THE JAMAT KHANA AS A SOURCE OF COHESIVENESS IN THE ISMAILI COMMUNITY IN KENYA

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This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

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This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as University supervisors.

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ABSTRACT

This study concentrates on and examines the role of the institution of the jamat khana as a major source of cohesiveness in the Ismaili community in Kenya. The Ismailis first settled in the country at the end of the 19th century, and established the jamat khana as the foremost communal institution. This institution has hitherto been an unexplored area of enquiry, and it is maintained and demonstrated through purposive interviews and a randomized survey that the close-knit nature of the community is primarily due to the jamat khana. This is so because the jamat khana acts as a central focus for essential religious as well as essential social functions.

Owing to a lack of indepth studies on any of the varied aspects of the Ismaili community in Kenya, and because of a marked scarcity of historical documents on the subject, the conclusions reached in this study depend extensively on the survey that was carried out. Reference has been made to several sociological studies which discuss different ways of achieving cohesiveness among people in any given society. The soundness of some of these hypotheses has been verified in this study. The major findings do indicate that the cohesion of the Ismaili community springs from the fundamental belief in an everliving

imam expressed and realized in a practical form in the jamat khana, through the observance of regular ceremonies, and the consequent interaction between individuals. Inspite of the observation made that the level of individual commitment differed considerably and consequently determined variance in individual perceptions and attitudes, the Ismaili community as a whole is distinctive in having a very strong degree of cohesiveness which derives primarily from the jamat khana.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Ismaili community of Kenya is the subject of the present study. Emphasis is given in particular to the jamat khana, their house of prayer, and to its role in creating cohesiveness within the community. The notion of cohesiveness cannot be conceived of without there first being a community. Thus the term community is used to refer to this particular group of people which is linked together by its common religious heritage, and by a common system of beliefs and values. It is further linked by a common area of origin - the Indian sub-continent, and consequently of culture, social customs and language.

In Kenya, the Ismailis are not concentrated in any one particular region in the country. Large numbers are however grouped together in the major urban centres - in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu and Nakuru. As the basic features of the Ismaili jamat khana in any one of the centres in Kenya are almost identical to those as observed in Nairobi, no comparison is made either with a rural or an urban Ismaili group in the country. Nairobi has been the obvious field of study because it contains the largest concentration of the Ismaili population in Kenya. Furthermore, it is the headquarters of the Ismaili Councils, not of Kenya alone, but of Africa, and it is the centre of the communal institutions of the country - the health, educational, economic, administrative and judicial organisations. It is

however beyond the scope of this work to study the vast network of these institutions of the Ismaili community, as each would merit a separate study. Nor would it be appropriate to make a comparative study with any other Ismaili society elsewhere in the world, without initially examining the community in one area of residence alone.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

It has been frequently stated that the Ismaili community in East Africa is a very close-knit one.[1] However, no attempt has been made either to elaborate upon this statement, or to explain what factors have been responsible for this cohesion. As a result, the following study seeks to fill this gap and show that the jamat khana is the major source from which the cohesiveness of the community springs. In order to do so, it not only answers basic questions such as what the jamat khana is, and how it creates integration, nor does it theorize merely on the importance of the jamat khana to the individual Ismaili, but it concentrates further on the practical significance of this institution in the day-to-day life of the community in Kenya. In so doing, the work attempts to determine the understanding of the individual and his attitude to his religious life, as well as the pattern of behaviour that seems characteristic of the community.

The aim of the study is not to question what the essence of Ismaili religion is, nor to evaluate its belief system, but to determine what major features of the religion have been conducive forces of integration. The religious perspective is, of course, just one particular method of constructing the argument. But the jamat khana, it is shown, is not merely a religious institution. Its other fundamental characteristic is social in nature. In order to avoid any ambiguity between these two terms, for the purpose of the study the term "religious" refers only to acts of worship and ritual activity in the jamat khana, whereas the term "social" refers to any overt individual or group activities inside and outside the jamat khana that do not have any obvious religious connotations. The religious and the social are thus viewed as two interdependent features of the community, and it is maintained that group cohesiveness is dependent on them both.

As a result of this overview of the jamat khana which embraces both the religious and the social domains, it is essential to study both these characteristics. The first objective is therefore to examine how religious ceremonies, rituals and congregational prayers tend towards cohesiveness. Is it the basic value-system underlying the socio-religious structure of the community that is responsible for solidarity? Or is togetherness created by the regular congregational assemblies of the different categories of Ismailis in the jamat khana? Is the authority of the imam himself a force of cohesiveness? Or do these forces, as mutually interdependent

factors, lead to cohesion?

The second objective is to define to what extent social interaction that results in the jamat khana and that is outside the realm of prayers brings about cohesiveness. Does face-to-face interaction, dialogue between and among members of a specific group create a sense of solidarity? Does regular contact in the jamat khana apart from the formal atmosphere of religious activity, have any far-reaching and permanent consequences? And to what extent do ideas like social equality and service influence attitudes of individuals?

The above questions have been raised in order to probe into the proposition put forward: that it is essentially the jamat khana that is responsible for the existence of a close-knit community. Having outlined the field of enquiry, a critical review of some sociological studies on the subject of cohesiveness will be useful.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON CONCEPT OF COHESIVENESS

Sociological studies on group cohesiveness, variously termed as "group dynamics", "social solidarity", "social integration", etc. reveal a wide range of variables that sociologists have used to support their theories on the subject. Durkheim[2] discusses the contribution of religion to social integration as necessary and an obvious function of religion. According to him, the belief of a people, their way of thinking, feeling and acting, are deeply embedded in the social

organisation. He bases his argument on the individual being basically an homo duplex i.e. every human being is fundamentally an individual being, as well as a social being. It is the latter aspect that is of interest to us - the individual as a social being, who interacts with other individuals. This leads to mutual exchange and strengthens the integrative bond.

Durkheim also argues that repeated ritual ceremonies observed in a group reinforce solidarity. In his work Suicide cohesiveness is shown as a result of frequency and closeness of social contact. This is a view that is largely applicable to the Ismailis and is analysed in the study. He further feels that the existence of norms which are acceptable to a large majority of the group is responsible for group cohesion. As he explains:

> "the more numerous and strong these collective states of mind are, the stronger the integration of the religious community, and also the greater its preservative value. The details of dogmas and rites are secondary. The essential thing is that they be capable of supporting a sufficiently intense collective life." (3)

On the same subject, Blau[4] writes:

> "Sharing basic values create integrative bonds and social solidarity among millions of people in a society...."

For Berghe,[5] too, it is the "value consensus" that is the most important and basic criteria leading to cohesiveness.

Malinowski[6] believes that firm adherence to tradition results in a close-knit group. He notes:

> "Order and civilisation can be maintained only by strict adhesion to the lore and knowledge received from previous generations. And laxity in this weakens the cohesion of the group and imperils its cultural outfit to the point of threatening its very existence."

It will be shown that it is not merely the existence of a value system in a society that results in cohesion, but the fact that this value-system is recognised and adhered to by the group. All this is made possible by the very regular congregational gatherings in the jamat khana which bring into contact members of the community.

It must be emphasised that the jamat khana is a particular site, "a space socially and ideologically demarcated and separated from other places"[7] to which so much significance is attached in this work. Numerous researchers have shown the importance of the notion of "social space" in interpreting social relationships. Specific to this thesis are the findings reported by Kuper.[8] He indicates how a particular traditional meeting place had led to group unity, in opposition to a particular administrative authority. Walter Firey[9] also demonstrated that people's symbolic interpretations of physical spaces can lead to certain forms of social solidarity based upon their perception of a particular space as "sacred". The importance of 'locality, propinquity and contiguity as

principles of grouping' cannot therefore be ignored here. The jamat khana is the only specific site where a high frequency and closeness of contact is regularly maintained. It is a form of a "territorial structure" within which relations between persons belonging to the Ismaili community are expressed in terms of the values they profess. The experience shared in the jamat khana, the atmosphere created therein, cannot be reconstructed in any other place. In other words, it is uniquely in the jamat khana, as distinct and opposed to any other communal institution, that symbols and values are translated into meaningful expressions. It is not merely the functions that are carried out in the jamat khana, but also its incomparable position, the site of the jamat khana that is responsible for being a major source of cohesiveness.

In the foregoing section, we have indicated what may be termed, the more 'positive' factors of cohesion within the Ismaili community, factors, which will be shown, are directly responsible for having created a close-knit society. There are, nevertheless, alternate forces that could as well lead to cohesion, and it would not be irrelevant to briefly discuss some of these.

Gross[10] uses the idea of attractiveness of the group as his primary indicator for integration. The more attractive the group is, the more cohesive it will be; the degree of attractiveness obviously varies, depending on how attractive

it is to a single individual. For the Ismaili, the attractiveness of a group is in this context non-existent because membership in the group is not as a result of attractiveness, but of birth. The group may or may not be attractive for him or the degree of attractiveness would vary with individual interpretation of the notion of attractiveness, but the reason that he belongs to the group is not due to attractiveness. Nor does that, in this instance, necessarily lead to cohesiveness.

Coser's[11] view of conflict is yet another alternative for group solidarity. He believes that conflict reduces social isolation and encourages social cohesion, and according to him, this cohesion is achieved in the following way. When the very existence of a group is threatened by external forces, or by other groups, the group that feels threatened and insecure will seek to stabilize its position and reaffirm its sentiments. In so doing, it may become more integrated. However, it is held that only a study of economic and political conditions in the country would reveal to what extent external influences have made more cohesive the Ismaili community, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to include this aspect.

What of the other communal institutions apart from the jamat khana? Does economic dependence for example create cohesiveness? Although there exists a system of loans, of housing schemes, of insurance, etc. these do not affect all the members of the community as does the jamat khana. Moreover, these economic and educational institutions are not exclusively

Ismaili, but are essentially national institutions. In contrast the jamat khana is the only communal institution where membership is restricted to Ismailis alone, and where a high concentration of Ismailis is made feasible.

It has been mentioned that the Ismaili group is linked together by a common language. A language common to a group can be a factor of cohesiveness, but is it so for the Ismailis? Jetha[12] has shown that a breakdown of communication in the Ismaili community is a result of ignorance of the mother-tongue Gujarati on the part of the younger generation, and ignorance of English among the older people. He demonstrates this by using a small sample of students and therefore his results cannot be accepted conclusively. Nevertheless, it is felt that language as a cultural indicator can be an effective source of cohesiveness, especially in a minority group. An indepth study alone, would reveal the soundness of this argument.

