular' subjects emerged to explain aspects of human activity without reference to God. By the 19th century, 'religion' and 'science' came to be seen as different intellectual arenas often at loggerheads with each other. A depiction of religion gained currency that it was merely about subjective experience.

In the late 19th and 20th century, 'the science of religion' developed. It was seen as an academic enterprise distinct from theology in Western universities. Jenkins (2008) states that 'the secular consensus' on which modern academia is based, shaped the distinct disciplinary identities of both theology and religious studies. This led to the development of an academic culture that made a division between the 'religious' and the 'secular', between 'faith' and 'reason' and between the 'private' and the 'public' in the study of religion. In 1960s, Welch's (1971) influential study in the USA on graduate studies in religion, called for increased methodological sophistication. He argued that religious studies must be an academic study seeking description, analysis and theoretical explanation of religion free from apologia.

Eventually, these shifts in the academic culture of the modern Europe and North America introduced a distinction between the aims and activities of students studying religion and the aims and activities of the devotee (Jenkins, 2008).

It is within this broader discourse, as students in a modern British university, that the STEP participants' dichotomous understanding of academic and believer perspectives need to be situated and analysed. As devotees, they could engage in the social scientific study of religion, but they were not expected to be 'biased' towards their own religious beliefs in their assignments. Fredrick Max Muller, one of the key founders of the modern scientific study of religion states, 'Science wants no partisans' (1893, 28). Inevitably, many of the participants experienced dilemma as to how they were to

reconcile being an academic with being a believer or how to use critical reasoning in understanding religion.

The following section describes the ways that they reconciled this tension in practice.

Reconciliation

Two broader approaches could be discerned in the way the participants engaged with social science perspectives in faith: one, using sociological tools to clarify, justify and reinterpret their faith positions and second, using them to critique faith positions as social phenomenon.

Smart (1974) has offered a contrast between the practitioner of the 'science of religion' and theology. According to Smart, theology involves 'Expression'. It is 'a response of commitment, on the part of the scholar, to the "object" under investigation'. The student of the 'science of religion' on the other hand, does not demonstrate such 'involvement'. The first approach, which a majority of the participants seemed to draw upon, could be described as a theological approach in the way Smart describes it. The second approach, employed by a minority could be seen as being much closer to the 'science of religion' approach.

Both approaches are about the positioning of scholars in the study of religion. This has also been conceptualised as an 'insider' and 'outsider' approach in literature. It is assumed that theologians take an 'insider' stance, while the scholars of the science of religion are presumed to take an 'outsider' stance. According to Arthur (2008), though the categories 'insider' and 'outsider' are far from clear cut and distinct, the position of relative outsider would tend towards critique rather than commitment and would privilege inquiry over advocacy. Theology assumes belief in the transcendent but the science of religion approach sees religion as human responses to the idea of the transcendent.

Similarly, Wiebe (2000, xi) makes a distinction between two types of discourses: 'the discourse within the framework' and 'the discourse about the framework'. He (2000, xi) states:

> *[Religion] creates the framework within which a particular form of collective life is carried out. On the other hand, the discourse about the framework is different from the discourse within the framework.*

In broad terms, a majority of the STEP participants employed discourse from within the tacit framework of their religious beliefs as 'insiders'. Anaya provided insights into the first approach:

> *Sometimes we talk about things like… who is more important in helping us in terms of our faith: is prophet more important or Imam more important? But again, this brings you to the same platform of Islam so there have not been major arguments… there may be issues in understanding the concept of Imam but everyone understands Imam, so the big umbrella is very strong. (FFI, Phase 2)*

A minority of the participants, on the other hand, did not demonstrate such 'involvement'. Social scientific reasoning deconstructed the very basis of their religious beliefs, positioning them as social phenomenon. Beehler (1999, 30) suggests it is possible that there are individuals who may be dislodged from their religious beliefs by continued exposure to scrutiny. The awareness of the diversity of conflicting perspectives may lead one to reappraise the place of religion in their lives. This is what happened to one of the participants:

> *To be honest I have become atheist now. I am moving towards atheism. I had come here as believer but I am going as an atheist. Many things we interpret. What to say this one follows this, that one follows that, I don't want to follow anyone. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Zulfiqar grew critical that the critical thinking tools were used selectively in the programme. According to him, only those perspectives that supported the Ismaili stance were often encouraged. He explained:

> *We take that interpretation [from the Qurʾān] which we want. For example [the verse of the Qurʾān] 'There is no compulsion in religion', we take that at face value. However, when this came 'Slay wherever they are' [connoting kill the unbelievers], at that time [they] began explaining us context…We are critical but only where we can be Ismaili but if we feel that we are going away from being Ismaili then we stop ourselves. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Despite their changed stance on religion as a social construction, these participants saw themselves as part of the community. Reema said that even if all her beliefs were challenged, she would continue to be Ismaili Muslim due to its humanistic spirit. Ahmed chose to remain part of the community due to the perceived benefits, its ethics and a sense of belonging. The participants distinguished between the plausibility of their

beliefs and attachment to their faith. The social scientific perspectives made them reconsider their faith position but not necessarily lessen their attachment to the community.

The Selective Social Scientists

The question is, how did a majority of the STEP participants manage to use social scientific tools within faith umbrella, rather than letting them question their faith positions as social phenomenon? In other words, once they began 'on the slippery slope of the investigation of the past by Enlightenment method' where and why did they stop?

I offer three explanations for this. One represented by Alston (1989; 1997; 2006) and Plantinga (2012; Dennett and Plantinga 2011), asserts that there are 'foundational propositions' or experiences upon which religious beliefs rest and whose reliability is not questionable. According to Platinga (2012) there are conditions in which theistic belief is 'properly basic'. In such conditions, it is rational, even in the absence of support from propositional evidence, to uphold 'basic beliefs'. They get their positive epistemic status neither from evidence, nor from anything else that we necessarily know. A majority of the STEP participants upheld a set of foundational beliefs and experiences that made it possible for them to engage with a range of critical thinking and social scientific perspectives in a way that led to 'a response of commitment'.

One of the foundational propositions was their faith in their Imam. For instance, on the Qurʾān controversy, Zeba sought refuge in a popular saying attributed to the Prophet Mohammed that says that his progeny and the Qurʾān were inseparable. She said, 'I will take Qurʾān example, whether it's complete or not doesn't matter, *Ya Ali Bapa* (Imam) is there, the "speaking Qurʾān" is there' (FFI, Phase 2). Similarly, Anaya said:

> *A few things were a bit difficult to accept initially, but I think what kept me still grounded was the fact that you look at it in context and look at it thinking that as an Ismaili Muslim you have an Imam and when that Imam is there, you are assured that things would not go wrong… so I think that kind of makes you feel okay. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Aisha said that it was important to engage with critical reading but:

> *What is most important is keep your faith strong. [If not] then your faith can shatter. Then there is no use, you would lose your identity. First keep your faith strong, keep faith on Imam, then read whatever nothing can influence you. (SVI, Phase 2, partially translated)*

Adapting from Andrew Koehl's (2005) arguments, I suggest that in this form of theistic belief a believer sees herself as standing in a personal relationship to her Imam. Her deep trust in her Imam makes it unthinkable for her to question her Imam. She trusts her Imam who is transforming her life in powerful ways. It will seem justifiable to her that the search for truth is best executed by devoting energies to understanding and strengthening her relationship with the Imam rather than reviewing it. She may in fact resist critique as a relationship-harming activity.

Another foundational proposition of many STEP participants was God. William Alston's thesis *Perceiving God* (1993) contends that the experience of God provides 'prima facie justification' for beliefs about God to the experiencer. Orsi's (2011) observation is relevant here. He notes that in a Pentecostal woman's everyday experience Jesus is a real figure, as real to her as the other people around her. She does not 'believe in' Jesus, Jesus is present to her. He has a life of his own in her life. Similarly, in many STEP participants' perception, God is present, as a real omnipotent and omniscient force, making a difference in their lives every day. Wittgenstein (2007b, 53) has offered an important insight on the subject.

> *Suppose someone were a believer and said: "I believe in a Last Judgement," and I said: "Well, I'm not so sure. Possibly." You would say that there is an enormous gulf between us. If he said "There is a German aeroplane overhead," and I said "Possibly. I'm not so sure," you'd say we were fairly near. It isn't a question of my being near him, but on an entirely different plane, which you can express by saying: 'You mean something altogether different, Wittgenstein'.*

In the context of religion, the difference is more than just the disagreement about a fact. It is not a situation like where one thinks that there is a German aeroplane overhead and the other does not and both can reassess their assumptions based on factual evidence. In the case of religious believer, his belief is not going to be shaken by contrary evidence. This is because his 'belief' in God is not 'belief' in usual sense. It is not belief but trust. In this 'believing-in' is 'relying on'. This is not an example of believing the opposite but both have entirely different perspective on life.

In short, the first explanation is that many STEP participants upheld certain foundational propositions, which were not acquired based on evidence and they were not continued based on evidence.

The second explanation is that for many believers faith is a special way of living that goes beyond social scientific explanations. Religious belief constitutes an interpretive framework for believers and they may be satisfied with it. Gellman (2000, 402) proposes, 'If the wheel does not squeak, don't oil it'. If the belief of devotees works for them then they are rationally entitled to uphold it. This seemed to be the case with a number of STEP participants. Some participants narrated certain experiences that they thought were only possible to make sense of within the context of faith. Some saw faith as a source of miraculous help, which nothing other than faith could provide. Shabana described:

> *Certain things have happened in my life and where faith has come and not miracles but things have happened. There is something in the power of believing sometimes. It happened yesterday. (FGI, Phase 2)*

Otto (1968) speaks of awe, wonder and desire that humans experience in encounter with the numinous. Taylor (1992) suggests that spirituality is invoked in boundary situations, in questions of life and death, good and evil and meaning and suffering. Together overwhelm us and mystify us. This seemed to resonate with the experience of many participants.

The third explanation is fear. The need for certainty, stability and an anchor are deep human needs. A group of participants consciously drew a limit to the extent of their critical enquiry on matters of religion to avoid experiencing disorientation or crisis in life. Naila recounted her crisis when she encountered an atheist perspective a few years ago:

> *I was in third year or fourth year when that happened. I could not even study... I went to Jamāʿat-khāna, and started reading the Qurʾān and I felt comfortable. I think what I did was just escaping because something that I really lived with 25 years it was very hard. It's hard for me to accept that there is no God. It's hard for me. Even may be mentally sometimes I say, yes, they are true but I can't. The way I live I can't. (FFI, Phase 1)*

Naila explained, 'This is a faith-based decision; it's not evidence-based'. Koehl (2005) has observed that a belief produced by a firmly entrenched, socially established religious practice that enjoys significant social support will have a better epistemic

status than one produced by a doxastic practice that lacks these qualities. In the case of Naila, belief in God was a firmly entrenched religious doxastic practice in her social and religious milieu in the Middle East and it was difficult to adopt a practice that lacked this support.

Neha, who was born and brought up in USA, cited the example of Al-Ghazzālī (1058-1111) who is hailed as an outstanding theologian, jurist and mystic of orthodox Islam (Bearman et al. 2014b). At the height of his career he suffered a crisis as he doubted his faith. Neha did not want to experience a similar crisis by making her beliefs a subject of examination. She explained:

> *I am afraid of that scepticism… I did a paper on Ghazzālī and he went through entire period of doubt… the more he studied his faith the more sceptical he was about it and then he got to the point where he questioned everything down to like his core belief and faith. He just didn't believe in anything anymore so that kind of does scare me a little bit. I don't want to get to that point. (FGI, Phase 2)*

These participants' stand resonated with Augustine (2007, 47), who has remarked:

> *I will rather not be inquisitive than be separated from God; nor can any instruction by which error is removed separate me from Him.*

According to Gellman, it is possible for a devotee to think that if she were to scrutinize her beliefs this would expose her to error and confusion. Under such circumstances, it is rational for her to refuse to enter into such an activity.

This meant that the participants needed a way to entertain doubts scepticism, and critical questions in faith without shaking their faith. This was done through at least two mechanisms. One of them was the notion of 'search'. The participants considered doubts and questions as part of their faith. If there were doubts, it meant an opportunity for further reflection on faith. They rejected blind faith and appreciated an enquiring mind. They seemed to find their equilibrium through considering search as a lifelong pursuit and refraining from arriving at conclusions. Aly argued:

> *In fact [if] these murids [followers] are asking more questions, you have made them better murids. Not saying that blindly accept this, in fact it is bad murid... Also this whole danger about not having enough information [to conclude]. People study the Qurʾān 30, 40, 50 years and they haven't reached conclusion. (FGI, Phase 2)*

They also saw doubts as the result of not enough knowledge and therefore the need to search further. Kabir said:

> *There is a famous saying that little knowledge makes you unbeliever and full knowledge makes you believer. It is a very, very, very good saying. Sometimes I question does God exist or not. If there is God then why do people suffer?... Then from another point, I need to find answers… So nowadays, I am in process of searching knowledge. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Doubts and questions are inevitable, but the notion of search served as a significant resource to the participants to respond to them from within faith perspectives. Koehl (2005) observes that the resources one has can influence the epistemic status of one's religious beliefs.

Secondly, these participants saw social scientific reasoning as limited. They assigned different functions to faith and science. The participants saw certain faith beliefs as unexplainable through scientific thinking. Sheena commented:

> *We can teach history, content, different perspectives, historical thinking but when it comes to the concepts, how to prove Imam is direct descendent from the Prophet, how to prove that Naṣṣ [designation] is from God, we can't really articulate when it comes to faith. (SVI, Phase 3)*

Similarly, Reema said, 'I know there are a lot of questions but at the same time, sometimes you have to leave it to faith. I have learnt that not all questions can be answered'. (SVI, Phase 2)

These participants distinguished between the place of academic thinking and faith-based thinking in life. Ahmed explained: 'they all fit in a like a part of puzzle. Whatever academic fails at, faith fills in' (FFI, Phase 2). On the other hand, Anaya observed: 'things are distinct; you don't have to intertwine and connect things' (FGI, Phase 2).

In addition, the STEP's aim and approach influenced the way the participants employed social scientific tools of investigation in matters of religion. With its humanistic take on religion, the STEP rejects positivism and seeks to interpret faith rather than deconstruct it. Amal expressed, 'For us as STEP even if we become like this [sceptical of religion], if we have all these questions at the end of the day, you will be brought again to believe in this [faith]' (FGI, Phase 2).

It is interesting to note that even from among the minority of the participants who saw religion as a social phenomenon, most retained appreciation for aspects of faith. For

instance, despite seeing religion as social phenomenon, Ahmed chose to remain part of the community. He explained:

> *I have been able to benefit so much just by the process that, that's enough. My family is Ismaili, my cousins... You are giving service to helping other. Those match with my ethics and I think for me that's enough… the community is more significant for me than the religion… I still have a hard time believing some of the existential stuff about the faith… but because being an Ismaili offers so much I guess I am willing to ignore some of the arguments that this isn't true or that's not true. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Ahmed called it as 'a bit of turning blind eye' and considered it as 'part of faith as well'. Koehl (2005) has argued that it is legitimate to take into consideration the practical fruits of one's beliefs. 'Rational choice theory' suggests that individuals make choices by looking at the benefits that they are trying to achieve and the costs that they are trying to avoid (Young 1997;Stark 2006). If practical support is significant, it can legitimately maintain individuals in their group. On the other hand, Dillon (2003) has argued that despite the dominance of a calculating rationality there are many instances of nonstrategic actions. Moral and emotional factors continue to shape social behaviour in ambiguous ways. Bellah (Bellah et al. 2007) speaks of a deep-seated need to relate to other human beings. Religion provides resources for individuals to be able to share meaningful connections. Ahmed's case is indicative of the significance of both, the rational choice and non-strategic action in religion. The social scientific perspectives may result in individuals reconsidering their faith position but not necessarily lessening their identification and attachment to the community.

These participants believed in belonging (Day 2011). In this, their religious identification complemented other social and emotional experience of belonging. The individuals demonstrated '*performative Ismailism*' with their Ismaili identity as a lived and emotional experience, brought into being through action such as volunteering and in the experience of belonging. Despite not having belief in the doctrines of the Ismaili faith, their experience of being an Ismaili was very meaningful to them.

Performativity

By *performativity* I mean a plural self, which gets constructed in dialogue with the 'other' (Bakhtin 1984).Individuals perform a diversified set of identities to a diversified set of others through an interpretive process and in this way they construct their selfhood (Ostberg 2008). It can be observed that in the STEP the participants interpreted their academic and believer identities dynamically and contextually depending on factors such as their perception of the receptiveness of the audience and the appropriateness of space and time. Amal expressed:

> *It [critical thinking] also depends to whom I am talking. If I am reading for myself or if I am reading with people who I know are open minded and they are looking at from the same lenses as I am looking at, [then] there would be no limit for my questioning…[otherwise] I am afraid I would be taken as non-Ismaili. (FGI, Phase 2)*

Two audiences seemed central to the participants' STEP experience: one, the tutors to whom they submitted their academic assignments and two, the pupils they taught at religious education centres (REC). The academic assignments required the participants to demonstrate a non-partisan and critical approach to religion. A successful accomplishment of their dual Masters depended on it. Writing as a believer meant being biased and the participants feared that 'they (IOE) will fail you' for writing as a believer. Sheela reflected: 'I think my MA paper could have been like that, that's why I didn't do too well on it; probably it had too much believer perspective' (FFI, Phase 2). Aisha said that her religious beliefs held no value unless they were evidenced through literature:

> *When I speak, there is directly the question: is this said by anyone? And then in entire paper if I say this is I believe, this is I believe, the teacher would say your opinion is not important what is literature saying? (FFI, Phase 2)*

This remark finds echo in Paul Heelas' observations about the way the Enlightenment's assumptions in favour of empirically verified 'knowledge' has impacted on religious studies. Heelas (2005, 262) notes that it has typically involved moving beyond the participants' frame of reference:

> *Participants might believe in their religions, but since such beliefs… are not of explanatory value, the investigator has to go 'deeper' to find empirical referents. Explanations are 'extra-religious'.*

Having faced the challenge to be academic, the participants used two distinct strategies to respond to it. In the first strategy, they chose topics that supported their beliefs and yet could be written from an academic perspective. In a way there was no dichotomy between being an academic and being a believer, the two were not antagonistic but complimentary. Anaya said: 'I have always picked those elements to do on which you might think as a believer but then I try to keep it academic' (FFI, Phase 2).

Aly argued that there was no tension between faith and critical thinking because it could be used to serve faith. He spoke about a friend who 'used critical thinking to establish that Imam Hakim was not crazy'. He said:

> *He wrote a 5000 words paper on Imam al-Hakim, about how he was not crazy. He went and looked at all sources. Use the scholarship to show he wasn't crazy. From a faith lens if you say that you believe that he can't be crazy because he is the Imam. You are saying the same thing but you are not required to provide any evidence but he as academic was able to provide evidence, so both complements. (FGI, Phase 2)*

The participants focused on finding academic literature that justified their beliefs and criticised those that did not support their beliefs. It is fascinating to see that when social science challenges believers, believers use the language of social science to silence it.

Another fascinating point to note is that some of the participants were aware of their biases. Sometimes, justifying traditional Ismaili beliefs in academic language using academic tools was a conscious endeavour and other times, their beliefs served as an unconscious filter for acceptance or rejection of academic materials. Aisha mentioned: 'At the time it was difficult to decide which author to hear, who goes with our perspective. I use that literature which I agree with' (FFI, Phase 2).

In the second strategy, some participants wrote critically irrespective of whether they believed in it or not. They considered that faith and critical thinking were valid in separate domains and were to be used for different purposes. Sheela said, 'Academic is very different and my faith is very different. I don't mix the two. I try not to. I think I was doing that in the first semester quite a bit' (FFI, Phase 1). Nishi also made a distinction between faith and critical thinking. She considered herself a believer because, 'I am a Muslim, I am an Ismaili. Prophet Mohammad is essential to my life' and she employed critical thinking to question Islam in her assignments. The following is an example of it:

> *So first essay I chose something about how Prophet Mohammed could have been just epileptic and Islam is a fictive religion and we are all just probably… and I think I choose to go to the non-normative perspective, because I don't like to articulate my faith as my academic. (FFI, Phase 2)*

In both approaches, academic identity was important to the participants. The tutor's interpretations and their way of constructing valid knowledge affected how the participants articulated. Kabir described this for the non-Ismaili tutors from the IOE:

> *I need to be careful. It's not like, our community, or our people read my paper. IOE also, they also read it. I need to be careful about choosing words…Instead of 'non-believers' I need to rephrase 'believers of other faiths'. If not, my tutor will say are you the only believer in this world? (FFI, Phase 2)*

In short, the tutors to whom the participants submitted their academic assignments were an important audience and thus, the participants chose to emphasise academic perspectives. Many employed critical reasoning based on social scientific tools to justify their religious beliefs and some chose to write critically irrespective of their beliefs.

The second audience that was equally central to the participants' experience was the pupils they taught at religious education centres (REC). In this, faith beliefs underscored their teaching. According to Zeba in an REC, the purpose was different from writing essays:

> *Because it [essay] is academic, you don't really say your position but of course as Ismaili teacher in the REC you have to be clear with that… At the end of the day, teacher should make sure that the students firmly believe in Ismaili faith and understand the Ismaili interpretation. (FFI, Phase 3)*

Zulfiqar observed that as STEP teachers they were expected to remain within the Ismaili framework in their RECs. Sheena explained, 'You can teach history and content but I don't want to rationalise my students too much, because faith is involved' (FFI, Phase 3). Depending on where the participants were expected to teach after the programme, some of them were considering accentuating either a believer perspective or an academic perspective in teaching. Aisha felt that in her country it was much safer to not provide different academic perspectives:

> *Maybe children would be disturbed that what is my teacher teaching me. I come to night school to read but what teacher is teaching all wrong, wrong. Teacher is making us against. Then they would go to parents and may be parents would misunderstand us. (FFI, Phase 2)*

In contrast to Aisha, Nishi was in favour of providing her pupils with tools to decide for themselves:

> *I think my personal faith is different from what I walk into the classroom to teach... My idea is not to make them walk out believing that they are Shia Muslims for a reason… It is more to...give them tools for them to decide what they believe in and what they do not. (FFI, Phase 2)*

It can be concluded that the participants dynamically and contextually synthesised their identities as academics and/or believers in front of different audiences. The academic assignments were a public sphere, whereas REC was a private sphere of the community; therefore, their emphasis and strategies of communication differed. Zulfiqar, who described himself as an 'atheist' summarised, 'When I am teaching I become believer; when I am writing I become an academician' (FFI, Phase 2)

Faith, Reason, Islam and STEP

The STEP participants' dynamic and contextual synthesis of devotion and critique defies the assumption that there is a strict dichotomy between faith and reason in Islam. Orsi (2011, 417) points out, there is 'an unreflective assumption that Islam and dogma are synonymous (and, concomitantly, Islam and criticism are mutually exclusive)'.

Here, I would like to provide some historical episodes to illustrate the dynamic response to the issue of reason and revelation in Muslim history. This is not meant to be a comprehensive and chronological anthropology of faith and reason in the Muslim context, although such an endeavour would be illuminating.

One of the examples of critical reasoning is the tradition of public disputations on various issues in medieval Islam (Makdisi 1981). Public disputations were commonplace and well attended. They were also held in the court of the ʿAbbāsid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (786–809) in Baghdad. Numerous schools of thoughts emerged in medieval Islam and they publically disputed matters. Kraemer (1992, 59) relates the arrival of 'a pious Andalusian theologian' Ibn Saʿdi at a salon in Baghdad in the late 10th century. Ibn Saʿdi felt:

> *Shocked by the excessive tolerance he witnessed…there were present not only Muslims of all sects, but also infidels, Mazdaens, materialist, atheists,*

Jews and Christians... Each sect had a spokesman who defended the position it professed. The rules of discussion proscribed appeal to the authority of revelation. Each discussant as restricted to arguments derived from reason.

A famous example of a tug-of-war on the issue of reason and revelation is between *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, the traditionalists theologians and *Ahl al-Kalām*, the rationalists Muʿtazilī theologians (Makdisi 1981). The *Ahl al-Kalām* emphasised the supremacy of revelation and the Muʿtazilī upheld the significance of human reason. The rationalists reached their height during the ʿAbbāsid caliphate of al-Maʾmūn (786-833), when translation of the Greek works on philosophy and science were taking place in the Arab world. However, in 892 AD, there was a caliphal decree banning works on philosophy and dialectic. It also prohibited disputations. In some parts only a study of the Qurʾānic exegesis, *Kalām*, *Ḥadīth* and law was allowed.

Many scholars such as al- Haytham (965-1039) strongly supported reason. He was one of the principal Arab mathematicians and a noted physicist in Syria. He wrote about mathematics, physics, philosophy and medicine as well as the Greek authors, notably Ptolemy, whose works he edited and criticised (Bearman et al. 2014c). He writes in his *Doubts Concerning Ptolemy*, whereby he based his Optics on experiment rather than authority:

He who searches for truth is not he who reviews the works of the ancient… [it is] he who follows argument and evidence, not the statement by an individual, who is inevitably affected by context and imperfection.

On the other hand, scholars like Ibn al-Jauzi (d.1200), who was a noted theologian and traveller criticised the use of reason without referring to revelation. He (1936) scorns Muslim jurists for using analogical reasoning as evidence in law, rather than cite a Ḥadīth. He bemoans that jurists look down upon it forgetting that Ḥadīth is one of the basic sources of the law.

Contrary to both the above positions, Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), also known as Averroes, who wrote commentaries on nearly all of Aristotle's works saw reason and revelation as complimentary. A medieval poet Al-Ma'arri (973-1057), laments that scholars must dispute between reason and revelation and suggests a middle option (Makdisi 1981, 139):

They all err - Moslems, Christians, Jews and Magians. Two make humanity's universal sect. One man intelligent without religion and one religious without intellect.

The point I wish to emphasise is that critical thinking is neither a product of the Enlightenment, nor is it valid to see critical thinking and reason as somehow not being part of Muslim history. Makdisi argues that the medieval religious madrasa were not hostile to the promotion of rationalism. Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1382) is regarded as a historian, sociologist and philosopher (Bearman et al. 2014d). His observations about the rise and fall of civilisations and power and dominance are considered his contribution to sociological theories.

The STEP participants belong to this legacy of dynamic responses to reason and revelation in Muslim history. Accordingly, some STEP participants engaged with those academic perspectives that supported their existing religious beliefs and dismissed the ones that did not. Some chose the topics that could be discussed from religio-scientific perspectives. Some consciously limited the extent of their critical enquiry on matters of religion. Some rejected blind faith and appreciated an enquiring mind.

The STEP's religious-scientific approach to religion is also a type of synthesis of reason and revelation. It rejects the positivist underpinning of social science methods in favour of the humanistic elements of social science. According to Sharpe (Wiebe 2000), the humanistic study of religion is a kind of religious undertaking. When Eliade applied a 'creative hermeneutic', he attempted to restore the sacred to a de-sacralised culture. For van der Leeuw the phenomenological study of religion was both, practice of religion as well as scientific study.

Thus, in the STEP there is at once co-existence of criticism and disputes, doctrinal assertions and scientific reasoning. It is precisely through such negotiation of reason and revelation that the religious identity of the Ismaili Muslims in contemporary times is taking place.

Impact

The preceding two chapters have suggested that over a period the participants had developed a degree of 'intra-faith competence' and 'academically informed pluralism'. According to the participants, their biggest learning was developing an understanding of how one's social, cultural and historical context influenced his or her understanding and practice of religion. They adopted a more nuanced positions on these issues. Anaya said:

> *Now I look at it quite in historical perspective in terms of seeing anything. It would not just be only religion but everything else…even if you are looking at somebody's tradition or culture, how it's historically come about or how somebody's personality, so kind of context why they are behaving that. I do look at it that way now. That's one of the major changes. (FFI, Phase 2)*

Inevitably, these shifts in their outlook made them more open to diverse definitions of being an Ismaili Muslim, being a Muslim and being a religious person.

A majority of the participants seemed to acquire the ability to draw upon social scientific tools to reason, investigate and understand their faith better. It made them feel confident in themselves as Ismaili Muslims and increased their confidence to articulate their position academically. They also felt that now they were able to use critical thinking to go deeper into religion. Serena said:

> *I realised that back home in India I used to touch surface level and not go deeper into it. It was more like facts and diversity but how does diversity help, why is it important? For me now I go deeper into the aspect of diversity. It's more abstract and not just factual for me. (FFI, Phase 2)*

This inevitably influenced the way they taught as STEP teachers. Now they were able provide a diversity of perspectives and avoid value judgements. Sheela said: 'I give both perspectives as Ismaili someone can see it this way and if someone is not an Ismaili he is very likely to see it this way too' (FFI, Phase 2). The social scientific tools, thus, helped them to make sense of their religious identity within a context of religious diversity.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the way participants understood and implemented social scientific tools in the study of religion and its impact on them. The findings suggest that the participants applied critical thinking based on social scientific perspectives in the study of religion differently, for different purposes, in different contexts. Over the course of the STEP, there seemed to be a shift in the participants' attitude towards faith. The programme not only developed greater contextual, socio-cultural, and historical awareness of religion in them but also enhanced their ability to relate to religious difference and augmented their ability to make a space for faith academically.

In contrast to Milbank's assumption, the study also shows that when social science seeks to silence religion, religion begins to speak in the language of social science, silencing the assumptions of social science rather than necessarily promoting 'secular consensus'.

This chapter also contributes to our understanding of the potentials and pitfalls of the social scientific tools in studying religion in Muslim religious education setting.

9. The Politics of Rooted Religious Pluralisation

In this chapter, I propose the 'rooted religious pluralisation' thesis. I argue that 'rooted religious pluralisation' is taking place in the Ismaili Muslim community, facilitating the emergence of pluralism as the community's 'tradition' in the modern discourse of the Ismaili community. The very interesting case of this particular group of STEP participants provides a poignant window into this process. My argument draws on the findings presented in the preceding four chapters, each of which has explored an important angle: the formal response of the STEP to plurality; the participants' engagement with the intra-Ismaili diversity; their relationship with intra-Islam and wider diversity and the impact of the social scientific approach on the participants' attitude to religious differences.

I hope that a 'rooted religious pluralisation' thesis is narrow enough to understand the experience of the particular community of STEP participants and elastic enough to throw some light on the process of religious pluralisation happening in other transnational faith communities. To this end, I bring together the historical, philosophical and the theological debates on the notion of religious pluralism, the perspectives around religious plurality in religious education and empirical manifestations of diversity attended to in theories on globalisation, postmodernity, cosmopolitanism, tradition and modernity. Thus, this is an interdisciplinary work.

This chapter has two main sections. In the first part, I broadly discuss what I mean by 'rooted religious pluralisation'. In the second section, I present some of the key dynamics of 'rooted religious pluralisation' interweaving it with the empirical data. Together, these sections take us on a fascinating journey of the Ismaili community's adaptation of pluralism in the first half of the 21st century.

What is Rooted Religious Pluralisation?

In the literature, 'pluralisation' is often referred to as a fact and a tendency in progress (Allievi 2005). In the religious sphere, it suggests both, a fact of growing diversity of religions and qualitative changes in outlook. In this thesis, I employ the term 'rooted religious pluralisation' to describe the process of actively engaging with religious plurality drawing upon the ideals of pluralism and qualitative changes in the outlook and self-perception of the community or individuals involved in the process. Rooted pluralisation is not the same as pluralism (Boeve 2012, 146). While pluralism is an ideology, an ideal and an abstract theory, religious pluralisation is an empirical socio-cultural process. Rooted pluralisation in the context of the STEP is a set of activities, gestures and a discourse of engaging with faith difference, inspired by the ideals of pluralism and transformation in the STEP participants' outlook.