The validity of all these criteria for cohesiveness is obviously impossible to examine. An important factor that must be borne in mind, nevertheless, is that of protection from breakdown of solidarity. What, in other words, have been the unifying factors of the group that have resisted disruptive forces? Is the group as close-knit as has been maintained, or is it less so? What is it that ensures Ismaili gatherings every single day? The study illustrates that it is fundamentally the belief in the imam expressed and realized in the jamat khana

through religious ceremonies and ritual prayers that is essentially responsible for cohesiveness within the Ismaili community.

METHODOLOGY

Owing to the nature of the study undertaken, four major methods of collecting data were adopted.

Library Research

Initially, library research was carried out with the view to obtain theoretical information on Ismailism in general - its beginnings, its growth and development, its dogmas, and its ritual practices - and to give the Ismaili community in Kenya a historical background. Studies on the Asians in East Africa generally make reference to the Ismailis, either briefly or in some detail. These studies however deal almost exclusively with the welfare and administrative institutions of the Ismaili community, making little or no reference to the socio-religious institution, the jamat khana. All the literature referred to is listed in the Bibliography at the end of the study.

Communal Records

The Ismaili Constitution, first promulgated in 1905, and subsequently revised in 1925, 1937, 1946, 1954 and 1962 proved invaluable in visualising some of the socio-religious aspects of the community at the turn of the century, and in tracing the

development of Ismaili institutions, and in particular, religious rites and practices, as well as marriage and funeral ceremonies. Records in the Provincial Council Chambers were also consulted in September, 1973 and these often included circulars regarding certain rituals with exact dates as to when a change in procedure, for example, was affected. Ismaili publications like the Ismaili Prakash were also consulted. All the records referred to are listed in the Bibliography.

Purposive Interviews

Ismaili migrants from India who settled in Kenya were questioned by unstructured interviews in Nairobi and in Kisumu. The informants were deliberately selected, hence purposively, by virtue of their old age, as elderly people seemed most likely to have been born in India, or would remember better the community in the early decades of this century; or through introductions from one early settler to another. Information obtained from these interviews helped form a general picture of the conditions in India which prompted migration to the East African coast, settlement in the African hinterland, and the establishment of the jamat khanas in different parts of the country as these settlers moved into the interior. (See table I, .I)

Twenty Ismaili women were interviewed with the view to obtain information on the marriage and funeral ceremonies of the community in Kenya. (See Table 1, II). Women alone were selected because they participate actively during these ceremonies,

and would therefore be more conversant with the customs in practice. The results are reported in the conclusion with other findings which are related to the subject of the thesis.

TABLE 1: BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS INTERVIEWED

	Form	Topic	Total no.	Age	Sex M	Sex F	Date of Interview
I	Unstructured Interview	Ismaili Origins in Kenya	20	all over 50 years	16	4	Nov. 1974 - Jan. 1975
II	Unstructured Interview	Social Practices	20	Between 20-80 years	0	20	May 1973
III	Structured Questionnaire	Jamat Khana	61	Between 20-75 years	34	27	Jan. - Feb. 1975

Standardised Questionnaire

In order to examine the hypothesis that: "The Jamat khana is a major source of cohesiveness in the Ismaili community in Kenya", a standardised questionnaire was written out, and oral interviews were conducted within the Ismaili community in Nairobi, from January 18 to February 15, 1975.

The questionnaire was formulated to include specific structured questions on age, occupation, place of birth, as well as unstructured questions like "How do you feel about

announcements regarding social events in the jamat khana?", or "What does the takht mean to you?". Most of the questions were open-ended as opposed to close questions, which only allow a restricted choice of answers. Open-ended questions would elicit responses that would reveal attitudes and personal opinions that would not be possible from specific structured questions on age, for instance. Ziesel[13] describes this procedure as "motivation research", that is, questions are designed to reveal or penetrate personality characteristics or specific unconscious attitudes to certain topics. (See table 1, III).

Sampling

In order to conduct this survey systematically, and to choose the Ismailis in a random fashion, an attempt was made to obtain a complete listing of all the Ismailis in Nairobi. Unfortunately, this was impossible. Ismaili communal records do not indicate either the size of the community, nor do they contain any demographic information. Nor do Government records, consulted at the Central Bureau of Statistics, indicate any demographic information on the Ismaili community itself. (See table 1, III).

Consequently, a list of Ismaili flats in Nairobi was made: these include Parklands, Highridge, Hirani Estate, Ngara, Protectorate Road and Ainsworth Road flats. This was the only means available of locating members of the community in definite residential areas. The questionnaire however could not be restricted to the flats alone as it would not make the

study as representative as desired. Therefore, listings were made of the Ismaili Council members, both past, (appointed in July, 1971), and present (appointed in July, 1974); of the titleholders in the community, and finally of those engaged in the various professions: doctors, lawyers, accountants and teachers. Listings of the other professions were not available. A name which occurred on more than one list, for example if a professional was also a councillor, his name was omitted from either list. This helped to ensure that duplication of names did not result.

It was assumed that all these categories of people, including those who reside in the flats, ranged from the middle-income group to the upper-income group. Obviously, this left out the lower-income group. Attempts to obtain information on this particular category of people were unsuccessful - either the information was not made available to the researcher, or it simply does not exist. However, it may be possible that the lower-income group is partly represented to a small extent in the flats, especially in those residential areas of Nairobi - where the general standard of living is comparatively low, for example, the Ngara flats as compared to Parklands flats. The vicinity of Ngara seems to be less preferable to that of Highridge and Parklands, as demand for flat occupancy in the latter is much higher than in the former area. One reason for this could be that communal institutions, the jamat khana, the club, and sports facilities, schools, the hospital, and the ghusal hall for funeral ceremonies are all situated in the

Parklands area. Apart from this, there is no information available to indicate that the Ngara flats do not fall into the same category as flats in Highridge and Parklands.

Once the listings were complete, a 10% sample of the total number on the lists was made, on the basis of systematic sampling. Thus, one person from every tenth flat was selected to be interviewed. Contact with the party of the flat number selected was not always made. If, on the third visit to a particular flat, the occupant was not to be found, or if a flat was vacant, the original number had to be substituted. For this purpose, the same method was followed, that, substitution occurred by systematic sampling, omitting this time, those numbers that had already been interviewed, as well as those for which substitution was sought. For the listings apart from the flats, the same procedure was adopted. Every tenth councillor, professional, and title-holder was interviewed. From these listings, only one respondent had to be substituted.

Back-Translation

Furthermore, the questionnaire was translated into Gujarati for those respondents who do not understand English. An exercise on back-translation was carried out with the help of one of the academic supervisors and a Gujarati speaking professional. Each question was read in Gujarati, the Gujarati-speaker gave its English equivalent, and the supervisor checked the English translation against the original English

questions. This exercise helped to ensure that in translating the questionnaire from English into Gujarati, neither the purpose nor the understanding of the questions was lost. Difficulty arose in conveying exact meanings for concepts like equality, close-knit and link of communication. The equivalent in Gujarati was too literary and not in everyday usage. Thus phrases to explain these terms were used, rather than the exact equivalent. One question which originally read: "How does the jamat khana as a source of communication regarding communal activities compare with some other means of communication?" posed a problem. Translated into Gujarati, the question did not convey the same meaning as in English. It was therefore altered to read: "Apart from the jamat khana, from where do you get information regarding communal activities?". No other changes were necessary besides these.

Pre-Test Interviews

Before the questionnaire could finally be implemented, four pre-test interviews were conducted. This was to test, as the term pre-test indicates, the feasibility of the questions in both the languages, and to test the reaction of the respondents to the questions. After the pre-test, the order of some of the questions was changed, the language for some questions was slightly modified, and one question which was somewhat repetitive, was dropped altogether. No other major changes were made after the pre-test. Lastly, the pre-test helped determine the time required per interview.

Time Sampling

The actual interviewing was done at different times of the day, and whoever was home was interviewed. This was done deliberately to maximise the possibility of including numerous age groups, occupations, and both sexes, since, depending on the time of the day, respondents would be expected to range from students and housewives to businessmen and office employees. This did result in interviewing representatives of most categories of people. Interviews with those respondents not living in the flats were usually prearranged by appointment. Thirteen of the respondents were contacted in the jamat khana when it proved difficult to contact them either at their place of work or at home.

Content

The questionnaire covered three areas of discussion. Under the section on the jamat khana, questions ranged from everyday ritual ceremonies to annual religious festivals, as well as general questions on concepts like service, equality, and cohesiveness. The second section dealt with marriage and funeral ceremonies, and the third area of discussion was restricted to those respondents living in the flats. Of the total 61 interviews conducted, 50 are at present living in Ismaili flats; that is 82% of the total sample of respondents to the questionnaire. The questionnaire is appended at the end of the study.

Procedure for Analysing the Data

Each respondent was interviewed personally, and once all the interviews were conducted and the data collected, all the information was coded. It was rather difficult to code the data because almost all the questions on the questionnaire were open-ended, and a large variety of attitudes and opinions were expressed by the interviewees. As a result, specific categories of respondes to include one type of an answer were formed. Once these responses were categorised, variables like age, sex and occupation were used to establish trends in attitudes, and to gain further insight into individual commitment and understanding as a consequence of such varying criteria. Finally, all these processes of eliciting information led to the final conclusions and findings of the survey.

Footnotes

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CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Whereas the presence of the Ismailis in Kenya as a minority group today can be viewed in the light of an East African background, their historical and religious origins cannot be isolated from the general history of Islam, in particular from the history of the Ismaili *imams*. For the purposes of providing a background for the study, it is necessary to narrate the history of the *imams*, to show what the *imam* means to the Ismailis, and to indicate further the historical and religious significance of *imamat*. An understanding of the communal structure of the Ismailis cannot be attained without first acknowledging the fact that the entire communal set-up is centred around the *imam*, and in relation to the *imam*.

The Ismailis of Kenya are a sect of Shia Muslims who do not accept that with the death of Prophet Muhammed in 632 A.D. in Medina, divine guidance ended on earth. They maintain that although Muhammed as the *seal* of the prophets, *khatim al-ambiya*, was the last in the line of the great prophets of the world, and that he terminated the cycle of prophethood, *nubuwwat*, and therefore of divine revelation, he established the institution of *imamat*, or spiritual leadership, before his death.[1] *Imamat*, for the Shia, and in particular for the Ismaili, is the most basic and essential feature of the religion. It is the foundation upon

which the religious structure of the Ismaili community is based, indeed the raison d'être for the very existence of the community. The imam is the only link between God the Creator and the creation. His presence in the world is absolutely vital, the justification for it being that one of the basic attributes of Allah as evident in the Quran is His merciful nature. He is ar-Rahim, and in His beneficence, does not leave man alone to struggle in the world without some form of spiritual guidance.