Why is this process rooted? Appiah's (1997; 2007) 'rooted cosmopolitanism' provides a helpful guidance to consider the idea of rootedness. It suggests having roots embedded in a specific history, nation, or group and yet declaring oneself a citizen of the world. Just as in rooted cosmopolitanism, one recognises the challenge of engaging with difference as part of a particular nation or tribe; in 'rooted religious pluralism', one recognises such a challenge as part of a religious community. It demonstrates an openness to a world in which everyone can be, 'attached to a home of one's own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people' (Appiah 1997, 618). Rooted religious pluralisation is not relativistic indifference in the sense that 'anything goes'. Relativism demonstrates openness but religious pluralisation involves openness with faith commitment (Eck 2005).

Pluralism is often seen as an expression of cosmopolitan commitment. Cosmopolitanism is a broader discourse on dealing with difference, whereas religious pluralism is specifically a way of dealing with religious difference. Religious pluralism, the way I have conceived here, however, differs from certain versions of cosmopolitanism that see cosmopolitanism as counteracting particularities of religions. Like rooted cosmopolitanism, rooted pluralism is grounded in a community as opposed to rejecting community.

Rooted religious pluralisation is religion's response to globalisation. Adapting the work of Altbach & Knight (2007, 290) it can be said that globalisation is the context of economic, social and cultural trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century, while rooted religious pluralisation is the policies and practices undertaken by faith communities and individuals to cope with the global changes in terms of religious diversity.

Rooted Pluralists

The group of STEP participants can be described as 'rooted pluralists'. It is because their engagement with religious plurality was not merely as individuals but as integral members of the Ismaili Muslim community. Rooted pluralists choose to view diversity as strength rather than a problem, even when it is tough. The STEP participants did not always necessarily feel at ease with the intra-Ismaili or the intra-Islam differences but following their Imam's guidance, they attempted to embrace a positive mind-set towards diversity even when it was outside their comfort zone. Rooted pluralists assume such a stance to be beneficial for peace, unity, stability and the flourishing of civilisation. They are cognizant of the fact that pluralism needs cultivation and efforts. There is no polarity between being religious and being a pluralist for them. Their religious particularity is their life's orientation and not an assertion of validity of their beliefs only (Eck 2005). Religious pluralists seek to develop mutually satisfying relationships with religious others. They even actively seek to learn from other religions, visit their places of worship, or go to events organised by other religions so that they can relate to them better as many of the STEP participants did. Weber observes in his *Protestant Ethic Thesis*, that Calvinist Christians' ideas about being chosen by God / being saved influenced their entrepreneurial activities. Similarly, for the STEP participants, the discourse of pluralism, rooted in religious texts and history, had meaning for them, and that largely shaped their conduct and attitude to diversity in STEP.

Rooted pluralists may belong to the community in their own way, as an ordinary believer, critic, philosopher, historian, theologian, religious leader, even as an individual

who is unsure of his/her beliefs or 'cultural Ismaili'[24] but they consider their roots to be in the community. All of them share one thing; they are committed to the struggles of that community in relation to religious difference. Rooted pluralists are not pluralist angels. They discursively participate in being pluralistic.

There are other people, who are not rooted in the community as the members of the community but they support the goal of the community through a role that is not based on roots but on relationships. In the STEP, there were tutors, educators, curriculum writers, administrators who did not belong to the community yet they were integral to the community's process of rooted religious pluralisation. I refer to them as the 'rhizome pluralists'. Glissant (1997, 11) the Caribbean postcolonial author, suggests that rhizome is an 'enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no … rootstock taking over permanently… in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other'. Rhizome pluralists share most of the characteristic of rooted pluralists in relation to plurality, except that the rhizome pluralists are part of the community through relationship rather than by birth or confession. Unlike Glissant's rhizome and rooted individuals who were in an antagonistic relationship with each other in colonial times, in STEP they share a supportive relationship. Their cooperation itself can be seen as a sign of cosmopolitan openness.

Having described in broad terms what I mean by rooted religious pluralisation and rooted pluralists; I will consider some of the key dynamic involved in this process in the next section.

Five-Dimensional Model of Rooted Religious Pluralisation

Rather than presenting a grand and immutable theory, I discuss five key dynamics of rooted religious pluralisation: 'value adjustment', 'reflexivity', 'selectivity',

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[24] 'The term 'cultural Ismailis' evolved in discussions with my colleague and friend Zulfiqar Khimani to denote the sort of Ismailis who relate to their Ismaili identity as part of their cultural heritage rather than as theological commitment.

'ambivalence' and 'performativity'. In this way, I hope to make sense of some important trends, tendencies and challenges of religious pluralisation. I will use the findings discussed in the previous chapters to illustrate a number of wider theoretical points. These dimensions show that while a faith community may hold pluralism as a desirable ideology or an ethical imperative, its actual implementation is a complex endeavour.

The following diagram is an effort to capture the key dynamics of the complex interrelationship between these themes.

Figure 9.1: The Five-Dimensional Model of Rooted Religious Pluralisation
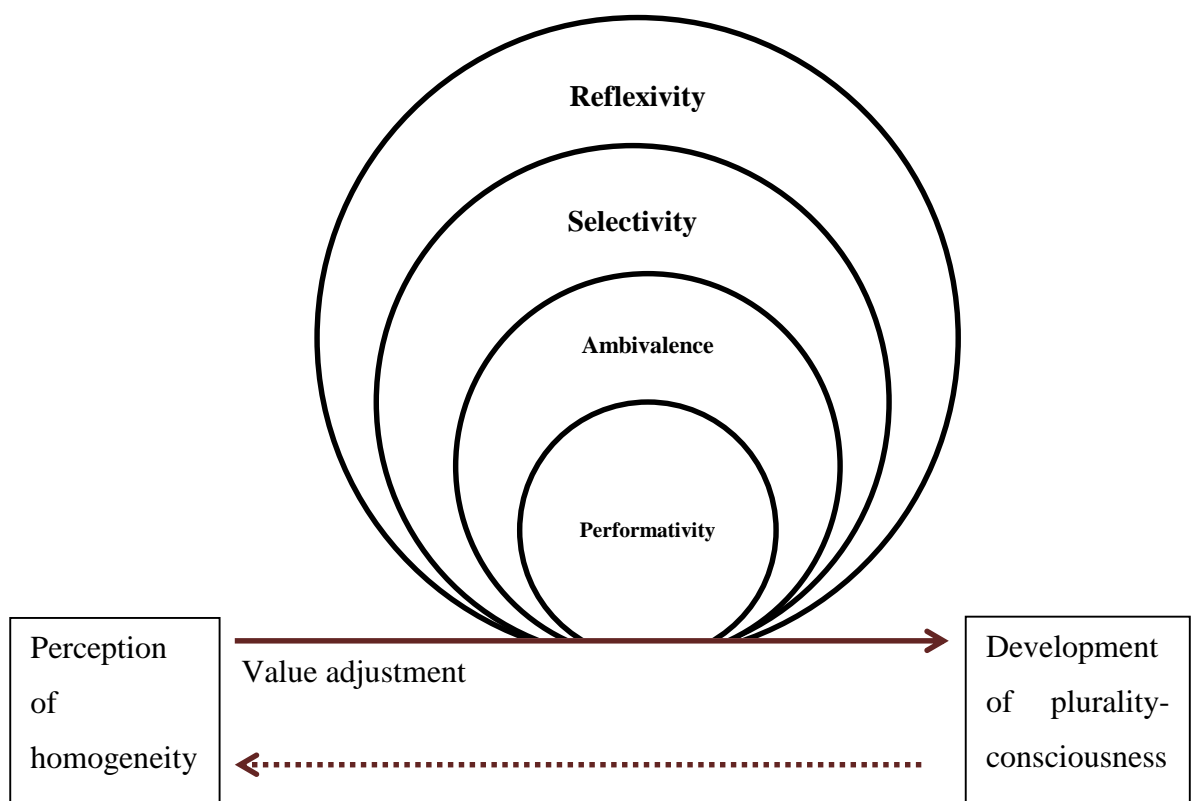
At the core of rooted religious pluralisation lies a movement away from a perception of singularity to plurality-consciousness. I describe this process as 'value adjustment'. The dotted arrow, however, shows a propensity for counter-movement, implying refashioning of exclusivity and exceptionality. It is dotted because it is subtle. It only exists relationally. It is ironically an inevitable and unintended consequence of value adjustment. Integral to the process of value adjustment is 'reflexivity', which propels

religious pluralisation. It involves a degree of 'selectivity', which in turn generates 'ambivalence'. 'Performativity', at the forefront, is concerned with dialogical performance of the community in relation to the 'other'. These elements are loyal friends in religious pluralisation. If you pick up any one, the other three tend to follow. These elements are intertwined with each other but they are separated here in order to permit a focus on particular moments.

Rooted religious pluralisation is not an 'arrived at' state but a journey negotiated in a given terrain. It is not necessarily a linear and sequential process. It is possible to reconstruct this map or diagram along different lines. It depends on how one slices the cake. It may also be worth mentioning not only the STEP trainee-teachers but also many of their tutors seemed to go through these negotiations.

The phenomenon of pluralisation is not a new one in the context of Ismaili communities. Bellah (Bellah and Tipton 2006) suggests that communities have always lived in intercultural relationship sharing artefacts, ideas and even stories. In Bellah's (2006, 478) words 'in short, all historical cultures have been "pluralistic"'. Bearing this in mind, when I speak of a shift from singularity to plurality-consciousness, I do not imply that the Ismaili communities were not pluralistic before. What I mean is the development of plurality-consciousness that is shaped by greater awareness of and active engagement with plurality in the context of globalisation.

In order to understand this process of rooted religious pluralisation, I will shed light on each of the elements in some detail:

Value Adjustment

The central feature of religious pluralisation is value adjustment. In the literature on intercultural education, there is the concept of 'cultural values adjustment' (DomNwachukwu 2010, 47). It assumes that the necessity of social interaction demands that we adjust our worldviews and value systems to be more accommodating of people outside of our own cultural arrangements. Similarly, in a faith context when a community undertakes policies and practices to be more accommodating of difference and otherness, it involves 'tradition values adjustment'. This is not an organic evolution of self-perception but a deliberate and reflexive cultivation of a norm.

In the STEP, value adjustment occurred at two levels. The first was that the individuals moved from a 'tradition-centric' disposition to developing a degree of 'inter-tradition competence' (Chapter 6). In tradition-centrism, individuals automatically treat their faith group's practice of faith as taken for granted and the only natural way to practice that particular faith. They compare and evaluate other faith groups within their community by their own standard of practicing faith. Even when encouraged to be open to the other, finding what is common in other group tends to be done with the lens and criteria of one's own faith group, sometimes at the cost of particular history of practices that are being equated. Gradually, most STEP participants' cultivated a degree of 'inter-tradition', in other words or 'intra-faith competence'. Participants developed the ability to relate more effectively across intra-Ismaili contexts. It redefined the participants' very notion of being an Ismaili.

The second major value adjustment was developing a degree of 'intra-Islam competence' (Chapter 7). Participants developed greater appreciation of the differences within Islam and learnt to situate their position as Ismaili Muslims within the intra-Islam diversity with a greater sense of comfort than before. It encouraged them to connect with other Muslims better than before.

Broadly, participants developed an academically informed pluralism. The participants began to see religious communities as dynamic and evolving in a variety of historical, political and socio-cultural contexts with different viewpoints. This resulted in greater openness to plurality and confidence to dialogue about religion.

The process of value adjustment for Ismailis can be better understood through taking a historic perspective. Like other historical religions, some of the doctrines and practices of the Ismaili community sit somewhat uncomfortably in modern society. Universalist tendencies are found in its historical documents, events, and practices, these implied that its own version of belief was the only truth and wished it to be triumphant over other versions.

At this point, I am thinking of three historically significant figures in Islam and particularly to the Ismailis: Nāṣir-i K͟husraw (1004-1088), Al-G͟hazzālī (1058-1111) and Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201-1274). Nāṣir-i K͟husraw was a Persian poet and prose writer, a noted traveller and an Ismāʿīlī philosopher and *dāʿī* (Nanji 2014). Al-G͟hazzālī is regarded as an outstanding Persian theologian, jurist and mystic of orthodox Islam

(Griffel 2009). He has written against the Ismailis. Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, born in Persia, is hailed to be the most important and influential S̲h̲īʿī scholar in the fields of mathematics, geometry, astronomy, philosophy and theology (Morris 2009). Ṭūsī served at the court of the Ismaili Imams of his time for many years.

Against the background of a multiplicity of competing interpretive communities and schools of thoughts among Muslims, these three medieval notables penned moving accounts of their personal spiritual journeys and transformations.[25] Their stories share a pattern. To begin with, their lives were fairly uneventful; then there was a sudden onset of spiritual upheaval, which then led to years of quest for the true interpretation of Islam; they consulted various prominent Muslim religious teachers and different schools of thoughts but none seemed satisfactory, finally, the truth was found only in a particular group's vision of Islam. While al-G̲h̲azzālī considered Ṣūfī vision of Islam as the true interpretation of Islam, K̲h̲usraw and al-Ṭūsī saw the Ismaili faith to be the truth.

Today, in 'the age of inter-faith dialogue' the essay questions assigned to STEP participants on these key historical figures did not ask them to prove how the Ismaili interpretation trumps all. The STEP participants seemed to recognise that their earlier language that reflected superiority of their truth was not relevant today in the public sphere. There was a language and perspective change from 'ours is the truth' to 'this is our truth'. The value adjustment in favour of plurality seemed to erode earlier absolutes. The 'old' resources that no longer served as a model or precedent for pluralistic behaviour were either ignored or reinterpreted.

What is fascinating is that most of the participants saw such value adjustment as a shift in their personal perspective but not necessarily as a transition within the community's

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[25] In his work *Safarnama* (Travelogue), Nāṣir-i K̲h̲usraw recounts that when he reached his 40s, he was gripped by the desire to seek the truth. His journey of more than seven years took him to all the teachers and clergy he knew and read all the books he could, but none satisfied him. His inner discontent was answered only in the doctrines of the Ismaili Shii faith (Hunsberger 2003). In a similar fashion, in his autobiography, *al-munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*Deliverance from Error*) al-G̲h̲azzālī tells his readers how a deep existential crisis afflicted his soul. After ten years of wandering in search of truth, whereby he consulted *Kalām* (theological writings), philosophy and the writings of the Ismailis, he found value in none of them but in the Ṣūfī-fold (Ghazzālī 1999). Similarly, Ṭūsī sends an autobiographical letter, later titled as *Sayr wa Suluk* (*Contemplation and Action*) to a prominent Ismaili figure close to the Ismaili Imam of his time, wanting him to know his earnest personal quest in search of religious truth leading to his recognition of the truth in the Ismaili faith (Ṭūsī 1998).

perspective. They saw their personal shift as their alignment to the community's ethical value of pluralism. Ricoeur (1988) provides some insights on such a phenomenon. He suggests that identity is not about sameness. People do not remain the same throughout their lifetime. They age, their appearance changes, so do their opinions, predilections and attitudes. Yet, individuals are able to build continuity with history. History is what happened. However, we only have access to the story of what happened. Our story brings unity and coherence to history based on our present lens. The ability to reconstruct history allows religious communities to imagine the past creatively. With access to such creative imagination, the autobiographical writings described earlier can be viewed either as clever polemic of their time or inspiring accounts of spiritual journeys, depending on the community's present lens.

In the Ismaili community's warehouse, in line with what Hobsbawm (1983) has observed more generally, an elaborate language of symbolic practice and communication is available to support new traditions. This is the strength of historical religions. Through such an approach, it becomes possible for individuals such as the STEP participants, to interpret their personal change with continuity. Change is easier when narrated as continuity. It makes them feel that their change is legitimate and grounded. It also helps address anxiety that comes with change.

Histories of religions, groups, and nations are replete with such appropriations of the past for the present purposes. For instance, a brief examination of the 'Golden Age' of the Umayyad Spain would be illuminating in Ismaili as well as Jewish studies. The Secondary Curriculum (Department of Curriculum Studies 2013a, 115) provides STEP participants with a paradigmatic example of 'Muslim Spain' (see Chapter 5). Hughes (2005) argues that European Jewish scholars, in the context of victimised situation in Europe developed a particular narrative of 'Muslim Spain'. In order to prove that when granted emancipation they became active and productive members of society, they deemphasised riots and persecution in favour of the narrative of a pluralistic 'Muslim Spain', whereby Jews flourished and helped the Muslim rule to reach its peak. Muslim Spain, thus, came to be idealized and theologised as 'the Golden Age'. In the STEP, Muslim Spain, similarly, acquired these features to emphasise pluralism. I wonder how present day Israel treats 'Muslim Spain' today in its history textbooks. This is a good example of appropriation of the past in interfaith relations.