Ismaili history cannot be separated from the history of their imams, simply because there could not have been an Ismaili nor a jamat khana, without there first being an imam. Nor is Ismaili history in its early phase of development in the eighth century distinct from early Shia history. The history of the imams and of their hereditary descent from the prophet through the house of his cousin Ali ibn Abu Talib and also his son-in-law by marriage to his daughter Fatima, is complex and varied. Dynastic disputes, and conflicting views abound. Rival claimants to the position and title of the office of the imam have been innumerable. Periods of Ismaili history consequently remain somewhat obscure and uncertain. Ismaili tradition, nevertheless, maintains as consistent and unbroken the direct and lineal descent of the imams in the male line from Prophet Muhammad - from Ali the first imam to the present imam, Shah Karim al-Husseini Hazar Imam, His Highness the Aga Khan IVth, the forty ninth imam. It must be emphasised that this

tradition is exclusively sectarian. Owing to the inadequacy of authentic records on the subject, historians have not always accepted as genuine this particular line of imamat as direct and unbroken.

Imams are formally appointed by their predecessors, and not elected to their office, and Ali's nomination as the first imam is believed by the Shia to have been announced by the Prophet himself while returning from his last pilgrimage to Mecca in 632 A.D. He stopped at Ghadir Khumm[2] where, according to the Shia, the following ayat of the Quran was revealed to him:

> "O Apostle, communicate that which was revealed to you by your Lord."
>
> (Q: V, 67)

He then proclaimed Ali as the imam to the assembled crowds with the dictum:

> "He of whom I am the Lord, of him Ali is also the Lord" ("man kuntu mawlahu fa'Ali mawlahu.")

The event is of crucial importance to the Shia for it established as historical fact the appointment of Ali ibn-Abu Talib as the successor to the prophet, and it is the basis upon which the religious fervour of the community is founded. The Shia therefore maintained that just as the prophet had been both a religious leader and a statesman, so too did Ali as the

imam combine in his person absolute authority. The rest of the Muslum community attached no such significance to the event at Ghadir Khumm, believing firmly that the spiritual leadership of the Prophet ended with his death, and was not continued in the imam. Ignoring subsequently Ali's appointment, they elected caliphs from among the close companions of the prophet to the temporal leadership of the community. Ali was finally elected in 656 A.D. as the fourth caliph, by which time the "outward semblance of unity which had hitherto existed in Islam...." had become practically non-existent.[3] The question of succession to the prophet led to the "scramble for power"[4] and the resulting dissent eventually caused division within the Muslim community.

Two important factions arose, 'Shiat Ali' and 'Shiat Muawiya', and the ensuing battle at Siffin in 657 A.D. led to the establishment of two rival caliphates, that of Ali and that of the Ummayad dynasty under Muawiya. Opposition from the Ummayads culminated in the murder of Ali in 661 A.D., and his sons Hasan and Husein who succeeded Ali as the second and third Shia Imams respectively, suffered similar fate. The massacre of Husein, at Kerbala in 680 A.D. gave birth to the idea of a martyr, shahid, in Islam. A moral and a religious element came to be attributed to the Shia cause after the Kerbala incident: "This dramatic martyrdom of the kin of the Prophet and the wave of anguish and penitence that followed it, infused a new religious fervour in the Shia, now inspired by expiation."[5] The Shia world has, over the centuries, annually observed the martyrdom at

Kerbala on the 10th of Muharram, with passion plays depicting the tragedy, and with grief and mourning.[6] However, present-day Ismailis do not mourn the death of an imam because of their fundamental belief in the eternal nature of imam. The death of an imam is believed to be merely the death of a physical body, imamat in essence is immutable. In subsequent years, imamat came to be regarded primarily as a religious office, and by the time of Imams Muhhammed al-Baqir (d.732 A.D.) and Jafar as-Sadiq (d.765 A.D.) the fifth and sixth imams respectively, imamat had become an hereditary institution, the succession being legitimate by divine right, continuing from father to the selected son. The idea of the infallibility of the imam, a concept which is discussed further on, gained emphasis during the life of Imam Jafar, and Lewis remarks that during the same period, a system of doctrine was elaborated "which served as the basis of the Ismaili religion of later days".[7]

Amidst several other movements which seem characteristic of Shia history at the same time, that of Imam Jafar is considered the most important, and he has been called the "founder of Shiism as a theological school in Islam".[8] His death in 765 A.D. resulted in the first major schism in Shiite Islam. It is perhaps significant that the controversy was religious in nature. Hitherto, claims to imamat had been mostly claims to secular power. Now, a dispute arose regarding the validity of nass, formal designation, of his son Ismail as his successor. That Ismail is supposed to have predeceased his father is one well-known view;[9] the other is that Ismail's predeliction to

drinking prompted Imam Jafar to revoke the nass in favour of Ismail's younger brother Musa.[10] The majority of the Shia accepted Musa as their imam and they believe in five more imams after Musa. They maintain that the line of "revealed" imams closed with the twelfth imam who went into concealment, ghayba, but one day will return to guide his followers to peace and justice. As a result of their belief in twelve imams in all, they came to be known as Twelvers or Ithna-asharis.[11]

On the other hand, those who maintained that an imam cannot revoke or change his first designation, and therefore accepted and followed Ismail as the lawful successor, came to be known as the Ismailis, taking their name from that of their Imam Ismail. In contrast to the Ithna-ashari belief in the return of their imam, the imam of the Ismailis does not "disappear" or go into hiding, but continues to guide his followers at all times, by his constant presence in the world. The principle of hereditary succession by nass gave to the Shia Ismailis a group existence and a continuous imamat, and Hodgson argues that this principle of nass is one of the major "reasons for the strength of the imamat of Jafar al-Sadiq" and his successors.[12]

As Musa was recognised by the secular authorities, the position of Imam Ismail's son and successor, Muhammed bin Ismail was made difficult, and it seems he left Medina for Kufa and later moved further eastwards to Persia.[13] Consequently, the identity of the imams who succeeded Muhammed bin Ismail is somewhat obscure

until the emergence of the Fatimid dynasty in 909 A.D. in North Africa.[14] This is one of the most perplexing periods of Ismaili history as far as authentic documentation of the period is concerned. However, "around Muhammad bin Ismail was created the historical Ismaili movement" notes Lewis,[15] and the imamat of Imam Jafar was a significant milestone in the systematic development of Ismaili religious thought.

During this intervening period from the death of Imam Jafar in 765 A.D. to the establishment of the Fatimid dynasty in North Africa in 909 A.D., personalities like Abd Allah bin Maimum, and movements like the Qarmatian, contributed towards the formulation of Ismaili history in general. As it is not the aim of this study to deviate too far from the theme of the jamat khana, the intricacies of such personalities, and the relationship of the Qarmatians to the Fatimid is not discussed here. Nor is it possible to analyse the numerous genealogies attributed to the Fatimid Imams; Lane-Poole shows at least eight Fatimid pedigrees.[16] It will therefore have to suffice to say that the Fatimids who ruled over Egypt and North Africa as spiritual and political leaders from 909 A.D. to 1094 A.D. traced their origin to Imam Ali and his wife Fatima through Imam Muhammad bin Ismail.

In 909 A.D. Ubayd allah al-Mahdi, known in Ismaili tradition as Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi, conquered the Aghlabid rulers of North Africa and established his headquarters there.[17] He proclaimed himself imam, and thus ending the period of satr,

occultation, and this was to usher in a more authenticated epoch of Ismaili history. The first four Fatimid Imams lived in North Africa, until, under the fourth Imam al-Mu'izz, the Fatimids conquered Egypt in 969 A.D. and founded al-Kahira (Cairo) as the capital of their empire.[18] The centre of influence and activity was thus transferred from North Africa to Egypt, whence the movement became overt and formidable.

The imams as well, who had hitherto refrained from political activity, became active administrative heads, caliphs, and yet fundamentally remained spiritual leaders. Their political authority as caliphs was recognised beyond Egypt, and the Friday khutba in Mecca and Medina was recited in their names.[19] Their religious authority was not limited to the conquered lands alone. Da'is, missionaries, who were the principal emissaries of Fatimid Ismailism, and who spread the faith in the names of the imams "commanded the allegiance of countless followers in the lands still subject to the Sunni rulers of the East."[20] The concept that imamat was a perpetual line of continuity from Imam Ali restricted by divine hereditary right was firmly established, and this fundamental belief in an ever-present imam must have been the driving force behing the movement. The religious teachings of the Ismaili system took on a twofold nature; the zahir, or the obvious, exoteric understanding which was apparent to all, and the batin, or the inner, esoteric interpretation accessible to those alone who delved deep in search of the haqiqat, truth.[21]

Towards the diverse denominations in their state, the Fatimids generally exercised a tolerant religious policy.[22] Ismaili doctrines were publicly taught in both schools and masjids, mosques. A renowned centre of learning was the mosque-university of al-Azhar, founded by Imam Al-Muizz. Here, jurists, scholars and savants in the esoteric doctrines of Ismaili faith addressed regular assemblies of both men and women. Subsequently, in harmony with freedom of worship, there was general prosperity, the arts and literature flourished, and cultural and intellectual activities were generally encouraged during the Fatimid era.

Under the sixth caliph Imam al-Hakim (d.1021 A.D.) the stability of the Fatimid Empire was considerably upset, and at his death, a group of followers dissented from the main body to form the Druze sect. However, Imam al-Hakim's successors, Imams az-Zahir and al-Mustansir reverted to the policies of the early Fatimids, and peace and order prevailed in Egypt during their reigns.[23] The death of al-Mustansir in 1094 A.D. was to cause yet another significant dynastic dispute, as well as an internal schism which was to split the Ismaili mission.[24] Al-Mustansir's eldest son Nizar was the official heir-apparent to the Caliphate and to the imamat. His position was challenged by his brother al-Mustali supported by the chief Vazier al-Afdal, and Nizar was imprisoned and finally murdered, along with his son al-Hadi in 1096 A.D. Nizar's grandson al-Muhtadi was rescued by a missionary, Da'i Hasan bin Sabbah and taken to Persia. This is the interpretation maintained by Ismaili sources,

which according to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, seems to be "substantially correct."[25]

Difficult as it is to ascertain the true nature of events resulting from the disputed succession, it is definitely the question of nass, formal designation of imamat, that caused the initial rivalry. Fyzee[26] sums up the situation aptly:

> "As is known, Ismailism itself came into existence as an independent sect of Islam in circumstances closely resembling the case of Nizar, and the immediate cause of the split of the Shiite community was exactly the defence of the dogma of the irrevocability of the nass. The sect was formed by the followers of Ismail, the son of Jafar as-Sadiq who refused to recognise the legality of the second nass, to Musa al-Kazim....."

The great majority preserved the original nass and pledged loyalty to Nizar and his successors. They are known as Nizari Ismailis, and from them spring the Khoja Ismailis of India, and of Kenya. For them, there cannot be a change in the initial nass, in fact the very question of a second nass does not even arise. Those who adhered to al-Mustali's caliphate continued in Egypt until finally destroyed by Saladin in 1171 A.D., and "after more than two centuries, Egypt was restored to the Sunni fold."[27]

With the move away from Egypt to Iran, where the Imams took refuge in Alamut, a fortress in the Elburz Mountains, Nizari Ismailism became independent of the Fatimid caliphate

in Egypt. Its political and administrative set-up differed from the Fatimid system, but the most basic form of Ismailism was maintained - belief in the historical continuity of the imams. In order to maintain this notion of continuity of the imams, the history of Nizari Ismailism may be traced according to the reigns of the imams. For the purposes of this study, however, it will be more meaningful to examine some of the outstanding features of the Ismaili movement during this particular period, rather than follow the history of individual imams.

The immediate task that awaited Da'i Hasan bin Sabbah was to make secure the position of the imam and his followers. The dawa system under the Fatimid Caliphate had converted to the Ismaili fold many Persian peasants, and groups of Ismailis were found not only all over Persia, "but in some arid tracks whole districts were now formed of Ismailis. Quhistan, and further on a substantial part of the Kirman province, Fars, Isfaha, and especially the distress belt of the Caspian mountains contained a considerable proportion of the Ismailis."[28] Under Hasan bin Sabbah who had become the official representative, or hujjat, (lit. proof) of the imam, these small communities were organised, and to them was emphasised the doctrine of ta'lim, authoritative teaching, whereby belief in the absolute authority of imamat was deemed indisputable.[29] It is perhaps necessary to remind ourselves that for the Ismailis, acceptance of the imam of the time and absolute obedience to him created the singleness of purpose essential for their survival in the face of

opposition.

Between 1094 A.D. and 1162 A.D., despite the fact that the *imams*, had not publicly proclaimed themselves and thus their identity was by no means known for certain, Nizari Ismailism acquired an immense power in Persia, and beyond her territories, stretching, according to Hodgson, from the "...Hindu Kush foothills to the Mediterranean for two centuries."[30] Hasan bin Sabbah died in 1124 A.D. and was succeeded by two more *da'is*, Kiya Buzurg Umid and his son Kiya Muhammed. In 1162 A.D., Hasan ala Dhikri hi-s-salam assumed the authority of the mission, and during his reign occurred the most important events in the history of Alamut. He was more inclined towards a spiritual interpretation of Ismailism, and he relaxed the rigid observance of *shari'a*. This tendency culminated on the seventeenth day of Ramazan, 1164 A.D. in the "Great Resurrection", *qiyamat al-qiyamat*, at Alamut.[31] On this day Hasan Ala Dhikri hi-salam broke the ritual fast, proclaimed himself *imam* and caliph, and declared the non-necessity of adhering to "the rites of religious law and established habits of worship." The underlying theme of the *qiyama* was an emphasis on spiritual discipline, an awareness of the *batin* as being fundamentally more exalted than the *zahir*. The accent on esoteric truth became more heavily pronounced and the equilibrium of the *zahir-batin* dualism of Fatimid Ismailism was no longer retained.

The qiyama gave a new dimension to the doctrine of imamat. With emphatic reiteration on "spiritualism", to see merely the physical body of the imam became somewhat unimportant, true recognition of the essence of imamat lay in the esoteric understanding of his personality. Imam Hasan ala dhikri-his-salam died in 1166 A.D. "a martyr to his new doctrine"[32] which nevertheless was upheld and elaborated by his son and successor who ruled for forty-four years. He died in 1210 A.D. and his son, Jalal al-Din, dissatisfied with the doctrines of the qiyama, imposed the sharia once again.[33] Between this year and 1256 A.D. when the Ismaili enclave of Alamut was razed to the ground by the Monogol invasion, a new period of occultation ensued. "This time it was not the Imams themselves that were hidden, as in the earlier period of occultation, but the true nature of their mission. When the inner truth was concealed, it did not matter greatly what outward form of legal observance was adopted."[34] It is perhaps this external conformity that helped the Ismaili movement to survive, for Imam Rukmud-din Khurshah, the last khudavand, lord, of Alamut was murdered in 1257 A.D. and the "....Mongols managed with zeal and much hard labour to destroy all that had been created in a hundred and sixty-six years of vision and resourcefulness."[35]

His son Imam Shamsuddin Muhammed is said to have been carried to Azerbaijan where the subsequent imams lived as sufi shaykhs.[36] Sufism provided a camouflage for the imams and their followers and enabled them to survive the crippling

blow dealt by the Mongols.

The imams thus continued to live in Sufi guise, and a rather long period of obscurity marks Ismaili history between the destruction of Alamut in 1256 A.D. and the beginning of the 19th century when the imams emerge once again, this time, as noblemen as the court of the Shah of Persia for a brief period. Imam Khalilillah II, the forty-fifth imam in the lineage that we have been tracing, enjoyed a favourable position at the court of the Persian ruler Fateh Ali Shah. As a result of a quarrel, the imam was murdered in 1817. To appease the followers of the imam, the Shah gave to the son and successor of the deceased imam, Hasan Ali Shah, the governorship of the Qumm and Mehelat districts of Persia, and the hand of one of his daughters in marriage. He further conferred upon the imam the title of Aga Khan,[37] and it is by this title that the succeeding imams are known to subsequent history. On the death of Fateh Ali Shah in 1834, civil war broke out in Persia and the imam was actively involved in it. Personal animosity of the Prime Minister of the Shah and court intrigues against the imam led to a revolt in Kirman in 1838 by Imam Hasan Ali; he was overwhelmed by the ruling party, and was forced to flee. He escaped to Sind in 1840, and later he helped the British in their "process of military and imperial expansion northwards and westwards from the Punjab."[38] He eventually settled in Bombay in 1848 where he established his new headquarters.

Here "he was received by the cordial homage of the whole Khojah population of this city and its neighbourhood,"[39] It is of direct relevance to this study to ask who the Khojas were, and why they should have accorded so cordial a homage to the imam. Besides, events which occurred between this time and the death of Imam Hasan Ali Shah in 1881, in particular the High Court Case of 1866 were to have important repercussions on the Ismaili community in India and elsewhere. But before dealing with this aspect of Ismaili history, the history of the imams themselves needs to be completed. At his death in 1881, Aga Khan I was succeeded by his son Imam Ali Shah, Aga Khan II, who died soon after assuming the imamat in 1885. The third Aga Khan, Sultan Muhammad Shah, became the forty-eighth imam in August 1885 at the age of eight years. It is under his imamat that the Ismaili community in Kenya was virtually born and nurtured. Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah died in 1957 when his grandson Shah Karim al-Husseini became the forty-ninth imam of the Ismailis. The imamat of the last two imams will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters.

This exposé which chronologically brings us to contemporary events in Ismaili history would nevertheless be incomplete without discussing a recurring and prominent feature of Ismailism, that of the dawa, or missionary activity of preaching and conversion, undertaken by the da'is under the aegis of the imams. It is necessary to do so in order to trace the origin of the Khoja Ismailis of India, and consequently of the Ismailis of Kenya.

Ismaili da'is were active in Northern India during the period preceding the Fatimid conquest of North Africa in 909 A.D.[40] By the time of the Fatimid Imam al-Mu'izz, Multan was an important scene of Fatimid - Ismaili activity, and an epistle of the imam to his chief da'i in Sind illustrates that he had a "powerful following" there.[41] Discussing the same, Hollister comments:

> "....the epistle shows how closely bound the community was, even when great distance separated them." (42)

What is significant is that a communiqué of this sort reflects the concern shown by the imam in the work of his da'i. The Nizari dawat continued to promote the process of conversion and Ismailis in India increased in number, by this time, trade connections between Persia and India were already established,[43] and this may well have facilitated the task of the missionary who followed in the wake of the merchant - trader.

To understand, however, the nature of the task undertaken by the da'is or pirs as they came to be called in Khoja Ismaili tradition, a glance at the social order in India and the religious beliefs of its people is important.

Hindu society is basically made up of castes, which are exclusive social groups. Membership to a caste is determined by birth, and unless expelled or ostracised, an individual remained bound to this endogamous group, and was unable to change his

social status. There was barely any social intercourse, and the castes remained self-contained communal groups, independent of each other even though they often shared a common dialect. In fact to perpetuate the caste system was considered a moral and a sacred duty, and this tradition was deeply embedded in the society. Consequently, the customs and practices of each caste varied, as did the status of each in the religious hierarchy. According to the latter, the upper castes were considered more holy whereas the lower ones were virtually the least religious. As Welty explains:

> "the caste system conforms to the law of spiritual progression because the most spiritual caste, the Brahmins, occupy the top position in the system, while the least spiritual, the outcastes, occupy the lowest position." (44)

This made for a rather complicated social system, and the unequal social status brought little relief to the poor classes. Therefore, when Islam penetrated into India, the idea of religious and social equality and justice and brotherhood of man, proved to be a liberating force, as opposed to the "spiritually and materially hierarchical view of religion and society" advocated by Hinduism.[45]

In this milieu, the pirs concentrated their efforts of conversion, and their activity reached its zenith in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Of these pirs, no authentically reliable data is available, the dates of their births and deaths remain undetermined. But the legacy that they

have bequeathed to the community of converts, to the Khoja Ismailis, in the form of ginans, religious hymns that they composed, has been reverently treasured to the present day. From these ginans emerge a wealth of information regarding the activities of the pirs, their relationship to other pirs, the names of the imams under whom they preached the Ismaili faith, as well as the doctrines, that they advocated.