At this point, one might ask if pluralism was thought about as a 'tradition' in the past. Engler and Grieve (2005) argue that claiming that something is a tradition today is one thing and claiming that even in the past those involved in the events saw it, as a tradition is another. A community garners authority for the tradition by connecting it to the past, irrespective of the past actors' motivations.

In summary, value adjustment lay at the very heart of rooted religious pluralisation.

Reflexivity

The process of value adjustment involved 'reflexivity' on the part of trainee-teachers. In the literal dictionary sense reflexivity is 'the capacity to turn thinking back on itself' (Milot 2004, 93). In religious education, Milot (2004, 93) defines reflexivity as follows:

> *In religious sphere, it implies the ability to distance oneself from one's belief statements. Detachment from one's own beliefs does not mean repudiating those beliefs; rather, it involves moving towards a more enlightened form of identity assertion.*

Giddens (1990) speaks about 'institutional reflexivity'. It is to do with organisational readjustments. The studied shift in the approach to Ismaili Muslim RE (Chapter 5); the use of social scientific tools in the study of religion (Chapter 7 and 8); the involvement of experts and the regular and ongoing deliberations among theologians, philosophers, educationalists, administrators and elite bourgeoisie in STEP are some of the expressions of this. Giddens' (1990) remark is perceptive that globalisation has made religions, their leaders and intellectual more reflexive about their beliefs and practices and the political significance of being recognised as a religion with worldwide implications.

A number of factors heightened reflexivity in the STEP. First, there was a sense of 'crisis of identity'. Mercer (1990, 4) observes, 'Identity becomes an issue when it is in crisis'. As discussed in Chapter 7, in certain socio-political situations, within which participants lived with their religious 'other', they experienced a sense of identity crisis. Within Muslim communities, the participants were often required to respond to the questions of the legitimacy of their belief in the living Imam and their practices. Within some Western communities, the participants often felt insecure about expressing their identity as Muslims. Inevitably, it had heightened their reflexivity about religious differences.

The second factor was *detraditionalisation*. In the religious sphere, according to Boeve (2012), *detraditionalisation* means that traditions, norms and old ways of relating to religion are no longer self-evident. It, therefore, forces upon believers and intellectuals of the community a new reflexivity about their own tradition and identity. Delanty (1999, 170) remarks that 'Traditions survive the transition to modernity only by becoming reflexive'. In the STEP, *detraditionalisation* occurred in many ways. Modern technology and a greater flow of new information, have meant that the participants' 'social eyes' have expanded and their thinking about themselves and otherness encompasses what is happening across the world (Elliott 2014). They incorporate knowledge from near and distant locations about Muslims and other religions and it affects the way they relate to with the other in their local settings. They also recognise that their manner of defining Ismaili faith has remained no longer self-evident in the light of Ismaili diversity.

The case study of the STEP clearly brings home the insight that a reflexive community puts much higher value on knowledge, intellect and lifelong learning than an unreflective conformity to the faith and the past. This emphasis on knowledge seems to be particularly strong in the STEP. Giddens (1990) observes that in pre-modern civilisations, reflexivity is still largely limited to the reinterpretation and clarification of practices and the past holds more significance than the future. Reflexivity takes on a different character in the modern religious communities such as the STEP. The participants did not want to act because 'that's the way you do things' but the extent to which their present rationality supported it. Giddens (1990, 38) observes that today:

> *The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character.*

Another condition that intensified the STEP participants' reflexivity can be understood in light of what Ulrich Beck (1992) identifies as a 'risk society'. He views risk primarily arising from the hazardous effects of the modernisation process, such as climate change, deforestation, toxins in food and the nuclear threat. This discourse encouraged the STEP participants to join hands with other religious communities, as a shared concern.

In the religious sphere, there is another sense of perceived risk as well. Many religious practitioners see today's society as a risk society in the sense of breaking down of previously established norms, deepening scepticism and secularisation. Casanova

(2013) suggests that in Western Europe, secularity in the sense of being without religion has become increasingly the default option. Belief in God warrants justification. Within the STEP, ironically in certain circle, the Enlightenment connotations of 'reason' and a critical social scientific dismissal of religion was seen as intellectual progression. For some STEP participants this characterised a risk society.

Such intensified reflexivity made pluralism a reflexive endeavour.

Selectivity

The participants were 'selective pluralists'. The participants made space for religious differences but were selective about how they embraced them. Being selective is an act of boundary making through which the participants constructed their sense of Ismaili identity. In diagram 9.1 there is a dotted arrow going back to exceptionality and homogeneity. This is because claiming pluralism is self-contradictory as it is a value preference over other positions (Galston 2002). Using the discourse of pluralism by the STEP participants was a way of re-claiming exceptionality. The participants of the STEP, in idealistic terms, were open to accepting everyone's religious beliefs but in practice, they were closed to certain religious differences that they either saw as no longer relevant or inappropriate as per human right norms. They upheld some religious positions as potentially fallible and contested. Like Berlin (Berlin et al. 2001) and Galston (2002) they also argued that the distinction between good and bad is rationally defensible. Though a majority of the STEP participants seemed to revise their notion of the 'best route', they continued to see the Ismaili Muslim interpretation as superior than many others as it endorsed the ideals of religious pluralism and they took pride in their spiritual leader's humanitarian works through the AKDN and public profile.

Woodward (1997) observes that exclusion must not be seen always as negative. It gives people a sense of stability and protection. According to McKim (2012), boundaries serve as a bedrock for solidarity and a shared identity.

Their well-meaning theological pluralism entailed bias towards certain notion of religion and exclusivist tendencies. For example, as discussed earlier (Chapter 7), a group of Ismaili Muslims initially upheld theological pluralism. They believed that different religions were different ways to reach the one God. All routes were equally valid like there are many paths to climb a mountain. This approach shares some

similarities with Hick's (1989) pluralist thesis (Chapter 2). Therefore, many of the criticisms of his thesis can be applied to the theological approach held by participants. This stance focuses on faiths that are concerned with a belief in the transcendent or God; however, many faiths do not hold such a belief. This means that the group of STEP participants' notion of religion excluded those that did not fit into their paradigm of religion. The second issue with it is that different religions make different, even contradictory truth-claims; how can all be equally valid? For example, claims such as that we have a soul as in Islam and that we do not have a soul as in certain version of Buddhism, contradict each other (McKim 2012). This indicates that the participants' 'all religion leads to the same God' stance was naïve. Such a sweeping theological pluralism is neither plausible nor pluralistic.

However, the case of STEP participants shows that these doctrinal details did not drive religious pluralisation. The individuals participated in pluralisation without much concern for how it all fitted together. The individuals were more than willing to assume commonalities among religions and were not even aware about the doctrinal differences across different communities to start with. Even when probed that certain religious ideas, doctrines and metaphors might contradict each other in different religious communities, it did not affect their stance. They saw the need for establishing authenticity and truth as unnecessary. They discursively drew upon a variety of sources to include the other, lessening, even counteracting some of the doctrinal assertions that might clearly carry the charge of exclusivism in today's context. They even changed the language of articulation of their truth-claims from 'X is the truth' to 'according to the belief and tradition of the community, 'x' is truth'. It was indeed a 'restructuring of identity', that enabled 'a relational mode of being-in-the-world' (Glissant 1997, 154).

This means that the assumption that if one is exclusivist then one is exclusivist through and through or if one is pluralist then he is pluralist through and through no longer applies to the STEP participants. Their option of being a pluralist was manifold (McKim 2012). For example, when atheists say that God does not exist, since it contradicted their beliefs, some of the STEP participants saw them as somehow misguided as far as their claim regarding God was concerned. The individuals, however, did not say that they were right and atheists were wrong about everything. They were also willing to learn from them in STEP in their capacity as scholars or tutors in their course.

In short, the participants' pluralistic dispositions were flexible and contradictory. Pluralistic values were not expressed at all times and on all issues. Therefore, rooted religious pluralisation is not an idealistic process. It is an ongoing conversation with and about religious difference and otherness. Eck's (2005, 41) has rightfully remarked, 'exclusivists, inclusivists and pluralists are not necessarily entirely different groups of people, but that these are ways of thinking about diversity and they may well be part of the on-going dialogue within ourselves'.

Ambivalence

Ambivalence is integral to the process of rooted religious pluralisation. Ambivalence literally means, 'The state of having mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something or someone' (Oxford Dictionaries 2014). Pluralisation involves fascination but also problematisation. Baumann (1991, 1) sees ambivalence as 'acute discomfort we feel when we are unable to read the situation properly and to choose between alternative actions'. Ambivalence therefore, constitutes 'background awareness of inevitable complexities of a situation' (Skrbis and Woodward 2007, 746).

In this section, I will focus a vital area of ambivalence relating to the establishing of a coherent global Ismaili identity given intra-Ismaili diversity. This raises questions of how the local and the global should synthesise. This is where one discovers that not all plurality is equal and identity is forged in a tension between plurality that is globally rational and practical and plurality that may remain in the local domain. Delanty (2009, 14) remarks that the struggle of local and universal is perennial. The clash is felt as people are polarised between the search for indigenous roots and a cosmopolitan quest for belonging on a global level.

Such ambivalence was experienced in the STEP in three overlapping ways (Chapter 6). First, the greater awareness of the relationship between faith and culture made them wonder what was religious and what was cultural, the assumption being that not everything that was cultural was necessarily religious. Therefore, some of them felt the need for clear criteria to distinguish between the particular and the universal. Secondly, the participants experienced difference between the local traditional understanding of various aspects of religion and the representation of those aspects in formal global expression of the community as presented in Secondary Curriculum. This made

segments of the participants unsure in terms of whether they needed to subsume their local traditional knowledge to it. They also noticed the issue of power and representation as they wondered about where IIS was located and how the perspectives and values emanating from those locations prevailed over other faith perspectives in the programme. The third dilemma was about re-contextualising what they had learnt in STEP in their home country.

While the participants were ambivalent, they had a high degree of trust in institutional reflexivity. They accorded a very high degree of legitimacy to their spiritual leader's decisions. Therefore, the issue was not why and who was negotiating the decisions but how they were being negotiated.

Ramji (2007) argues that religious traditions have always had to face the challenge of 'localising' themselves in different places well before the contemporary period. Therefore, this issue is not new. I contend that today the issue is about 'globalising'. Due to extensive institutionalisation and much effective connection between far-flung communities, the process of 'globalising' the community has become a reflexive, informed and institutionalised endeavour. There is also an enlarged space for reflexive engagement internationally for individuals.

In such circumstances, a transnationally diverse community may have three major options among others in addressing 'unity in diversity':

The first option reflects the 'homogenisation theses'. It recommends converging effects on local traditions. With common institutional language and strategies, a community can standardise different groups within the community. While this is a possibility, it is important to see this option within the wider debate.

One perspective argues that such converging effects are happening on Western terms (Hamelink 1983;Dorfman and Mattelart 1984;Schiller 1976). It is often referred to as Coca-Colonisation and McDonaldisation in consumer context (Ritzer 2009). Reactions to such perceived Westernisation have emerged from many spheres. For instance, the sentiment expressed in 'Westophobia', 'Occidentalisation' and 'Westoxification' (*Gharbzadegi*) refer to the experience of loss of one's indigenous culture, feelings of inferiority in relation to the West and being overwhelmed by values emerging from the West (Akbarzadeh 2006). Barber (2010) has identified such polarising discourse as

'Jihad vs. McWorld'. The issue with the homogenisation thesis is that it essentialises the West and the rest.

Another perspective within convergence theory takes a political and humanistic angle indicating that awareness of differences inevitably leads to a search for what is common. These serve as grounds for cooperation instead of collision (Beckford 2003, 109).

Both the discourses, convergence as Westernisation and convergence as the need for common ground, prevail in the segments of the Ismaili population studied. While the latter approach may facilitate an engagement with plurality, the former does not generate a productive discourse on plurality. It also undermines intercultural interconnections.

The second option is 'hybridisation theses'. Pieterse (2009) argues that instead of homogenisation new mixed forms are emerging. This perspective rejects the notion of the unquestioned hegemony of the West. It sees non-Western cultures making an impact on the West through music, cuisine, immigration and economic ties as well. It considers that even McDonalds are localised wherever they go (Talbott 1995). For the Ismailis this could mean that different Ismaili traditions incorporate a mixture of elements from the other Ismaili traditions. A version of hybridisation thesis suggests that the increasing interconnectedness and shrinking of time and space may produce new phenomena over time (Holton 2000; Castells 2000;Urry 2012)). The implications of this for the Ismaili community would be that different faith traditions may become intermixed and that there may no longer be any 'pure' or 'authentic' tradition distinction possible.

Hybridisation is a not a new phenomenon. There are historical layers of hybridity across cultures and communities. This is true also for the Ismaili communities across the world. For instance, *Ginan*, the devotional literature identified as part of South Asian Ismaili tradition is a fusion of Persian, Indic and Arabic languages, devotional ideas and symbols. It developed over centuries in an active intercultural dialogue between the individuals that came from Arabo-Persian lands and the Indic populations. The difference is that in the past hybridisation happened but often it was not acknowledged as such.

A problem with the hybridisation thesis is that it masks actual unevenness and inequality in global relations (Pieterse 2009, 249). Hybridity may even mean different

things to different people. For some it may seem 'impurity' or 'a fateful condition that is inflicted rather than willed' (Pieterse 2009, 249). The STEP curriculum's intercultural perspective is in line with the hybridisation thesis and therefore it is prone to the above criticisms and reactions from different segments of the STEP participants.

The third option lies somewhere in the middle. It suggests another way of looking at the issue of homogenisation versus hybridisation. It argues that both co-exist (Baumann 1999; Juergensmeyer 2005; Robertson 1992; 1997). Therefore, the question is how to describe this phenomenon of the simultaneity of the global and the local. A foundational contribution on the issue has come from Roland Robertson (1992;1997) with his notion of 'glocalisation'. It is a blend of two words: global and local. The term was coined by Sony Chairman Akio Morita to suggest 'looking in both directions' as companies may be multinational but 'all business is local' (Robertson 1992, 52). A similar sense is also reflected in Appadurai's (1996) concept of 'flows' that point to increasing social networks, a series of interactions and exchanges and movements that go back and forth, over and under and betwixt and between.

I suggest that STEP is an example of glocalisation, whereby homogeneity and heterogeneity co-exist. In the STEP, one can notice homogenising trends around certain perspectives and practices. For instance, the allegiance to the living hereditary Imam, the view of pluralism as an ethical value, the emphasis on English language, particular versions of student-centred teaching pedagogy, etc. can be seen as homogenising forces. At the same time, the individuals brought in their diverse cultural repertoires and realities, which actively contributed to localisation of their learning. The STEP participants participated in homogenising forces, while reshaping, adjusting and negotiating to see what worked for them the best in their local context.

The STEP is producing a new glocal community of Ismaili cosmopolitans. Delanty, in his book *Community* (2009, 4) observes that transnational movements and the internet develop new relations of proximity and distance. This can be seen in the STEP as the participants are forming relationships with the Ismailis from different parts of the world. They are likely to be in contact with each other throughout their lives through media such as WhatsApp, Skype, Facebook and Email. Their social networks, activities and patterns of life now encompass and yet transcend both their host Ismaili traditions and

other traditions within their faith. It seems to result in the awareness of being part of the global Ismaili community and at the same time being part of a local Ismaili community.