In order to make Ismaili doctrines such as imamat understandable to a fundamentally polytheistic society, with its rigidly-observed caste structure, the pirs acquainted themselves with Hindu traditions and ideas, and they learnt native dialects. The language obstacle thus overcome, in their compositions the pirs adopted Hindu style and terminology and in deference to the proselytes they further adopted Hindu names. Pir Nur-ud-din for example called himself Nur Satagur, "teacher of true light", and to him is attributed the conversion of the low castes of Gujerat, the Kanbis, the Kharwas, and the Koris.[46]

The missionary was an itinerant preacher, and he moved constantly from place to place. Of Pir Shams who settled in Multan we are told that he travelled through twenty-four countries including Punjab, Kashmir, Badakshan, Sind and Multan.[47] Around the personality of Pir Shams are woven legends of a Sufic type[48] and it is possible to detect from the ginans, that the pirs who came from Persia and who maintained contact with the imams in Persia, included Sufi thought in their works. "Their doctrines generously mixed with sufism, absorbed much of

the Hinduistic doctrine which probably in the course of centuries was incorporated into local Ismailism."[49] This synthesis of traditional Hindu concepts with Ismaili ideals gave birth to the Satpanth religion, the religion of the "True Path".

Tradition preserved among the Khoja Ismailis shows that they were converted by Pir Sadardin who was sent to India by Imam Islam Shah in the mid-fifteenth century.[50] The Hindus of the Lohana caste that the pir converted to Satpanth Ismailism received the title Khwaja, which has been corrupted to Khoja. The word Khwaja is usually translated to mean a "disciple", or "the honorable or worshipped convert", "lord" or "master".[51] "The title Khwajah meaning Lord which they received on their conversion to Islam from their Pir Sadr-ud-din seems a translation of the title Thakkar or Thakur by which Lohanas are addressed."[52] It is Pir Sadardin who is directly connected with the development of the Ismaili sect in India. He is acknowledged as the founder of the first "Khana or Khoja religious lodge"[53] which is referred to in this study as the jamat khana. The only reference indicative of the establishment of the jamat khana is to be found in a ginan entitled Jannatpuri (the city of Paradise) composed by Sayyid Imam Shah:[54]

> "Then came Pir Sadru'din who spread the religion. He began to guide the people openly on the right path, and openly built a jamat khana at Kotla (Kotala).
>
> "He converted many Hindus to Islam. He converted the Lohanas, and made them known as Khojas, because they firmly believed in him.....

> "Thus the Khojas have become the worshippers and followers of Ali and of his descendants. The religion then spread, and jamat khanas were built according to the advice of the Pir.
>
> "The first jamat khana belonged to the Queen Surja.....

Of the jamat khana, it seems that there is no further mention in Ismaili literature, and we first hear of it in an external document, in the judgement of 1866 when this institution is described in some detail.

As did the pirs before him, Pir Sadru'din too made concession to Hindu beliefs, and his treatise the Das Avatar, translated as the ten incarnations, marks the culminating point of the Indian form of Ismailism. In this religious document, the pir outlined the Hindu belief in the incarnation of the god Vishnu, and re-interpreted it by attributing to Imam Ali the tenth and final epiphany of God. The Das Avatar"was written to procure conversion by adopting as in great part true the religious standpoint of the intended converts."[55] This, we have noticed is the procedure adopted by the pirs in their preaching and in their writings - they absorbed the prevailing ideas of Hinduism and incorporated them with those they wished to impart to the people.

Finally, how is the successful proselytisation to be explained? Ivanow[56] attributes it to the religious zeal and enthusiasm of the preachers, and to the acute discontent with the established order as a result of economic distress and the

unequal strata of the society. Arnold says:

> "The conversion of Khojas from Hinduism to Islam was entirely due to the peaceful penetration of the missionaries and we hear of no instance where force was employed. The missionaries who came down from Alamut to preach the faith of Ismailism were specially trained for the purpose and they gained their success by adapting themselves to the local conditions and by leading a simple and religious life." (57)

The converted Khojas seem to have spread from Sind into Kutch and Kathiawar and throughout Gujerat to Bombay, [58] and it is this community that welcomed the first Aga Khan when he arrived there in 1848. They professed themselves as Ismaili Muslims, but a definite Hindu influence permeated through their ceremonies, especially those pertaining to marriage and funeral rites. Thus the kind of cultural group that emerged from the process of conversion in the form of Ismailis of India had Ismaili as well as Hindu traits inherent in its formal make-up. The Ismaili religion evolved over a long period and over vast regions, and it meant different things at different times and places. Having shown this, the study now concentrates on what it means today to the present-day community in Kenya.

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CHAPTER THREE

ISMAILI SETTLEMENT IN KENYA AND ESTABLISHMENT OF JAMAT KHANAS

Before we focus our attention on the study of the jamat khana proper, it is essential to account for the presence of the Ismaili community in Kenya. This settlement dates back to the nineteenth century when Ismailis from India first left their homeland and settled along the East African coast, and later penetrated into the interior. The study does not seek to analyse at great length either the historical circumstances that prompted migration in the first place, or the composition of the emigrants, or conditions that favoured settlement, and difficulties that the settlers encountered. In fact, a recent study[1] deals extensively with the question of migration of Ismailis from India to Tanzania. Nevertheless, for our purposes a succinct historical review of the process of migration to the East African coast will shed some light on these questions, even though this may be in a somewhat limited sense. It will also provide a background against which the community, once established, functioned, for, with settlement inland, there were established jamat khanas, and thus the pattern of communal life familiar to the migrants.

There seems to be a lack of family papers among the Ismailis which deal with their origins in Kenya, or with the early phase of settlement in the country. Nor do we have any specific documents related to the subject. Historical works on

the Asians in East Africa in general make mention of the presence of the Ismailis in East Africa in the nineteenth century, along with that of other Indians. Moreover, migration of the Ismailis did not take place on a communal basis, but independently, as part of the whole process of migration of the Indians to East Africa. However, from these records, we learn that the Indian Ocean network of trade connected the west coast of India to the east coast of Africa, and scattered settlements of Indians were to be found along the African coast from as early as the sixth century B.C.[2] Trade links continued over the centuries and before the advent of the British in the nineteenth century, Indian settlements were well established in Zanzibar, and on the adjacent mainland. In 1860, it was noted that every dhow (sailing ship) from India was full of Ismaili migrants from western India, particularly from the Surat, Kutch and Bombay areas.[3] The Bombay High Court Reports of 1866 recorded the presence of 450 Ismaili families in Zanzibar, who maintained some form of communication with their Imam, Aga Khan I.[4] It would seem that Zanzibar was the primary destination for settlement, and Ismaili records reveal that a jamat khana had already been founded on the island by 1838.[5]

The presence of a jamat khana is indicative of the fact that not only did the migrant seek a new homeland and a better mode of life, but that he was equally anxious to adhere to his religious tradition and to a communal way of life. It reflects an awareness of being a member of the Ismaili persuasion as distinct from any other, and it further reflects the link

maintained between the imam and his followers, wherever they happened to settle. What is, however, of greater significance is that an exclusive place of worship indicates that religious freedom was granted to the settlers by the Sultan of Zanzibar, and later by the British during the colonial era. Being, therefore, assured of religious toleration, as well as social and economic freedom, the Ismailis, like the other groups of Indian migrants, were encouraged to make their homes in East Africa. Pandit[6] remarks that it was the:

> "policy of the Arab rulers on the east coast.... to give every encouragement and assistance to Indian traders and businessmen to permanently settle in East Africa."

Therefore, absence of religious and social restrictions, on one hand, as well as the protection afforded by the authorities on the other, created a favourable environment for long-term settlement.

Nevertheless, in any consideration of an understanding of the process of migration, it is essential to look at the question from the standpoint of the migrant himself. What were the motives that induced the prospective migrant to leave his homeland in the first place? Oral tradition preserved among the Ismaili community indicates that acute poverty in the Kutch, Kathiawad and Gujerat provinces of north-west India was the primary reason for migration. In an attempt to reconstruct in a comprehensive manner the accounts narrated

by Ismaili informants who migrated to Kenya, it appears without much doubt that economic hardships, combined with endemic famine, drought and plague, forced them to look beyond their native land to new horizons. Rupani,[7] an Ismaili author, mentions the years 1856-1857, 1878 and 1900-1901 as periods of very severe droughts in these Indian regions. 1912-1913, 1916-1917, 1919-1920, 1924-1925, and 1937-1938 are subsequent years in which Kathiawad in particular was badly affected by famines.[8] These harsh conditions, combined with various other factors, appear to have acted as major 'push' factors and impelled the Ismailis to emigrate in increasing numbers, both in the nineteenth century and in the first half of the present century.

An issue that needs to be considered in our understanding of the migration process is to show to what extent the migrants were influenced by the policy of the Imam. How did the Imam, who was not in close proximity to his followers since he had established his headquarters in Bombay since 1848 react to this movement whereby increasing numbers of Ismailis left India for 'unknown' Africa? We have seen that the 1866 court-case revealed the presence of an Ismaili community in Zanzibar which was in contact with the Imam at that time, the Aga Khan I. Apart from this recorded evidence, we have to rely on communal tradition which emphatically maintains that the guidance of the Aga Khan III, played an important role in encouraging Indian Ismailis to migrate to East Africa, especially in the present century. As early as 1899, the Aga Khan III had hoped that the plan to settle some 800 Ismailis as agriculturists in German

East Africa, present-day Tanzania, would be feasible. The condition laid down by the German authorities that these prospective farmers should renounce their British status made the idea less attractive, and it was eventually abandoned altogether.[9] In 1905, he urged the Ismailis who were settled in Nairobi then to aid their very poor brethren in India by helping them to establish themselves as farmers in Kenya. The Imam himself would pay their passages from India.[10] It was yet another hope unfulfilled. Even though these plans did not succeed owing to different reasons, they reflect that the Imam was very keen on improving the standard of living of his followers in India by moving them to East Africa.

However, we have no evidence to show that migration of the Ismailis was at any time organised on a communal basis. A large number of informants who migrated to Kenya stressed the fact that they came on their own initiative, and that the advice of the Imam to his followers addressed in the form of farmans, in those instances when they were aware of such farmans definitely determined their decisions to emigrate. Once they had made up their minds to leave India, the farmans added weight to their decisions. Of these farmans, there does not seem to be a written record, with the exception of the 1905 farman quoted in the foregoing paragraph, until the 1920's.[11] But they clearly indicate that they have been reiterated over a period of time. The general belief within the community is that the Ismailis in East Africa prospered and became an affluent community because they adopted the farmans of the Imam. But, it must be

borne in mind that on the whole, the initial decisions to migrate were taken not solely because of the farmans of the Imam, but due to several other considerations. This applied to both the early and the late migrants.