As time goes by, it is inevitable that there would be increasing number of Ismaili cosmopolitans whose outlooks, behaviours and feelings will transcend a tradition-centric view. Their intra-faith competence will increasingly expand to deal more effectively with the complexity that is increasingly a part of Ismaili faith in a global context. It would not be surprising to see an Ismaili youth from Mumbai reciting *Madho* in Mombasa in a multinational event, or an Ismaili girl from Tajikistan directing a show based on a novel on the lives of Eastern African Ismailis in Germany to an Afghan or a mixed Ismaili audience. The pluralisation of outlook could be hailed as a form of Ismaili cultural capital (Bourdieu 2011). This capital is accumulated through gaining a transnational network of Ismaili friends, participating in international Ismaili events, reading about Ismailis and acquiring a mastery of English language as well as the language of at least one other Ismaili tradition.

Robertson (1997) argues that the compression of the world as a whole involves the linking of localities but it also involves the 'invention' of locality. Similarly, in the Ismaili context, the categorisation of different Ismaili groups as 'traditions' is a modern construction. In the STEP, there were two 'locals'; the lived local and the local that was constructed in the STEP by a few of representatives of the local and the other. It takes two parties to construct a tradition. Delanty (2009, 10) observes that today communities are essentially constructed in communication rather than reproduced. The articulation of who they were as 'Central Asian Ismaili', as 'South Asian Ismaili', etc. is a modern construction. It serves a function. One needs to make a distinction between utility and reality. Therefore, when we say the 'Nāṣir-i Khusraw Tradition' or the 'Pir Tradition', it is best to see them as identifications in order to avoid essentialisation and as symbolic constructions to denote belonging rather than boundaries corresponding to something clearly tangible or to an underlying reality (Delanty 2009).

Appiah (1993) has observed that such construction of the local is not a new phenomenon. What is considered as local today has in fact developed in encounters between different cultures and through historically contingent rationale; they have acquired a sense of particularistic locality.

There are other converging and diverging processes at work within the Ismaili community. These can be put into three categories. First, rites and practices: For example, the language of Prayer is Arabic while the language of other devotional and religious/non-religious dialogue is local languages. Another example of this is the *Jamāʿat-khāna*, which emerged as the place of worship and social life in South Asia. Since the late 19th and 20th century, this model of community gathering is being exported to Ismaili traditions in other parts of the world. Second, meta-narratives: For instance, there is an active promotion of a meta-narrative of a worldwide Ismaili fraternity, united by the Imam as their spiritual father. The matters of resolving differences in the intra-faith setting are seen as the prerogative of the Imam of the time. Third, institutionalisation: For example, a New Constitution for the entire community has been established. There is also a consultative body formed of community leaders belonging to different Ismaili traditions. The international RE programmes are centrally designed for the religious and cultural education of the community worldwide. Thus, 'McIsmaili' trends and hybridising movements co-exist and in some ways, convergence becomes a way of upholding divergence.

In STEP, a number of factors determine the question of what is globalised. It depends on the religious leadership's view on what is central to the community's identity at this given historical point. Not all plurality is considered equally useful. There are reflexive judgements made in terms of differences that are 'useful' and 'portable' and those that do not 'fly' in contemporary situations.

This means that pluralisation is not a neutral process. How the global and the local becomes defined depends on the influence that different groups have on shaping perspectives and what voices are influential at the time. Gramsci defines hegemony as the political mechanism through which a social group establishes its intellectual and moral leadership (Jones 2007). In contrast, (Laclau and Mouffe 2001) argue that a 'hegemonic bloc' can emanate from the struggles of any group or sector of society, such as the feminist movement. These issues of who exerts influence on how faith must be defined also manifested in the STEP (see Chapter 6). For example, in the beginning of the programme, at the macro-level, the narrative of being Ismaili was privileged from the perspective of the South Asian Ismaili tradition but it began to be challenged, resisted and re-examined. Not necessarily all aspects of power and equality issues were challenged equally. For example, the hegemony of English as the language of

instructions continued to mean that those who spoke it fluently had a better advantage at representing their traditions than those who struggled to express themselves in English. Furthermore, the programme, based in a Western country, drawing upon the Western approaches to teaching and learning, inevitably privileged certain groups.

Nonetheless, participants seemed to reconcile with the situation through bilingualism. They acknowledged the need for two languages. Sacks (2005) argues in favour of people having two languages in pluralistic societies. The first language is the public language of citizenship, which everyone needs to learn in order to live together and a variety of second languages, which connect individuals to their local framework of relationships; to family and the traditions that underlie them. Similarly, the STEP participants saw the need for a common, global and public language for the Ismaili community and the variety of their home groups' languages of self-understanding could remain in the local and private sphere. They saw the common, global language of the community as expressed in the Secondary Curriculum as sanctioned by their spiritual leader and therefore, they gave it precedence over their home group's language, when the two clashed. The global and local were not necessarily always mutually exclusive; there was also criss-cross and crossover, informing each other.

Regarding the issue of convergence and divergence, the STEP participants may well also be classified in terms of their views on human rights, justice, gender, sexuality, reproductive medicines, animal rights, lifestyle choices and application of ethics in everyday lives rather than just their ethnic traditions. In STEP sometimes, two individuals from the same Ismaili tradition were may be very different from each other but very close to someone from other Ismaili tradition based on how they approached the issue of faith. 'We' and 'them', therefore, are not two different static entities in every context. This raises questions about how intra-Ismaili differences are identified and boundaries are constructed.

The process of religious pluralisation is a deeply ambivalent process, whereby faith-based institutions and individuals are likely to experience mixed or contradictory feelings and ideas about how best to negotiate plurality. Ambivalence is therefore not the product of rooted pluralisation but a normal constant companion of it.

Performativity

Rooted religious pluralisation is *performative*. The way STEP participants constructed their identities in their assignments, in teaching in REC, in *Jamāʿat-khāna*, at different formal and informal events, at their residence, in the common room, showed that there were multiple projections of themselves in relation to religion. Chapter 8 identified that the STEP participants employed social scientific perspectives dynamically and contextually depending on factors such as their perception of the receptiveness of the audience, purpose of their communication and the appropriateness of space and time. The question is, is there a dissonance in their identity?

Ricoeur (1995) speaks of 'Oneself as another'. The focus, in this, is not on 'who I am' but on who is asking this question of identity. Selfhood of 'oneself as another' implies that otherness is connected to us to 'such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other' (1995, 3). Let me build this further in the light of Bakhtin's (1984) insights that we are always in a dialogical relationship. In all areas of life, we are actually dealing with someone else's words more often than with our own. Either we remember and respond to someone else's words or we represent them in order to argue, disagree or defend them. We even carry on an inner dialogue, responding to someone's words. The way STEP students' negotiated their identities in front of different audiences was part of that dialogue. They sensed the hegemonic discourse at a given platform and lived their religious identities dialogically.

This makes us realise that how we see the issue of self-understanding and self-presentation depends on whether we hold reified or flexible view of identity. It is possible to see dichotomy if we hold a reified view of identity. A survey of literature on 'identity' suggests that initially, the concept of identity was seen as something that existed within individuals as an essence, as fixed and coherent (Wetherell and Mohanty 2010). Identity was considered a psychological concept and it was assumed that there was an agreement between a person's understanding of the self and other's understanding of the person. Multiple identities were seen as a form of dissonance in a person's experience of the self. Later theorisations defined identity as a social concept, which was therefore, contested and multiple. Scholars such as Stuart Hall (1996) prefers the term 'identification' to avoid essentialisation. Today, it is generally acknowledged that the subject is constantly 'suturing' itself to different articulations, which in turn leads to multiple identifications at different moments in time (Wetherell and Mohanty

2010,72). In contrast to dissonance, current ethnographic works suggest seamless multiple identifications by subjects (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993).

Similarly, the STEP trainee-teachers reflexively interpreted their identities in a given situation. This is what Ricoeur means when he says that the selfhood of oneself cannot be thought of without the other. Similarly, in religion, what is seen as 'core' of identity was at one point dialogically constituted and came to acquire its 'coreness' over a period. Self-understanding therefore must not be seen as cast in stone.

This makes religious pluralism a form of communication. The Ismaili community simultaneously participates in three different types of audiences. Habermas' (1990) notion of 'communicative spaces' is relevant here. According to him, the public sphere entails a variety of communicative spaces in which dialogue is historically and contextually determined. For the Ismailis, there exist Ismaili communicative spaces, where diverse constellations of followers from different cultural zones come together; the Muslim communicative spaces, where different denominations of Islam participate and the much wider global communicative spaces, where a multiplicity of faiths and worldviews simultaneously coexist. Since the configuration of the three types of communicative spaces is different, the mode of communication of the Ismailis is also reorganised. Charles Taylor (1994, 32) has poignantly remarked:

> *People do not acquire the languages needed for self-definition on their own. Rather we are introduced to them through interaction with others who matter to us.*

Therefore, when I say rooted religious pluralisation is performative, by that I do not mean a lack of integrity but a plural Self that is constructed in dialogue with the other and may sometimes be contradictory. The participants in this sense demonstrated 'integrated plural identity'. Ostberg (2008) defines it as an articulation of a diversified set of identities to a diversified set of others through an interpretive process and in this way we live out our selfhood.

Conclusion

Having reviewed the key dynamic of the process of rooted religious pluralisation it can be concluded that pluralism is about an 'active engagement with plurality' (Eick, 2005, 41) and relational changes in one's self-perception. In this plurality-consciousness begins to replace the previous sense of exclusivity and exceptionality and pluralism is seen as a religious virtue. This is a deliberate and reflexive cultivation of a positive attitude to differences facilitating the construction of the 'tradition' of pluralism in the community. With the emphasis on pluralism, there is a propensity for a counter-movement, implying refashioning of exclusivity around the ideals of pluralism.

Rooted religious pluralisation is a way of thinking, reflecting and relating to religious diversity. Pluralisation denies the clash of civilisations. It assumes an interconnected relationship between people, cultures, and societies. It is not a linear and sequential process. Rooted religious pluralisation is not a static state but a journey negotiated in a given terrain.

Concluding Reflections

Summary

This thesis has investigated how the vital issue of religious difference is negotiated in the contemporary Ismaili Muslim community. The Nizārī Ismaili Muslim community are the Shia community that acknowledge Karim al-Ḥusayn Aga Khan IV, as their forty-ninth living Imam, who is believed to be the direct descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad through his daughter Fāṭima and son-in-law ʿAlī. The Ismaili Muslim community consists of culturally and linguistically diverse populations living in some thirty different countries of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America (Daftary 1992).

There are three key reasons why pluralism is vital for the Ismaili community. The first is that one of the persistent issues for the community has been the assertion of its legitimate place within Islam. The Ismailis, though the second largest Shii community in the world, are a minority within Islam. Changes in the world today have made it vital for the community to co-exist confidently alongside other communities within Islam. Secondly, as a transnational community, the Ismailis live among many different faith communities such as Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and other indigenous traditions as well as people with very different views on religion. With the Ismaili community's increased involvement in global affairs through the Aga Khan Development Network, the community is required to make some kind of response to how it relates to other religious communities globally. Islamophobia has also added to this need. Finally, in recent times, historically dispersed and independently evolved Ismaili communities have come into intense contact with each other through migration, information technology and transnational institutional infrastructure. Thus, the issue of pluralism has assumed a noteworthy significance for the Ismaili community.

For the purpose of closer investigation, the Ismaili community's Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) has provided an excellent focal point where religious education and the issue of pluralism are discussed. STEP is a two-year postgraduate programme offered by the University of London's Institute of Education in

collaboration with the Institute of Ismaili Studies. It aims to provide professional training for secondary education teachers to educate Ismaili children, young people, and parents living in different countries and cultures. These Ismaili trainee-teachers originate from as many as thirteen countries from five continents, representing diverse ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This study asked, 'how do STEP trainee-teachers negotiate religious difference? How does faith-based religious education (STEP) impact on their attitude to religious diversity?'

Based on a research spanning over three years, this thesis has argued that a 'rooted religious pluralisation' is taking place in the Ismaili community facilitating the construction of the 'tradition' of pluralism in the community. 'Rooted religious pluralisation' is the process of actively engaging with religious plurality drawing upon the ideals of pluralism resulting in qualitative changes in the outlook and self-perception of the community and individuals involved in the process. It is rooted because the difference is negotiated as part of the religious community and a positive engagement with plurality is seen as a religious virtue. Rooted religious pluralisation is not the same as pluralism. While, pluralism is a political ideology, an ideal and an abstract concept, religious pluralisation is an empirical socio-cultural process with empirical outcomes and attendant politics of equality and mutual recognition.

Those engaged with religious plurality as integral members of their religious community are 'rooted pluralists'. As the case of STEP participants demonstrates, rooted pluralists choose to view diversity as strength rather than a problem, even when it is challenging. They assume such a stance to be beneficial for peace, unity, stability and the flourishing of civilisation. They are cognizant of the fact that pluralism needs cultivation and effort. Rooted pluralists do not merely tolerate the other, they actively learn *from* and *about* other religions in order to build a good relationship with them. Rooted pluralists may belong to the community in their own way, as an ordinary believer, critic, philosopher, historian, theologian, religious leader, even as an individual who is unsure of his/her beliefs but they consider their roots to be in the community. Rooted pluralists are not pluralist angels. They discursively participate in being pluralistic, in which exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist ways of thinking about diversity intertwine. Rooted pluralists are supported by rhizome pluralists, who are not rooted in the community as members of the community but they support the community

in its goals through a role that is not based on roots but on relationships such as consultant, tutor, curriculum developer, etc.

Rooted religious pluralisation is the Ismaili community's response to religious plurality under the conditions of globalisation. As a socio-cultural process of engaging with diversity, rooted religious pluralisation is constitutive of sub-processes that involve value adjustment, reflexivity, selectivity, ambivalence, and performativity. These elements overlap.

The study has shown that in STEP, the individuals developed a degree of 'inter-tradition competence'. The participants developed the ability to relate more effectively across Ismaili traditions. Plurality became their very definition of the Ismaili faith. They also developed a degree of 'intra-Islam competence' as they cultivated an informed understanding of the wider diversity of Islam and their historical situatedness as the Ismaili community within it. In addition, most participants moved towards an academically informed pluralism. It led to a language and perspective change from 'ours is the truth' (a given fact) to 'this is our truth' (that evolved in a context) in the Ismaili religious education. In this way, STEP attempted to prepare Ismaili Muslim individuals to live in the 'global village' with their religious others.

Contribution and Significance of the Study

The present study makes three key contributions to the understanding of religious pluralism, globalisation and religious education. First, this is the first study to propose the thesis of rooted religious pluralisation. It has identified key features, tendencies, trends, challenges and opportunities inherent in a religious community's engagement with diversity through a five-dimensional working framework of rooted religious pluralisation. It can be a helpful tool to analyse the phenomenon of religious pluralisation in other faith communities. It has also developed a perspective to identify rooted and rhizome pluralists. Moreover, as a study of the socio-cultural process of 'intra-faith pluralisation' in Muslim religious education setting, it is unique. It is about making sense of the everyday experiences of the Muslims who encounter diversity within their own faith. The thesis has identified various dimensions and stages involved in the process of developing intra-faith competence and provided tools and vocabulary

to make it possible to discuss them meaningfully for students, educators, policy makers and others in intra-faith religious education. Thus, it has contributed to a niche in the existing literature on religious pluralism. Furthermore, much of the current literature consists of philosophical and theological discourse on religious pluralism and there has been little empirical work done on the religious pluralisation of faith communities in contemporary society.

Second, the study offers a refreshing alternative viewpoint on Muslim communities. A great deal of the literature since 9/11 focuses on fundamentalism and reactive responses to globalisation and religious difference in Muslim context. When it comes to the question of the relationship between Islam and modernity, there is a widespread conviction in the West that this relationship is problematic. This study challenges these assumptions. It shows an example of a much less studied Muslim religious community that is not afraid of globalisation, modernity and diversity. The Ismailis are not only a part of the globalising process but also contributors to it. They have developed their own understanding of how religious identity is negotiated in relationship to global and local forces. With this concept in mind, the current study hopes to extend the theorisation of globalisation and religion in general and Islam and globalisation in particular.