The influence of the farmans varied from one individual to another, and two examples illustrate this point. Kassam Sulemen Damji[12] emigrated from Una in Kathiawad in 1902, destined for Mombasa. He left his home, he recalled, not solely because of poverty, but because he was told of the farman of the Imam, advising Ismailis in Kathiawad to go to Africa. In contrast, the relatively late arrival of Jamal Panchan[13] from Bombay in 1939 to Nairobi reflects his hesitation to leave India, in spite of being aware of the Imam's repeated exhortations to emigrate since 1919. The informant explained that his reluctance to migrate was mainly because he was unwilling to make a distinct break with the familiarity of his life-style. Moreover, he had no relatives already in Kenya to whom he could turn to for support, nor did he have the money to finance his voyage. It was only when he overcame all these difficulties did he finally migrate in 1939.

What, however, was the pattern of settlement that took place in Kenya? We find that in the 19th century, apart from Zanzibar and the adjacent mainland, the island of Lamu off the coast of Kenya, and the ports of Malindi and Mombasa were also under the jurisdiction of the Sultan of Zanzibar. These places were to attract the migrants as well. Isolated examples of

Ismaili settlers have been recounted. Kassim-Lakha[14] from Kathiawad, for example, settled in Lamu in 1871, a pioneer settler on the island, and he was soon appointed treasurer to the Sultan of Zanzibar. He helped many other Ismaili migrants who arrived in Lamu to find employment and to settle down. One such beneficiary was a young boy of ten, Ismail Nathoo,[15] who reached Lamu in 1888. Although I have been unable to ascertain the exact date when a jamat khana was first founded in Lamu, oral information indicates the presence of a small Ismaili community on the island, as well as a jamat khana, during this period. Today, however, the jamat khana in Lamu is defunct, as most of the Ismailis seem to have moved to the mainland.

On mainland Kenya, migrants settled initially in Mombasa, apparently from 1880 onwards. When Suleman Verjee[16] a fifty-year old Ismaili from the Portuguese territory of Diu in India arrived in Mombasa in 1885, he was helped to start earning his living by making sweetmeats on the verandah of a small shop which belonged to another Ismaili settler by the name of Rattansi Virji. Suleman Verjee, a victim of intense poverty, migrated with his wife and two sons, and by 1890, having prospered to some extent, he sent the passage fares for the rest of his family who had stayed behind in Diu, to join him in Mombasa. Usually, migrants ventured across the ocean on their own, and only later on did they send for their families. The example of Suleman Verjee is typical of many others, and illustrates that he was helped because of communal ties, as was Ismail Nathoo. He in turn helped other Ismaili migrants by giving them employment when

they arrived in Mombasa. The firm of Suleman Verjee and Sons which was established by the end of the last century by his sons, employed a large number of Ismailis. In 1885, Ismaili settlers in Mombasa numbered some twenty to thirty individuals, and Berg in his study of mosques in Mombasa mentions 1885 as the year when the first jamat khana was established in Mombasa at Kuze.[17] Suleman Verjee was appointed mukhi soon after he established himself as a leading Ismaili, and Council records reveal that the first mukhi and kamadia were appointed in Mombasa in 1888.[18]

The migration of these individuals shows that to a very large extent, they came on their own initiative, impelled by very poor economic conditions to seek a better way of life. The influence of the farmans of the imam as has been illustrated varied from one individual to another. It is, however, the later phase of migration at the turn of the century that is more relevant to this study, for in this period we are able to discern a more defined pattern of Ismaili settlement, and the establishment of jamat khanas in the hinterland of Kenya, and consequently the growth of the community. This phase reveals to what extent commmunal affiliations and kinship ties helped the migrant-trader to settle permanently in Kenya. It reveals as well the role the jamat khana played in helping the settler, because, with penetration inland of Ismaili settlers, jamat khanas were founded in those places where the migrants settled. In discussing the growth of Ismaili settlements particularly in Nairobi and in Mombasa, this study shows that all these interrelated factors

greatly contributed to the establishment of the Ismaili community in the country in the early decades of this century. Furthermore, communal solidarity was reinforced by the willingness on the part of the well-established settler to help the newly-arrived migrant, and by the subsequent business ties that were made.

The interior of Kenya began to develop only after the construction of the Mombasa-Victoria Nyanza railway was undertaken from 1896 to 1903. The construction of the railway which began from Mombasa in 1896 provided an incentive to those who were already established at the coast to move inland with the railway in the hope of furthering their trades. These traders got the opportunity of providing the labour force that was employed for the railway-construction with food and other necessary supplies. On the subject of these indentured labourers referred to as "coolies" who were imported from the Punjab area of India, it has been frequently assumed that these labourers laid the beginnings of Indian settlement in Kenya, and generally in East Africa. This clearly is an unfounded assumption, for the majority of the coolies returned to India when their terms of service were completed. Only a mere handful of the labourers stayed on permanently.[19]

Settlements in the interior therefore resulted directly from the penetration of the already-established coastal firms of Suleman Verjee, Alidina Visram, and others, who followed the railway into the interior. In fact Alidina Visram who arrived

in Zanzibar in 1863 had reached Uganda as much as twenty years before the railway reached Kisumu on the shores of Lake Victoria in 1901.[20] Alidina Visram's trading posts throughout Kenya which included places as remote as Kitui, Baringo, Eldama Ravine, and Londiani, among many others, helped many a settler to establish himself. Yet another Ismaili, Bandali Jaffer from Kutch, arriving in Mombasa in 1895, went onto Uganda in the same year and was one of the first traders to cater for the needs of the Uganda railway.[21] Ismail Nathoo, who we saw arrived in 1888, left Lamu for Mombasa in 1898, having gained sufficient experience as an apprentice to a tailor. He joined the survey team for the construction of the railway on its preliminary trip into the interior, and reached Nairobi in 1899 where he opened his own tailoring shop in the "Indian Bazaar", present-day Biashara Street. These are but isolated examples of individual Ismailis, but they serve to indicate that having taken the initiative necessary to migrate, trade prospects provided the incentive required for penetration inland, and permanent settlement. However, not all settlers had equal success, in fact there is much evidence to show that many businesses had to be closed down, and many employees remained employees, because they failed to become successful shop-keepers themselves.

With penetration into the interior of the railway, by 1897 Indian traders had settled at Voi, Kibwezi and Machakos, all of which were along the railway line.[22] Once again, oral information suggests that Ismailis were part of these

settlements, although no demographic information is available. Jamat khanas were established in these places by the end of the century, according to the data collected from the interviews. That jamat khanas were definitely to be found in these places, among many others in the country, is first recorded in the Constitution of 1914, by which time jamat khanas in Kenya numbered as many as twenty.[23] Difficult as it is to verify exactly when a number of Ismailis gathered in a particular place to warrant the need of a jamat khana, it seems to be practically certain that wherever Ismaili settlements began to grow, the first communal institution that was conceived of was the jamat khana. It is important, not merely to state where and when jamat khanas were established, but also to be able to determine the role of this major communal institution in aiding the migrant to settle in a fundamentally different society.

It is to this very central and basic institution of the Ismaili community that we must now focus our attention. Translated as the Khoja Ismaili prayer house, it served a wide range of purposes that were not strictly confined to prayer alone. We have shown that if the migrant sought a better way of life, he did not choose to ignore his religious tradition. Yet in establishing the jamat khana he did not merely assert his religious exclusiveness, but also his communal attachment. The jamat khana became the refuge for the migrants on arrival, and the focal-point for the growing community. On arrival, very often the migrants sought shelter in the jamat khana,

for they knew no one and did not always have pre-arranged employment. Both K.S. Damji who arrived in 1902 and J. Panchan who arrived much later in 1939, spent their first days in the shelter of the jamat khana. Their destination was not just Nairobi or Mombasa, it was particularly the jamat khana in that place. Both these settlers found that the jamat khana was the only place to which they could resort to initially. They slept in the jamat khana compound, and their meals were provided by other Ismaili settlers. Until they found employment, the jamat khana provided the essential facilities for the Ismaili settlers. Thus a sense of communal solidarity was enhanced by the fact that every Ismaili, whether he was a well-established settler or a newly-arrived one, could repair to the jamat khana without any inhibitions. Migration to a foreign land and settlement therein did not affect either their devotion to their imam and to their religion, or their communal affinity. In this respect, as in every other, the later migrant must have settled down with comparative ease since he rejoined a community which in its basic out-look, its habits of everyday life, and what is much more important, in its religious and cultural values, was no different fundamentally from the one that he left behind in India.

It is of particular interest to us to show how the jamat khana initially came about in any one place. Who contributed to the construction of a jamat khana and to the expenses incurred? What factors determined the choice of a

site for putting up a jamat khana? We find that in a place where the Ismailis were few in number, the jamat khana was a room set apart in the house of an Ismaili, usually the mukhi. Ismailis who settled in Mumias, a small village one hundred and fifty miles from Kisumu recall that from 1901 when the jamat khana was first founded, to 1912 when the Mumias jamat numbered over a hundred, the jamat khana was just a room in the house of the mukhi. A proper jamat khana was built only after 1912, and it functioned until 1972-1973. It has since been closed as Ismailis from Mumias seem to have moved to Kisumu.[24]

As the number of Ismaili settlers increased, funds were collected either to rent a building, or a new building altogether was put up to serve the purpose. Buildings in those days were usually made of corrugated iron-sheets, and both descriptions and photographs of jamat khanas in the early decades of this century reveal a very simple structure. Even when cement and stone came into use, many jamat khanas retained the original structure of corrugated iron-sheets until quite recently. In Lamu, for example, a jamat khana was established by the end of the last century. However, a concrete building was put up only in 1941. Other places on the mainland illustrate similar accounts. At the coast, the Malindi jamat khana was completed in 1974. Machakos which had a jamat khana at the turn of the century changed over from corrugated iron-sheets to cement as recently as 1964. In the major centres of Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu, the years 1920-1922 witnessed this changeover.[25] Informants recall the first jamat khanas in these centres,

and the construction of the jamat khanas as they stand today. The present Kuze jamat khana in Mombasa stands on the same site as the original one in 1885.