Third, in Western Europe in particular, there is a general sense of scepticism about whether religion can promote pluralism. Faith-based religious education is generally regarded with a degree of suspicion. Following the attacks of 9/11, Muslim education, in particular, is suspected of promoting intolerance. In the light of this, the study's significance lies in describing the vital role that sensitively designed Muslim religious education can play in nurturing informed religious pluralism. The Ismaili Muslims have developed not only their own way of addressing the issue of religious plurality, but are also building upon and contributing to Western theories on religious education, which purport to do the same.

An implication of this study is that it has provided an exciting 'analytical keyhole' to understand one of the stimulating ways in which Muslim faith communities today can engage with religious difference in the globalised world. The learning from this study would be useful to states, faith communities, religious education experts, NGOs and those who work in the area of religious pluralism.

Limitations and Further Research

The limitations of this study are also avenues for further research. The first major limitation lies in the fact that the findings are not generalizable. This study focused on largely urbane, mobile, well-educated, middle class and outward looking young adults, who had chosen to come to London for the international Masters degree. Openness to mobility itself demonstrates a certain cosmopolitan attitude. However, the processes of pluralisation that are happening on the ground where mobility between different groups is asymmetrical may even be different in character. Globalisation itself has plural implications; this means that the process of pluralisation is likely to be experienced in complex, uneven and varied ways by individuals and communities across the world. In addition, the process does not affect all Ismaili communities at the same time.

Moreover, religious pluralisation does not occur in a vacuum or in the abstract. According to Beckford (2003), pluralism is debated, contested, fought over, managed and asserted in varied social and political circumstances. Where the Ismailis live, those societies differ in the extent of their religious diversity; they also differ in terms of which religious groups enjoy acceptance or recognition in the public sphere. Additionally, different societies have different arrangements for defining 'religion' and for ensuing religious toleration (Beckford, 2003). The locally negotiated nature of religious pluralisation means that it is also not possible to draw any firm conclusions with regard to the consistency of the STEP participant's pluralistic reasoning as they return to their home countries. How pluralism is enacted can depend on the social circle the individual belongs to and as the social group changes, the pattern of pluralisation is also likely to alter.

This is where exciting prospects open up for further research. For example, everyday pluralisation in different Ismaili communities across the world from Mombasa to Mumbai and Salamiyya to Stockholm could be studied. A comparative study of different contextual settings and their impact on religious pluralisation would be very illuminating. The STEP participants could also be followed up to see how they engage with plurality at home, in their local RE setting and in their local society. There is also a possibility of differentiation depending on factors such as gender, rural and urban locality, and age group. Drawing upon Baumann's (1999) suggestion different groups

could be researched such as laypeople, rich and poor, powerful and marginalised, heterosexual and homosexual believers.

The second key limitation of the study is that my study has not captured two types of STEP trainee-teachers' voices. On the one hand, there may be those who may have refused to allow their own previously held notions to be challenged and adjusted. DomNwchukwu (2010, 47) observes that some individuals live their entire lives avoiding everything that looks different from the values and orientation that they have held all their lives. They may think that their own cultural or traditional values are superior to all others and should be the only standard by which to live their lives, or they may avoid such a shift because it may be too uncomfortable to make the necessary adjustment but they may have no problems with other ways of being. At the other end of the continuum, there may be those who were highly plurality-conscious. This study captures a majority that stood somewhere between the two poles rather than at the extremes.

Therefore, through further research we might want to ask, what kinds of participants refuse to allow their own previously held notions to be challenged and adjusted? Why is this case? Similar questions can be asked of those who already demonstrated a high degree of plurality-consciousness. A comparative study of the two different sets of participants could be very useful in taking practical measures to enhance the religious education curriculum.

Third, this study does not consider the experience of STEP tutors, curriculum writers, the steering committee and rhizome pluralists. A study of their negotiations with plurality and particularly the impact of rhizome pluralists on the rooted pluralists' experience of plurality and vice versa, could prove to be a revealing study.

Moreover, the issue of equality and justice in pluralisation is also a vital topic for research. Beckford (2003, 101) rightfully points out that the affinity of the term pluralism with 'tolerance' for example is stronger but much weaker with the use of 'equality' or 'justice'. Milbank (2006) has rightfully asked about the relation between diversity and difference. He questions whether those who are weak experience diversity in the same way available to the strong. Beckford has suggested one can investigate the particular uses to which pluralism is directed to in religion. Therefore, a study of this aspect would be illuminating.

Despite these shortcomings, the description of what the participants said and did in this study is a sign of a larger performance of pluralism. As much as it tells us about the subjects of the study, it reveals the way in which the author is part of that larger performance.

Final Remarks

This study shows that religious communities have the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. Rooted religious pluralisation is political as much as it is theological in its implications for the public sphere.

Secondly, I suspect that multiple visions of rooted religious pluralisation may coexist in various Ismaili communities outside the STEP and may be even in competition with each other. Therefore, to end the thesis, I call upon Tomlinson (1991) who retells the story of 'The blind men and the elephant', attributed to Rumi, the 13ᵗʰ century Persian poet and Ṣūfī teacher. In the story, a few blind men attempt to describe an elephant but they gain only a partial and probably distorted understanding of the elephant. There is an assumption of a stable and coherent elephant that could be touched and felt in the story. However, what if no such unified and coherent set of ideas, practices and discourse exists when it comes to pluralism in the diverse transnational community of the Ismailis? Would it be wiser then not to assume the existence of the elephant?

Glossary

Al-Anasheed al-diniyya	:	Literally, religious anthem. A poetic tradition of the Syrian Ismailis.
ʿAlīm (plural ʿulama')	:	A scholar in Islamic religious sciences.
Bāṭin	:	The inward, hidden or esoteric meaning behind the literal wording of sacred texts and religious prescriptions.
Chirag I-Rowshan	:	The funeral ritual of the Central Asian Ismailis.
Chandrat	:	It is a type of religious gathering held on the night of the new moon; traditionally part of South Asian Ismailis.
Chhanta	:	It is a purification ritual, traditionally part of South Asian Ismailis.
Da'i	:	Literally, a summoner; a religious missionary especially amongst the Ismailis.
Da'wa	:	Mission; in the religo-political sense, *da'wa* is the invitation or call to adopt the cause of an individual of family claiming the right to the Imamate.
Farman	:	Royal decree, written edict. For the Ismailis it refers to any pronouncement, order or ruling by their Imams.
Ginan	:	A general term, derived from a Sanskrit word meaning contemplative or sacred knowledge; used in reference to the indigenous devotional literature of the South Asian Ismailis and some other communities of South Asia.
Hadīth	:	A report, sometimes translated as 'tradition', relating to an action or saying of the Prophet Muḥammad, or the corpus of such reports collectively. For Shii Muslims it also refers to the actions and saying of their imams.
Imam	:	Leader of a group of Muslims in prayer; the supreme leader of the Muslim community.
Imamate	:	The central theological doctrine of the Shia Muslims. In common with all Shii communities, the Ismailis believe that the Imamate is a divinely sanctioned and permanent institution of humanity through which Muslims receive the necessary guidance.
Jamāʿat-khāna	:	Assembly house; congregation place, with a special prayer hall, used by the Ismailis for their religious and communal activities.
Kalām	:	An Arabic term that refers to scholastic theology.

Kamadia	:	Literally, a treasurer.
Madho	:	A poetic genre of Central Asian Ismailis.
Mukhi	:	A name originally used by the South Asian Ismailis in reference to the head of the local Ismaili community.
Murid	:	Disciple.
Naṣṣ		Explicit designation of an Imam of his successor.
Pīr	:	A spiritual guide.
Qasida	:	An Arabic poetic genre of a certain length normally concerned with the eulogy of a personality; in Persian it is a lyric poem, most frequently panegyric.
Satr	:	Concealment, veiling; in Ismaili history, it was used specifically in reference to a period, when the Imams were hidden from the eyes of their followers.
Sayyid	:	Lord, master: an honorific appellation for the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad, particularly in the Ḥusaynid ʿAlid line and men of authority.
Shariʿa	:	The whole body of rules guiding the life of a Muslim.
Shaykh	:	Old man, elder; any religious dignitary; in particular an independent Ṣūfī master.
Sira	:	A sweet dish traditionally offered to symbolize purity and good deeds in the South Asian tradition in *jamāʿat-khāna*.
Ṣūfī	:	An exponent of Ṣūfīsm, the commonest term for that aspect of Islam, which is based on the mystical life; hence, it denotes a Muslim mystic.
Taqiyya	:	Precautionary dissimulation of one's true religious beliefs, especially in time of danger.
Umma	:	Community, any people as followers of a particular religion or prophet; in particular, the Muslims as forming a religious community.
Zāhir	:	The outward, literal or exoteric meaning of sacred texts and religious prescriptions, in distinction from the *bāṭin*.

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Appendix I: Prospectus of the Secondary Teacher Education Programme

The document is attached herewith.

Appendix II: The Harmony Project

The document is attached herewith.

Appendix III: Interview Questionnaires

Please note that these questions are guiding probes only. They were modified depending on the dynamics of the conversation.

Phase One Questionnaire
(Interviews conducted in the first term of the first year of the programme)

Your background:

- Please tell me more about yourself.

Motivation to study STEP:

- What motivated you to come to this programme?

How do trainee-teachers engage with diversity within the class?

- What was your initial reaction when you met Ismaili trainee-teachers from different parts of the world at STEP? How comfortable do you feel in relating to your course mates from different backgrounds?

How do trainee-teachers engage with diversity within Islam?

- Given that there are several different communities of interpretations within Islam, what makes you teach Ismaili Muslim interpretation?

How do trainee-teachers engage with other religious orientations?

- Given that there are many religions in the world, what makes you want to be part of Ismaili Muslim community?

How do trainee-teachers engage with various sociological and secular perspectives in relation to faith?

- You may have come across several other kinds of people such as those who do not believe in God, those who are unsure of God's existence, etc. What do you think about these ideas?

How do trainee-teachers make sense of religion in their lives?

- Is religion important to you in your everyday life? If yes/ no, why? How relevant do you find religion in your life?
- What does it mean to be religious for you?

How do trainee-teachers view relevance of STEP curriculum to their lives and context?

- Do the ideas and perspective taught in STEP fit in with the ideas you were brought up with?
- What effect do you anticipate completion of STEP will have on your quality of life?

Phase Two/ Three Questionnaire
(Interviews conducted at the end of the first and the second year of the programme)

1. What are your three key learning or insights as a result of the programme? Do you perceive any effects of the programme on your outlook or your identity? What factors have influenced you the most? To what extent the academic materials introduced in STEP has made an impact on your sense of identity and beliefs? Did you or do you experience any dilemma, issues or difficulties?

2. How has your interaction with the Ismaili trainee-teachers from diverse backgrounds influenced you? What can you relate to and what do you find difficult to reconcile with? Have there been any major debates, issues or arguments around any aspects of faith?

3. Has there been any shift in your attitude/beliefs towards the other interpretations of Islam because of STEP? How do you view them? What can you relate to and what do you find difficult to reconcile with?

4. Has there been any shift in your attitudes/ beliefs towards other religions because of STEP? What is your opinion on the existence of different religions? What can you relate to and what do you find difficult to reconcile with?

5. What has been your experience of relating to people who do not believe in religion or unsure about their stance on religion? What can you accept and what you cannot?

6. Is the Secondary curriculum applicable in your context? Do you see any challenges in implementing the curriculum in your context?

7. What are the significant issues that face the Jamat today? How do you think the Secondary Curriculum as well as the STEP curricula prepares you for understanding and responding to these issues?

8. Would you like to say anything more about your experience in the STEP?

Secondary Teacher Education Programme

(2011 - 2013)

IOE LONDON — Leading education and social research · Institute of Education · University of London

The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Master of Teaching (MTeach)
and
Master of Arts in Education
(Muslim Societies and Civilizations)

WELCOME

IIS Co-Director's' Message

The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) was established in 1977 to promote scholarship and learning on Islam and a better understanding of its relationship with other faiths. Within this tradition of promoting knowledge and learning, the IIS looks forward to extending its partnership with the Institute of Education at the University of London. This involves a pioneering, collaborative programme for producing teachers who will make the interdisciplinary Secondary Curriculum (developed by the IIS) accessible to young people globally. The collaboration is designed to address the training of teachers within a framework that links their Muslim heritage to the intellectual methods and best practices available in the academic environment. The Institute of Education, like the IIS, has a global reach and with over 100 years of experience it also has the expertise and qualifications necessary to facilitate this collaborative effort. The partnership which has been established has the potential to become a model for addressing some of the most urgent issues currently facing education institutions in the world.

Dr Farhad Daftary and Professor Karim H. Karim
Co-Directors, The Institute of Ismaili Studies

IOE Director's Message

This collaboration between the Institute of Education (IOE) and the Institute of Ismaili Studies builds on more than 20 years of successful joint provision of teacher development programmes. Since the late 1970s successive cohorts of IIS students have studied for Post-Graduate Certificates in Education and MA degrees at the Institute of Education. The Institute of Education also works with other agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network, particularly the Aga Khan University and the Aga Khan Foundation.

Links between our Institutes can only go from strength to strength over the coming years. In devising the Master of Teaching and Master of Arts in Education course of study, our two institutions brought together complementary experience and expertise as well as a shared commitment to rigorous scholarship and to scholarship that has practical application.

I am confident that the launch of this new course will lead to further discussions about how we can educate prospective teachers about the richness and diversity of the Muslim world, which will in turn contribute – both globally and nationally – to educating children about the heritages that are part of our world today. We are delighted and privileged to be playing a part in this important and timely development.

Professor Geoff Whitty
Director, Institute of Education

The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Since 1977, The Institute of Ismaili Studies has grown to become an academic centre for the Ismaili Muslim community's interest in its own history and in its relationship with the larger world of Islamic scholarship and contemporary thought. Its mission is to promote scholarly investigation of Muslim cultures and societies, both of the past and of the present, and a better understanding of their relationship with other societies and faiths.

With an international reach, the IIS has also become a central point of reference for scholars in the field of Ismaili Studies. To date, the IIS has produced 50 books and 40 translations, mostly on Ismaili and Shi'i subjects.

The IIS is increasingly being recognized internationally for its programmes and research that encourage perspectives that are not confined to the theological and religious heritage of Islam, but which seek to explore the relationship of religious ideas to broader dimensions of society and culture. Over the years, the IIS has collaborated with several institutions of learning such as McGill University, The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Cambridge University, The University of Jordan as well as the Institute of Education, University of London. The IIS draws on its own faculty, as well as other scholars who regularly participate in its research, publication and teaching activities.

Teaching and learning are important facets of the the IIS' work. To this end, the IIS has developed the Ta'lim curriculum for Ismaili Muslim students at the pre-school, primary and secondary levels. An international programme, Ta'lim aims to educate young Ismailis in the heritage, history and culture of Muslim peoples.

The IIS also offers a thriving Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities which attracts students from world-wide Ismaili communities. The programme aims to engender an analytical and sympathetic examination of issues that contemporary Muslims face, and is committed to the study of the diversity of Muslim societies.

Institute of Education, University of London

Founded in 1902, the Institute of Education, University of London is a world class centre of excellence for research, teacher training, higher degrees and consultancy in education and education-related areas of social science. Its staff of pre-eminent scholars and talented students from all walks of life make up an intellectually rich and diverse learning community.

The Institute of Education is a graduate college of the University of London. Initially established to deliver high quality training for school teachers, it has, over the years, expanded its activities and now offers courses leading to higher degrees in all areas of education and related aspects of the social sciences and professional practice.

Today, the IOE hosts lectures on educational issues by the leaders of the main UK political parties and by education ministers from around the world. In doing so, it provides students with a forum for lively debates involving leading figures in the world of education.

The IOE has long been recognised as a leading centre of educational enquiry. The scale and quality of this research attracts large numbers of students from all over the world keen to work with scholars at the forefront of education. International links are also fostered through active participation in European Union-sponsored programmes and through collaborative projects with overseas and other institutions. The Secondary Teacher Education Programme is one such collaboration.

The IIS Secondary Curriculum

The Secondary Curriculum, being developed by the Institute of Ismaili Studies, adopts an approach to the study of Islam based on humanistic, civilisational and normative perspectives. It seeks to acquaint secondary students with the diverse and dynamic interplay of Islamic expressions – religious, social, cultural and material – that manifest themselves in Muslim societies of the past and present day. It strives to achieve this aim by seeking to integrate seamlessly the religious content with the social sciences and the humanities. Religion is not viewed as a detached and compartmentalized phenomenon in history and society, but rather in terms of its multifaceted connections with various dimensions of human experience. On this basis, the curriculum leads students to reflect progressively on the place of the sacred in human culture. At the same time, it encourages students to analyze their own contemporary situations and to reflect on the social and ethical challenges of an increasingly plural world. To achieve its aims, the curriculum applies pedagogical approaches consonant with its philosophical framework. It calls for a profile of teachers with a broad set of proficiencies – a profile that is not narrowly specialist but reflects an acquaintance with a range of contexts. These pedagogical approaches invite the active engagement of teachers and students with the content of the curriculum so as to engender thought and reflection on contemporary issues faced by Ismaili Muslims, other Muslim communities, and societies in general.

Students at the Madinat Al-Zahra in Cordoba, Spain

Top: STEP students during the Granada, Spain field trip

Middle: STEP students with staff in Cairo, Egypt field trip

Bottom: Whirling dervish performance near Al-Azhar Mosque, Cairo, Egypt

Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP)

Opposite page

Top: STEP students in Cordoba, Spain

Middle: 19th century manuscript of Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani's Rahat al-'aql

Bottom: Students during a STEP lecture

STEP is the Secondary Teacher Education Programme whose aim is to train, sustain and provide the appropriate resource base for teachers who will teach The Institute of Ismaili Studies' Secondary Curriculum to Ismaili students worldwide. The Master's level teacher preparation aspect of the STEP is being undertaken through a pioneering collaboration between the Institute of Education and The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London. The programme extends over two academic years and culminates in two postgraduate awards: a Master of Teaching (MTeach) and a Master of Arts in Education (Muslim Societies and Civilizations).

What are the key outcomes of the programme?

The concurrent MTeach and MA Education programme provides focused professional development for individuals wishing to teach at Ismaili religious education centres (RECs) at the secondary level, utilising an innovative, humanistic, civilizational and normative approach. The educational outcomes of the programme emphasize pedagogical decision making based on multiple sources of instructional materials, broad subject-matter knowledge, the IIS secondary curriculum framework and content, and field-based training. Through coursework and practicum experiences, participants foster and develop an analytical stance towards research and scholarship in teaching and learning, and have the opportunity to reflect on their role in the process of education.

In addition to traditional essays, course participants will produce portfolios, reflective journals and evidence-based studies as they develop an increasingly complex understanding and appreciation of their young students—perceiving them as adolescents, thinking about them as active learners in learning environments, and examining the religious education and community systems that support their learning.

The programme also provides a viable career path in teaching within religious education and secular contexts for Ismaili Muslim teachers who wish to make a significant contribution to the education of young students.

What is the role of professional practice in the programme?

Participants bring to the course a range of perspectives on teaching and learning from the diverse educational contexts in which they operate. The sharing of these perspectives and the analysis of professional practice with peers is central to the development of a deeper understanding of subject knowledge and of the way adolescents learn. Theoretical and professional readings support and challenge participants' understanding of how they teach, inviting alternative perspectives and possibilities for change.

Practicum experience

The STEP vision recognizes that through well-transitioned teaching placements, course participants will learn just as their young students will: by studying, doing, and reflecting; by collaborating with other professionals; observing their adolescent students' work and environment; and by sharing their observations. During the programme, course participants will be exposed to practical experiences in an array of classroom environments: Ismaili religious education centres (RECs) in London and their own home countries, as well as in secular school settings.

What are the key features of the Master of Teaching (MTeach) and Master of Arts in Education (Muslim Societies and Civilizations) programme?

The Master of Teaching (MTeach) and Master of Arts in Education (Muslim Societies and Civilizations) leads to two postgraduate degrees. The programme is designed for Ismaili teachers at different stages of their careers who wish to enhance their professional learning by integrating a humanistic, civilizational and normative approach to the study of Islam in their teaching practice - primarily within the Ismaili religious education system worldwide.

The MTeach provides intellectually challenging and sustained practice-based, in-class and virtual learning opportunities with peers from across disciplines and phases along with experienced Institute of Education tutors. It incorporates the participants' teaching experiences into course design, assessment, and fieldwork around a common vision of accomplished teaching practice.

The MA Education is structured around a sequence of core modules designed to develop the knowledge and understanding of the Ismaili heritage within the broader dimensions of Islam and its civilizations. It emphasizes a teaching and learning stance that prepares participants to understand and respond analytically to relevant scholarship and research. It does this through humanistic, civilizational and normative approaches, in order to facilitate an understanding of the philosophical and pedagogical frameworks and content of The Institute of Ismaili Studies' Secondary Curriculum.

How does the programme develop careers in education?

One of the primary objectives of the STEP is to develop and sustain a cadre of Ismaili teachers who are acquainted with the richness of the IIS Secondary Curriculum's content and who have exposure to the social sciences and the humanities in order to do justice to the civilizational thrust reflected in the curriculum.

STEP graduates will work within the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Boards/Committees (ITREB/Cs) in their home countries serving as secondary-level teachers. Their professional development and career path may also lead them to positions as resource faculty or as education administrators within the ITREBs. In the longer term, the programme will also offer opportunities for graduates to enter into teaching or other education related positions with the Aga Khan Education Services, the Aga Khan Academies, and other initiatives of the Aga Khan Development Network.

Teaching at secular schools in one's home country is another possible longer-term outcome of the STEP. The MTeach and MA Education programme will have provided participants with relevant subject-matter knowledge, awareness of curriculum design and development and pedagogical proficiencies to teach social studies, humanities and religious education courses within secular secondary schools. Those who are not already certified teachers in their regions may need to satisfy additional pre-requisites to qualify as professional teachers as each province, state, and/or region has specific teacher qualification requirements. Regional ITREB-STEP Teams will be able to provide further guidance

What are the fees?

The STEP is a fully-funded scholarship programme. Successful applicants receive a living allowance (stipend) for their stay in London. All programme-related fees and travel costs are covered.
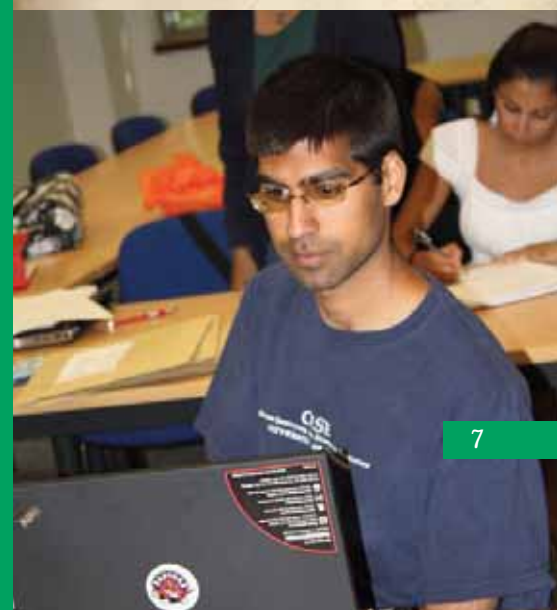
If educators are to work closely and effectively with a wide range of young students and their families, develop standards-based approaches to religious education, curriculum and assessment, and participate in shaping religious education and school practices, they must be prepared to engage these responsibilities from a deeper base of knowledge.

The two-year programme is designed to help participants gradually develop a knowledge base of professional teaching practices, modes of enquiry, core subject-matter, and the skills and attributes of reflective practitioners. Guided through these competencies and infield practicum experiences, participants will also be in a position to seek teacher certification once they return to their own regions.

What's in it for experienced teachers?

For experienced teachers who have been working professionally, there are diverse benefits. The programme provides teachers with a unique and exciting pathway to further their learning in the field of education. In addition to the classroom focus of the MTeach, there is a dimension of leading learning outside the classroom. This reflects and responds to the increasing number of leadership-focused roles, towards which many experienced teachers find themselves moving. Indeed, experienced teachers have the chance to re-engage with issues that will help them improve their knowledge of pupil learning and progress while contributing to the overall development and re-vitalization of religious education and school systems. The MA Education complements the MTeach's evidence-based practice by offering experienced teachers opportunities to engage in a forum for the discussion and study of Islam and Ismaili heritage that draws uniquely upon the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences.

What's in it for non-certified teachers?

For those who are new to the teaching profession, the programme builds on previous undergraduate knowledge and experience gained working with young students as a volunteer educator in community or religious education settings. Experience as a tutor, counsellor, trainer or mentor supported by a common vision of becoming agents of change in education systems serves as the basis for studies in subject-matter pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and leadership. Non-certified teachers in the programme will discover that working closely with experienced faculty, tutors of the IOE and the IIS, and classmates who bring practical teaching experience can be highly stimulating and supportive. (Note that the STEP does not award professional teaching certificates. Non-certified teachers wishing to pursue future careers as secular teachers must make themselves aware of the prerequisites to obtain qualified teacher status in the jurisdictions where they would like to practice eventually).

What's in it for community stakeholders?

The programme supports and re-vitalizes existing religious education systems through capacity-building by focusing on teachers' practice and leadership, and an examination of a wider understanding of their young learners, classrooms, communities and extended learning environments. At a time when recruitment and retention of excellent teachers are key issues influencing young students' access to religious education, the possibility of award-bearing professional learning is a real incentive for relevant community stakeholders within religious education settings to support the teachers practically and professionally.

Benefits of the MTeach and MA Education

"The UK practicums have given me the opportunity to experience both teacher and student learning from yet another lens. It has given me the opportunity to work with the management team and experience the operations of ITREB UK in comparison to our respective ITREB. Our sincere thanks goes to ITREB UK for providing us with the space and resources and helping us implement and fulfill the vision"

Kishwar Ali
Cohort 2 (USA)

"Studying under some of the best scholars in the field has been inspiring and sparked an excitement that is infused in every class of young people that I teach. During my practicums, I found that the students engaged well with the critical issues in the new IIS Secondary Curriculum and were keen to learn more…"

Rahim Lalji
Cohort 1 (Canada)

Opposite page
Newsam Library at the IOE

"The journey with STEP has added a new dimension to our lives, leading towards a lifelong vision filled with a treasure of experiences. A group of 40 different individuals from five diverse parts of the world formed a unique mix of cultures and languages and this multiplicity of ideas provided us with the opportunity to broaden our thinking and learning horizons…"

Shermeen Surani
Cohort 1 (Pakistan)

STEP students lesson planning for a REC class

Master of Teaching (MTeach) modules

The MTeach is structured using online tasks as well as face-to-face meetings, using various forms of assessment. Participants will be expected to test their experiences and knowledge against those of their colleagues, in relation to conceptual and theoretical frameworks advanced by background reading.

Important note

At the time of going to press, the Master of Teaching element of the STEP is subject to development arising out of the exciting Curriculum Review Process. A number of changes are underway to make the programme better fit the contexts of Ismaili RE teachers, the needs of the ITREBs and students' learning needs. It is important for applicants to note, therefore, that the descriptions of the modules that follow are indicative and subject to change.

Learning, Teaching and Assessment in RE

It is currently proposed that this module will form part of the STEP MTeach programme.

Understanding Teaching in Ismaili RE Contexts

This module is undergoing development. At the time of going to press, it is expected that UTIREC will emphasize group discussion of key issues among peers and teachers who will be encouraged to make references to their personal teaching contexts and particular experiences and knowledge.

Leading Learning in Ismaili RE Contexts

This module is undergoing development. The module will be based on an existing module, Leading Learning, which helps participants to understand how they learn, how others learn and how to maximize both. Assessment is through a reflective journal and a critical commentary on that journal. Participants will focus their discussions around issues key to the course, namely curriculum design, leadership of learning, assessment and evaluation and the range of theories on teaching and learning.

Research and Professional Practice

The Research and Professional Practice module encourages participants to analyze and critique published research and equips participants with the skills needed to carry out their own enquiry work. The focus of the module is an examination of what it means to be 'research literate' and leads into practice-based enquiry. This is the production of a report or dissertation which focuses on teaching and learning in educational settings.

OPTION MODULE

If participants do a report, they must complete the MTeach with an option module which can be selected from a wide range offered by the IOE.

REPORT/DISSERTATION

The Report is a small-scale research-based enquiry that investigates an area of benefit to the educational settings in which the participants are working and provides them with an opportunity to focus on their own subject area. A longer piece than the Report, the Dissertation allows participants to conduct an enquiry in greater depth. If participants opt to write a dissertation, they do not need to complete an option module.

MA Education (Muslim Societies and Civilizations) modules

CORE MODULES:

Muslim History and Secondary Education

This module introduces participants to the IIS Secondary Curriculum framework, its overarching rationale and philosophy, and its pedagogical underpinnings. It examines the central characteristic of the IIS Secondary Curriculum, namely, the interweaving of humanistic, civilisational and normative approaches. This characteristic is explored through a broad introduction to the historical aspects of Islamic civilizations, their pluralistic composition, their interactions with diverse societies across time and geography, as well as their achievements in the sciences, arts and culture, including the establishment of institutions of learning and education.

Revelation, Hermeneutics, Pluralism and Practice

This module examines core aspects of religious traditions: revelation, hermeneutics, the inherent pluralism that results and its expression in community practice. The module studies the question of what constitutes 'Islam' for the diverse Muslim traditions that compose the Muslim world. The module will prepare course participants to facilitate this examination through the study of selected facets of the Qur'an and expressions of faith and practice in Muslim communities and through the application of tools of enquiry and analysis that will equip them to develop informed perspectives on these subjects.

OPTION MODULES FOR YEAR 1

Students may choose between various option modules, including the following:

Literature of Muslim Societies and Civilizations

The literature of Muslim societies and civilizations has traditionally been categorized by language. Hence one studies Arabic literature, Persian literature, etc. However, this module begins with the recognition of a shared literary culture among the various linguistic contexts within Muslim societies and civilizations. This shared culture is evidenced by similarity of genres, topoi, and intertextual references within diverse linguistic contexts. This module examines such shared genres as devotional literature, mystical poetry, individual prayers, epics, courtly literature, belles-lettres, prose, biography, autobiography, and social critique. The module will also explore, where appropriate, elements of literary culture which are unique to linguistic contexts. Through this examination, participants will develop an appreciation for the role that literary culture has played in forming cultural memory.

Modernity and Muslim Societies

This module continues the examination of Muslim societies and civilizations from the perspective of the humanities, in particular the historical narrative into the present, which began in the core module Religious Education and the Humanities in Secondary Education. Participants will examine the Safavid, Ottoman, and Mogul dynasties of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and continue on to selected aspects of the contemporary Muslim present. A key aspect of this module is an exploration of the notions of "modern", "modernity" and "modernism". Through discussions of various episodes, personalities, and movements from the late eighteenth century to the present, the module will survey a period of rapid political, economic, social, and intellectual change that continues to this day. In so doing, the module aims to provide participants with contemporary subject matter that will be relevant to their classroom teaching.

OPTION MODULES FOR YEAR 2

Cultural Encounters, Material Culture and Narratives

Cultural education is an essential aspect of the secondary curricula of contemporary pluralistic societies. This module seeks to engage participants in the examination of how cultural products are socially constituted during "cultural encounters", and then to examine selected case studies of such encounters during critical periods of Muslim history (including the contemporary period) in diverse Muslim societies.

Traditions of Enquiry

All major world civilizations engage in the pursuit of knowledge - so as to understand the world around them - and to utilize this knowledge for practical purposes, whether to improve the world, or to attain personal fulfilment. This module examines Islamic civilizations' rich heritage of philosophical enquiry, the sociological and philosophical foundations of law, and the pursuit of the natural sciences and humanities. The module adopts an analytical stance towards this heritage and requires an evaluation of the contemporary relevance of these inherited intellectual traditions; the module explores the praxis of the ethics of faith with particular attention to issues of inequity and social injustice in society, as indeed among the nations of the world, with the aim of utilizing these issues to engage and develop moral reasoning in adolescent learners.

Report

The Report, based on empirical study, will provide evidence of participants' research of specific topics of interest, under the guidance and supervision of IOE and IIS teaching staff.