The establishment of the four Nairobi jamat khanas offers a parallel to the growth of the Ismaili community in the capital. The original jamat khana founded by 1900 stood where the Nairobi Fire Brigade has its main centre today. Between 1900 and 1920, Ismaili settlement in Nairobi which clustered in the Indian Bazaar-River Road area increased considerably. At the corner adjoining Government Road and River Road, a piece of land was acquired, plans for the construction of a jamat khana were drawn up, and sent to the imam for approval. Funds for the building were collected, and construction was begun in 1920. Communal leaders, the mukhi and kamadia closely supervised the construction, and a plaque at the jamat khana still bears the names of all those who contributed considerably towards the expenses of the erection of the building. The jamat khana was declared open in 1922. It stood exactly as it does today, except that within the confines of the building, the ground-floor housed a daytime secular school. Today the same hall serves as a centre for religious education.[26]

Three years later, in 1925, a second jamat khana was built in Pangani as many Ismailis had settled in the area. But it was only in the 1930's that a tendency to move away from the town area to the suburbs began in Nairobi. By 1932, a third jamat khana in Parklands was established. The founding

of a jamat khana in Parklands initiated a phase for the beginning of an entire communal complex in the area. The Ismaili club had been opened just a year earlier, in 1931. In 1964, adjacent to the Parklands jamat khana, the Diamond Jubilee Hall was built. It later was converted to the jamat khana when the original place of worship was found to be too small. This was yet again extensively expanded, and the new Parklands jamat khana was completed only in December 1974. Opposite to the jamat khana, a primary school was built in 1951. In 1952, a housing scheme was set up in the same area. Other housing schemes followed in 1953-1954, and 1955. The Aga Khan Hospital was erected in 1958, and the Ismaili cultural centre was set-up in 1958-1969. The Parklands complex therefore reveals the propinquity of the various communal institutions ranging from a school, and communal residences, to recreation centre and hospital as springing up as close to the jamat khana as possible. It reveals that only when a number of Ismailis had made the Parklands area their residence that the need for a jamat khana in that region was realised. It was only after the establishment of the jamat khana that the construction of the other institutions was made feasible.[27] The growth of the Parklands area illustrates a tendency to settle in a region where members of the community were already settled. This tendency to cluster in one area led to the establishment of a cohesive unit within the community comprising of institutions that catered for all the requirements of the Ismailis.

The original Pangani jamat khana was replaced by a much larger one, the Forthall Road jamat khana built in 1958. An article in a communal magazine on the opening of the new jamat khana explained that the site had been chosen owing to the presence of a large number of Ismailis resident in the area.[28] Moreover, the Ngara flats which housed ninety Ismaili families were not too far from the new jamat khana, and would thus benefit from the proximity of the institution. This indicates that the institution of the jamat khana was given priority over other communal institutions both in urban as well as in rural areas. In fact, unlike the Parklands area, no communal institutions apart from the jamat khana were constructed either in the Pangani area, or in Eastleigh where in the following year, in 1959, a fourth jamat khana was established.

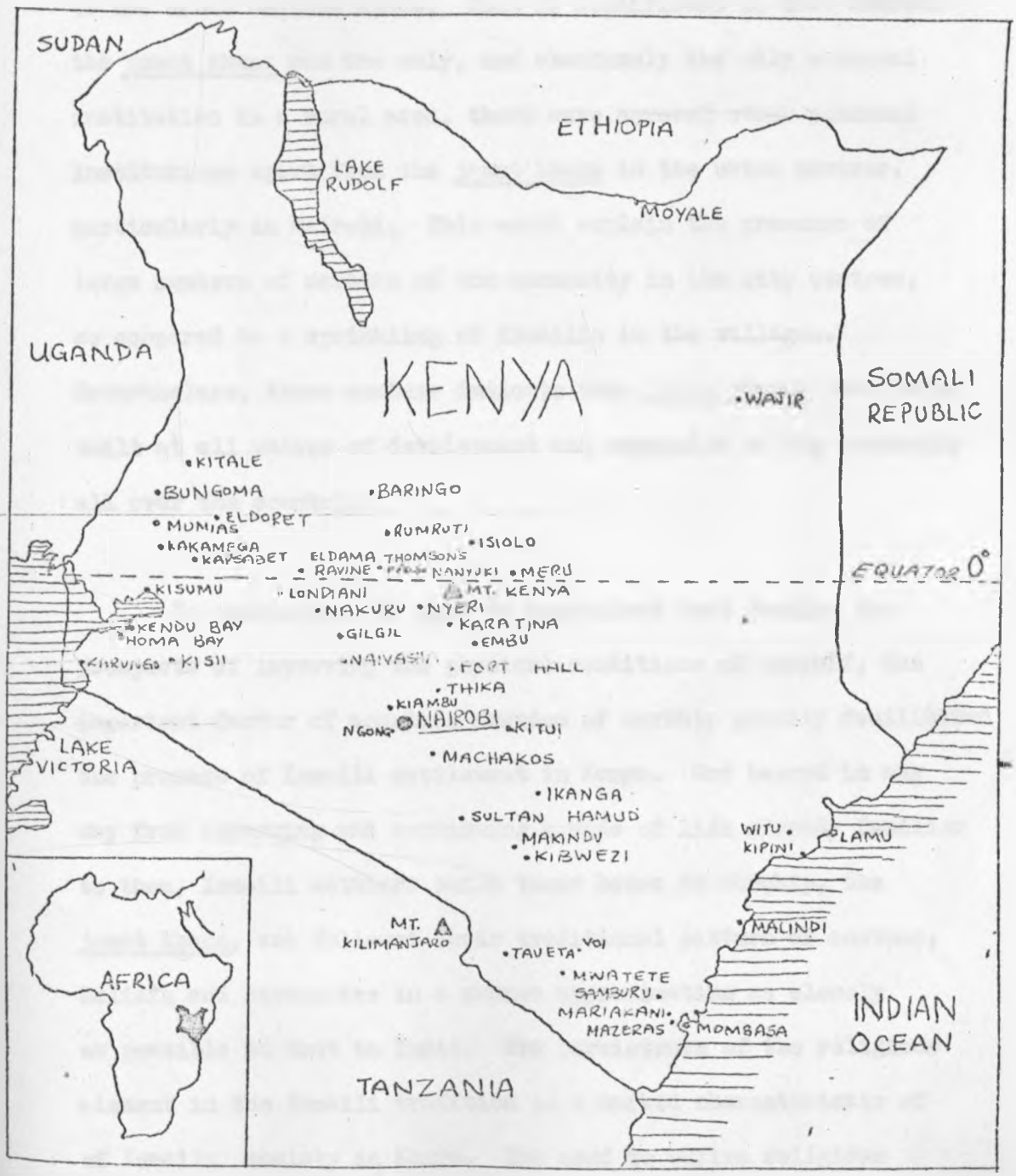
The Ismaili population of Nairobi was estimated at that time to be around 5,000.[29] As estimate of the Ismaili population in Kenya in the same period was put at 10,000,[30] which means that half the community was located in Nairobi. In 1963, the figure given was 18,000 in the country.[31] Besides these indications, and the fact that the building of jamat khanas in different parts of the city must have resulted as a consequence of increasing population within the community, no demographic information, or any specific data relating to population growth is available to confirm such a conclusion.

Nevertheless, the establishment of the three jamat khanas in Mombasa seems to point to this inference of increasing size

of the Ismaili community. In 1885, there were about twenty Ismailis when Kuze jamat khana was founded. A larger jamat khana was rebuilt in 1921, and until 1955, it was the only jamat khana in Mombasa. Only after a lapse of seventy-five years, was a second jamat khana put up in 1955 in the Makupa area, and a third one in 1958 in Tudor. By this period, Ismailis in Mombasa numbered 2,548, and it is evidently the growth of the community that justified the jamat khana establishment. "The Ismaili Khoja mosques (that is jamat khanas) are especially related to population increases, as both were designed as focal points for well co-ordinated and self-contained Ismaili housing projects."[32] Both Tudor and Makupa contain Ismaili housing schemes, comparable to those in Nairobi. However, if jamat khana foundations are the only indications to go by, they reveal that the growth of the Ismaili community in Nairobi was relatively rapid compared to that in Mombasa.

Therefore, the establishment of the four jamat khanas in Nairobi, and three jamat khanas in Mombasa are indicative of the fact that large numbers of Ismailis were concentrated in these two urban centres. However, the jamat khana as a visible symbol of attachment to the Ismaili tradition was to be found in remote places in the country as well. These included Rangwe, Oyugis, Sio Trading Centre, Yalla, Wajir, Kiu and Mwatate among very many others, as indicated on the map. The number of jamat khanas in the country had increased from twenty in 1914 to almost ninety in 1954.[33] Thus over a period of forty years, the rise in the construction of the jamat khanas was virtually four

SITES OF JAMATKHANA ESTABLISHMENTS SINCE 1888 IN KENYA



and a half times. Once again, except for conjecturing that these figures reflect the growth of the community in Kenya at a steady rate, we have no documentary evidence to conclusively show the parallel between Ismaili settlements and the establishment of the jamat khanas. Nor were these ninety jamat khanas confined to the urban centres alone. What is significant is that whereas the jamat khana was the only, and absolutely the only communal institution in a rural area, there were several other communal institutions apart from the jamat khana in the urban centres, particularly in Nairobi. This would explain the presence of large numbers of members of the community in the city centres, as compared to a sprinkling of Ismailis in the villages. Nevertheless, these numbers indicate that jamat khanas were being built at all phases of development and expansion of the community all over the country.

In conclusion, it must be emphasised that besides the prospects of improving the physical conditions of oneself, the important factor of complete freedom of worship greatly facilitated the process of Ismaili settlement in Kenya. Not barred in any way from observing and continuing a mode of life already familiar to them, Ismaili settlers built their house of worship, the jamat khana, and followed their traditional pattern of customs, beliefs and ceremonies in a manner approximating as closely as possible to that in India. The persistence of the religious element in the Ismaili tradition is a marked characteristic of of Ismaili society in Kenya. The need to affirm religious sentiments and to assert social and cultural separateness, was

made possible through the institution of the jamat khana.

The jamat khana was the first, and frequently the only institution to be established, and this was especially true of rural Ismaili settlements in the country. Furthermore, jamat khanas became temporary homes of the migrant-settlers, and both the religious and the social needs of the Ismaili community were realised in the jamat khana. Communal ties were reinforced by the willingness to help the newly-arrived migrants, and this association enhanced communal solidarity. The jamat khana was the focus of communal activity, and it combined to create a cohesive unit of the community, and the study now shows exactly how this need is expressed today and what particular features of the jamat khana have been conducive towards creating cohesiveness in the Ismaili community.

Footnotes

1. Walji, Shirin, Ismailis on Mainland Tanzania, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1969; Walji, Shirin, A History of the Ismaili Community in Tanzania, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1974.

2. Coupland, East Africa and its Invaders, 1938, p. 16; Burton, Zanzibar, City, Island and Coast, I, 1872, p. 39; Morris, S. "Indians in East Africa", 1956, p. 195, British Journal of Sociology, Vol. VII, No. 3.