Professional Studies

The Professional Studies module gives teachers an opportunity to enquire into their teaching practice in order to develop their teaching and reflection skills within the classroom. During the module, students undertake a programme of professional studies and supervision, teach in Ismaili Muslim Religious Education Classrooms in the United Kingdom or Europe. During the course of their experience, students are asked to compile a portfolio of evidence for assessment which shows how they are working within a range of professional relationships with pupils, colleagues, parents and possibly the wider community. The final portfolio will include clear evidence of professional progression, integrated with a critical commentary underpinned by a demonstrated engagement with appropriate literature.

Academic and Student Services

*Opposite page:
Entrance of Al-Hakim Mosque,
Cairo, Egypt.*

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and Alnoor Nathani*

FURTHER INFORMATION

Full details, including an application pack are available from:

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Fax: +44 (0) 20 7756 2762
Email: step@iis.ac.uk

Website: www.iis.ac.uk
(under Graduate Studies)

IIS Library

In its relatively short history, the IIS Library has grown into a leading centre and repository for rare and significant resources illustrative of the pluralism of Ismaili thought and tradition. The IIS Library's collection comprises nearly 30,000 items. Its general collection of printed materials consists of reference works, books, periodicals, journal articles and theses on various aspects of Islamic history, theology, philosophy, law and literature, with a focus on Shi'i works and esoteric traditions.

Besides this core collection in Islamic studies, the Library has a specialised holding of Ismaili printed materials comprising nearly 1,000 volumes of texts and monographs, over 700 articles and off-prints, as well as a small collection of Ismaili journals.

The manuscript collection of the Institute's Library consists of nearly 1,500 volumes. Besides a small nucleus of manuscripts that contain the text of the Holy Qur'an, the scope of the collection encompasses a variety of subjects including jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, logic, grammar, medicine, astronomy and alchemy, as well as poetical and biographical works.

IOE Library

The Newsam Library houses the largest collection of materials on education in the United Kingdom.

The Reference collection provides reference works, indexes to journal articles, legal guidance, statistics of education in the UK and recent official government publications.

The library subscribes to a wide range of journals on education published both in the UK and many other countries. An increasing number are available in electronic format.

The Other Subjects collection contains material on education-related topics such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and linguistics.

The Archives house historical papers from organisations and individuals involved in education. Most Special Collections are discrete historical collections bequeathed to the Library. The library also holds theses and dissertations by IOE students.

IT Facilities and Support

The IOE provides facilities for students including Mac and PC-based general computing facilities, including standard software and email applications, networked file storage and Internet access. In addition, STEP participants will have access to computing facilities within the IIS.

Student Services

STEP participants are registered as students of the Institute of Education, University of London and may therefore access all of the student resources of the Institute of Education and the University of London. These include:
• student welfare
• international student support
• disabilities support
• counselling service

The Institute of Ismaili Studies also offers student support services to complement those available through the IOE.

Entry Requirements and Application Procedure

Details of entry requirements can be found on the IIS website and in the Notes of Guidance section of the application pack. Potential applicants can obtain an application pack from their national STEP Team or by contacting the STEP Student Services Officer.
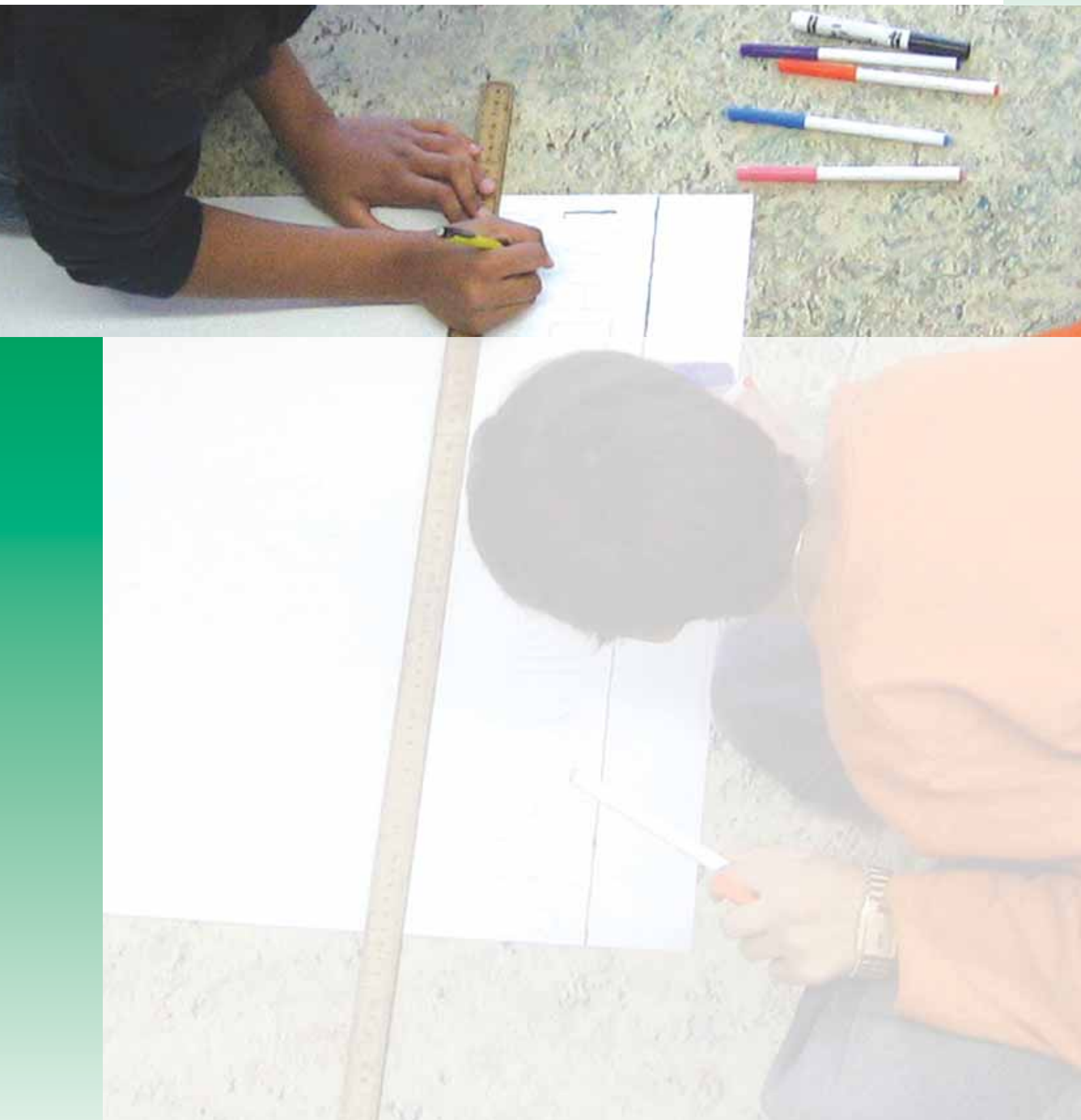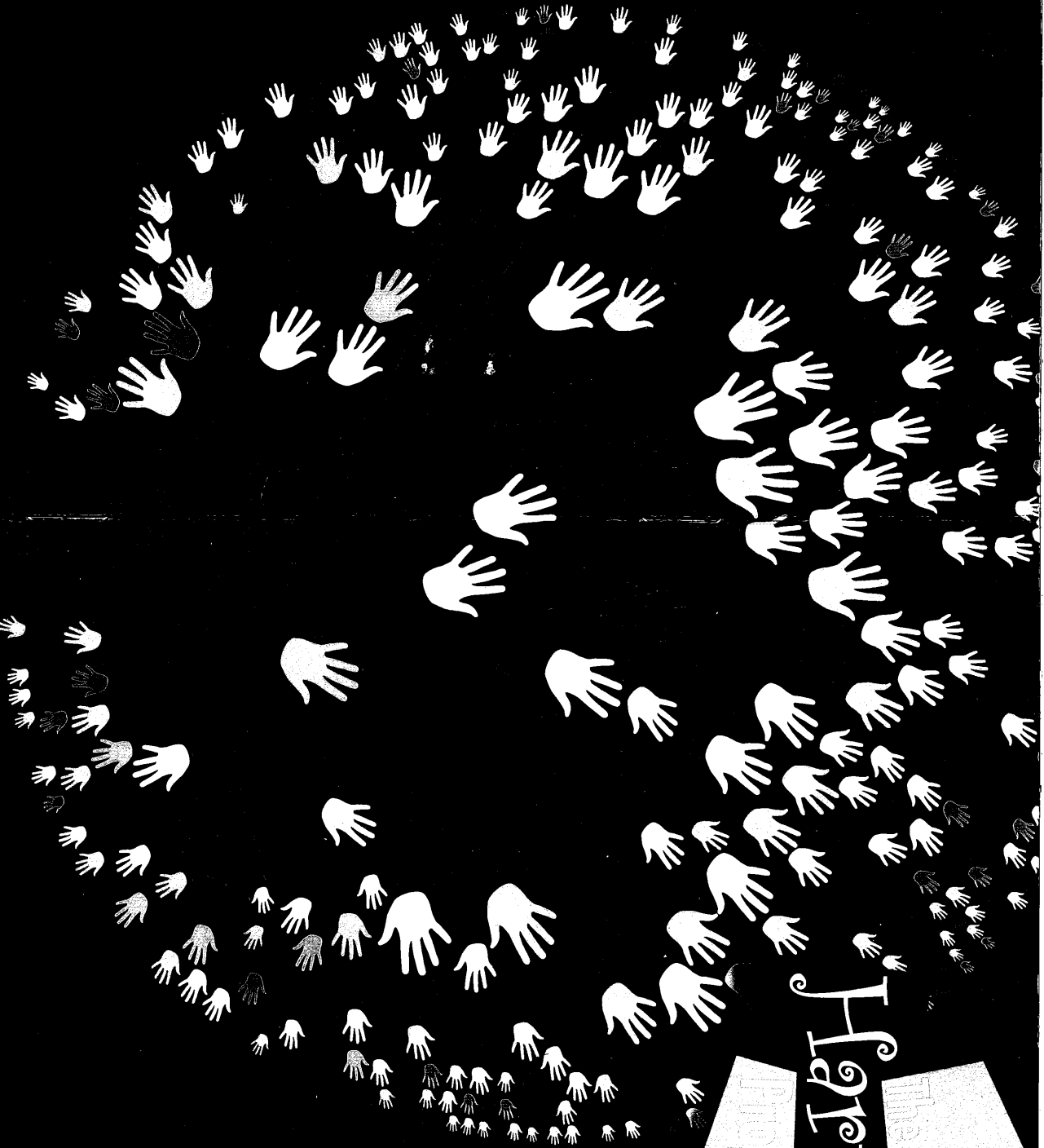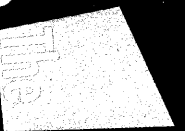
Programme

Harmony

Saturday 13 and Sunday 14 April 2013

About The Performance

Human beings have struggled for thousands of years to understand 'the other'. To live with, share and embrace cultures different to their own.

The Harmony Project is the story of a group of people from very different traditions who learn to work together. It follows their struggles to understand each other and gives insight into the background of their own prejudices.

When they find some common ground the group realise that diversity itself can be a source of creativity and inspiration.

Accompanied by music and dance from across the world as well as performances of Ismaili devotional literature, The Harmony Project attests to the ability of music and art to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries.

With drama, comedy and heart-felt sentiment, The Harmony Project is a narrative that reflects the dilemma which has puzzled mankind for centuries - how do we embrace diversity and build a path to pluralism.

The Cast

Akbar - Zayd Kassam

If mixing Chartered Accountancy within the world of oil and gas wasn't exhilarating enough, Zayd has decided to rekindle his childhood love of performing arts. Notable performances over the years include a 24-hour Shakespearathon at university, appearances in Expressions and more recently, Zayd has taken on the role of Jaffer in Coffee with the Chaiwalas.

Assistante - Dilshad Sachedina

Dilshad is from Darkhana and plays the role of 'Assistante' to board member Akbar in The Harmony Project. She has played the role of 'Noorbanu the photocopying lady' and 'Majorsaheba' in similar productions in the past. Although not something she gets to do often, acting is one of her favourite pastimes.

Talib - Nadim Pabani

Nadim is 24 years old and recently completed a Masters degree at the University of Edinburgh in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. He is currently studying at The Institute of Ismaili Studies as part of the Secondary Teacher Education Programme. He loves singing and acting so he really hopes you all enjoy watching the show as much as he enjoyed being a part of it!

Professor Javad - Mansour Morteza

Mansour is originally from Iran. He is a qualified conductor of Western classical music and teaches music for a living. Mansour is familiar with four instruments. During his spare time, he composes music, reads philosophy and poetry. Mansour is married and has one daughter.

The Cast

Irfan Sheen

Irfan is currently a student at the Institute of Ismaili Studies. He is originally from Hunza, Pakistan. He is the lead singer and guitarist of the band SAMA and has performed at various venues in the greater London area. Irfan is a self-taught musician.

Durri Zahir

Durri Zahir is a singer and also plays the rubab – a unique and melodious instrument originating from Afghanistan and Pakistan. She took up the instrument upon discovering it on a trip to Pakistan and has since performed with it in many shows including that of the Ismaili Community Ensemble and 'Naghma'.

Farah Jiwan

Inspired and encouraged by her parents, Suli and Abdul, Farah received formal training in both Indian classical music and Western classical music from childhood. She plays seven instruments of which the sitar is now her primary. Farah also sings lead vocals in a band and performs with them internationally. Farah finds her music balances her medical career, and provides the perfect outlet after a busy day.

Alnasir Jamal

A full-time film and humanities student and part-time musician, Alnasir has been learning the tabla since 2006, first in his hometown of Toronto and now in London. His musical interests lie in world music, with influences ranging from light classical tabla, hip-hop, percussive guitar, vocal improvisation and many others.

The Cast

Aditi - Sauraya Amin

Sauraya has been training in Indian classical dance for the past 20 years. She has studied both Bharatanatyum and Kathak. Sauraya has performed at venues and events across the UK, including the London 2012 Olympic Ceremonies. Originally from Manchester, Sauraya is a qualified solicitor who now lives and works in London as an adjudicator for the Financial Ombudsman Service.

Farouk Bhimji

Farouk trained as a professional dancer at Broadway Dance Center, New York and has danced, choreographed and taught dance all over the world. Credits include Jay Sean, Whitney Houston, Leona Lewis, Alexandra Burke, Victoria's Secret Fashion Show and Britain's Next Top Model. He now runs a successful job website for UK performing artists.

"The path to Pluralism is not an easy one to tread. It is fraught with obstacles as we battle with our own sense of identity and our fears of the other."

"All we can do is try and begin that journey. So that one day, in the future, we may embrace our diversity and find a unique and rich kind of Harmony between us."

The Harmony Project

The Team

Director & Writer	Shermina Sayani
Producer	Shahzma Kanji
Producer	Alykhan Kassam
Assistant Producer	Sameer Mawji
Assistant Producer	Ashifa Rashid
Logistics & Front of House Manager	Sehrish Ali
Marketing	Navida Jiwani
Company Manager	Zahra Somji
Script Research & Stage Manager	Salim Jakhra
Technical Support	Rahim Esmail
Box Office Support	Adil Bhatti
National Council Member Responsible	Zulfikar Hassam

With special thanks to:

Audio/Visual Unit, Front of House team, Les Knollman and The Ismaili Centre Management team, Sales and Marketing teams, Stage Management team, The National Council Secretariat, Wilding Sound

"O humanity! Truly, We created you from a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes that you might know each other. Truly, the most honoured of you in the sight of God is the most God-conscious of you. Truly, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware"

The Qur'an (49: 13)

"Whatever its vernacular forms, the language of art, more so when it is spiritually inspired, can be a positive barrier-transcending medium of discourse, manifesting the depths of the human spirit..."

"The Ismaili Centre in London, like its counterparts in other countries, has been conceived in a mood of dialogue, of humility, of friendship and of harmony."

His Highness the Aga Khan
'Word of God, Art of Man' Colloquium (Opening Address)
The Ismaili Centre, London
19 October 2003