3. Kritzeck, Islam in Africa, 1969, p. 143.

4. Picklay, History of the Ismailis, 1940, p. 141; Morris, "Divine Kingship of the Aga Khan", 1958, p. 463.

5. Alidina J. Paroo, "Chaitnya Yug", Salegrah Ank, 13 June, 1933, pp. 36-38, list of Mukhis and Kamadias of Zanzibar Jamat Khana, 1838-1933.

6. Pandit, S. Asians in East and Central Africa, 1963, p. 66; see also Hollingsworth, The Asians of East Africa, 1960, p. 20; Morris, The Indians in Uganda, 1968, p. 3.

7. Rupani, J.P., Africano Vepar ane Hindio, 1937, p. 132.

8. Walji, op.cit., 1969, p. 30.

9. Aga Khan, India in Transition, 1918, p. 120; see also Mangat, History of the Asians, 1969, p. 46.

10. Kalam-e-Imam-e Mubin, Part I, 1953, (farman no. 139) Nairobi, 6.10.1905, pp. 328-9.

11. ibid., Part II, Nairobi, 21.3.26, p. 114; Nairobi, 25.3.1926, p. 121; Zanzibar, 27.1.37, p. 205.

12. Oral information provided by Kassam Suleman Damji.

13. Oral information provided by Jamal Panchan.

14. Oral information provided by Mrs. Nurbanu Tejpar, granddaughter of Kassim-Lakha.

15. Oral information provided by Dr. Hassanali Ismail Nathoo, son of Ismail Nathoo. (Families of both Kassim-Lakha and Ismail Nathoo are prominent members of the Ismaili community in Kenya).

16. Oral information provided by Count Nazarali M. Suleman Verjee, and Abdulmuhammad K. Suleman Verjee, grandsons of Suleman Verjee.

17. Berg, F.J. & Walter, B.J. "Mosques, Population and Urban Development in Mombasa", in Hadith I, Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Historical Association of Kenya, 1967, p. 64.

18. Personal communication from H.H. The Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili Provincial Council, Mombasa, dated January 7, 1975. List of names of Mukhis and Kamadias at Kuze jamat khana in Mombasa dates from 1888 and indicates S. Verjee as the first Mukhi.

19. Morris, loc.cit., 1956, p. 195; see also Kritzeck, op.cit., 1969, p. 142; Pandit, op.cit., 1963, p. 16; 18, 45.

20. Delf, G. Asians in East Africa, 1963, p. 3.

21. Pandit, op.cit., 1963, pp. 51-53; 68; 77-82.

22. Hollingsworth, op.cit., 1960, p. 51.

23. See Rules and Regulations of the Shia Imami Ismailia Council, 1914, art.17, p. 60.

24. Oral information provided by Gulamhussein Meghji Dossa and Nurmuhammad Valji Jetha.

25. Information made available from H.H. The Aga Khan's Estate Department for Africa, Nairobi.

26. Information on the construction of the Nairobi jamat khana provided by Count Nazarali Verjee and Mukhi Remu Verjee. The Verjee family was largely responsible for the construction of this jamat khana.

27. Information obtained from the plaques outside the communal institutions in question. These plaques bear the dates of both the foundation-stone laying ceremony as well as the opening ceremony of the institution.

28. Ismaili Prakash, Vol. II, No. 1, January 9, 1959, Mombasa, p. 7.

29. ibid..

30. Vaghela, ed., East Africa Today (1958-1959), p. 83.

31. Delf, op.cit., 1963, p. 6.

32. Berg, op.cit., 1967, p. 76.

33. The Constitution, Rules and Regulations of H.H. The Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismailia Councils of Africa, 1954, Ch. III, p. 13.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE JAMAT KHANA IN PRESENT DAY KENYA: ITS STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

From the very first period of Ismaili settlement in Kenya, the establishment of the jamat khana was given priority over other communal institutions by the migrant Ismaili community. This has been the central theme of the preceding chapter, and we have shown that jamat khanas were built wherever Ismailis settled in the country. To this focal communal institution, we must now direct our attention. However, before giving a theoretical description of the structure of the jamat khana, it would not be irrelevant to briefly describe the informants who were interviewed. The survey that was conducted within the Ismaili community in Nairobi highlights some of the features of the community in the capital today. Furthermore, it will provide for our use an essential dimension in analysing the data - other than mere description and theory - the attitudes of individual Ismailis towards the jamat khana, as well as the influence of age, sex and occupation on their attitudes.

A SOCIO-ECONOMIC DESCRIPTION OF INFORMANTS IN NAIROBI

The sample framework of interviewees on the jamat khana numbered a total of 61 respondents, which was 10% of the total number of Ismailis listed in Nairobi. Of those interviewed, 34 were male and 27 were female, and thus the sex-ratio was found to be equi-proportionate. The ages of the respondents ranged

from 20 to 75, and classified under the following age brackets as shown in table 2, they numbered as follows:

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY AGE

Age Group	20-29	30-39	40-49	Over 50	TOTAL
Number	12	21	17	11	61
Percentage	20	34	28	18	100

In analysing the data, specific age groups will be compared to determine whether differences in age influence attitudes to particular questions. Those under 30 years of age for example will be compared with those over 50 years of age to show whether younger people think differently from older people. Within a particular age group, further comparison will be made between the two sexes, to see whether male and female respondents share similar views or have differences of opinion on any particular topic.

Further classification into occupational categories showed that the respondents could be divided into three major groups, and these were further sub-divided according to male and female respondents as shown in table 3. It will be noted that only female respondents comprise the group of non-professionals and almost equal numbers of both the sexes fall into the semi-professional category.

TABLE 3: OCCUPATIONAL BREAKDOWN ACCORDING TO SEX

	Professional		Semi-professional		Non-professional		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	17	50	17	50	0	0	34	100
Female	3	11	16	59	8	30	27	100
TOTAL	20	33	33	54	8	13	61	100

Under the term "professional" were included all those who had had higher education and were highly trained in their various professions, like medicine or law. The "semi-professional" group included businessmen, office employees and students, because these categories of people are neither highly qualified in a professional sense nor lacking in skill or education. The last category mainly included housewives. Given this wide range of occupational categories, it has been possible to examine whether respondents falling in different professions showed any similarities or any disparities in their answers. This was done in order to show whether education has had any definite influence on the understanding of the religion, i.e. whether one's opinions of one's faith, besides being traditional, are subject to change as a result of exposure to education, especially to a western mode of education that has been the system in Kenya. And, as in the age group, further comparison is made between the two sexes within a specific occupation. This categorisation of the respondents into age, sex and occupational groups shows a fairly representative cross-section of the Ismaili community.

The survey found that a large majority of the respondents, 91.8% of the total were born in East Africa. Of the total number, more than half, 62.3% were born in Kenya itself. This information, besides providing another dimension to the sample selected, shows that the views expressed were predominantly of East African Ismailis, in particular of Kenyan Ismailis. The following table 4 illustrates a breakdown of informants according to their place of birth:

TABLE 4: PLACE OF BIRTH OF RESPONDENTS

Place of Birth	Number	Percentage
Nairobi	19	31
Elsewhere in Kenya	19	31
Uganda	4	6
Tanzania	14	24
South Africa	2	3
India	2	3
Pakistan	1	2
TOTAL	61	100

Closely associated with the question on place of birth was a question on the length of residence in Nairobi. As all the informants were interviewed in Nairobi, and as the unit of study is concentrated on Nairobi, it was felt that the length of time spent in Nairobi would reveal to what extent respondents were acquainted with the jamat khana system in

Nairobi as compared to a similar system outside Nairobi. Residency in Nairobi would not necessarily be indicative of the opinions expressed by the respondents, but would add further information on the sample interviewed. Although 19 respondents indicated Nairobi as their place of birth, 17 of them have been lifelong residents in the capital. Seventy-four per cent of the total indicated residency in Nairobi over 11 years. The following table 5 shows at a glance the length of residence of all the informants in Nairobi.

TABLE 5: LENGTH OF RESIDENCE IN NAIROBI OF THE RESPONDENTS

Length of Residence	0-5 years	6-10 years	Over 11 years	Lifelong	TOTAL
Number	6	10	28	17	61
Percentage	10	16	46	28	100

Varying age and occupational groups, as well as a balanced number of both male and female respondents provide a fairly representative cross-section of the Ismaili community in Nairobi. Before embarking on the analysis proper, it is necessary to describe the structure of the jamat khana per se. In Nairobi itself, there are four jamat khanas today, all of which function everyday, and cater for the needs of the six thousand Ismailis resident in the capital. In describing the jamat khana it is important to keep in mind that within this

structural pattern of the jamat khana, the organisation of the congregation, irrespective of its numerical strength, or of its geographical location in the country, is fundamentally the same.

STRUCTURE OF THE JAMAT KHANA

The jamat khana for the Kenyan Ismailis represents the assembly hall for communal prayers. It is usually a large single hall where the congregation known as the jamat, comprising of men, women and children, gathers together for prayers. Men and women sit apart, usually the former to the right and the latter to the left of the hall respectively. The entire floor is covered with mats on which the jamat sits. Low tables upon which food offerings are placed are to be found along the wall-sides. The walls are bare except for the photographs of the imam, the Aga Khan IV. A takht, i.e. a throne, made of wood, symbolising the religious authority and the eternal presence of the imam, is to be found in one of the corners of the jamat khana. The takht is explained in detail at the end of this section.

The Nairobi jamat khanas all have large window-panes which allow in a lot of air and light. The curtains have traditionally been red and green in colour, the two colours of the Ismaili flag.[1] Today, however, it would seem that colour schemes which blend with the rest of the interior décor are given preference to the traditional red-green combination. Apart from this customary lay-out in the jamat khana, modern gadgets like clocks, fans, air conditioning, electric lighting and

microphone systems have become part of the permanent fixtures of the jamat khana. The entire congregation sits down on the floor for prayers, but against the far end of the jamat khana, chairs are kept for the old and infirm. Flowers in plenty fill vases in the jamat khana adding the final touch to the setting and background that the jamat khana provides for daily communal worship.

This description of the jamat khana structure is essentially true for all the jamat khanas in the country. In its non-essential features such as the architectural design of the building, or the colour of the curtains, there may be some variation, but the basic structure is much the same as described here. Within the precincts of this structural model which remains more or less permanent, individuals of the Ismaili socio-religious system professing common beliefs come together everyday. The jamat khana setting provides the specific region for giving expression to values and symbols understood and shared by the Ismailis. To the jamat khana, therefore, is attached that special significance reserved for a particular site by a group of people adhering to a common value system. Different sites symbolise different values, and the jamat khana site conveys and evokes a range of emotions and responses totally different to those resulting from a site such as a hospital or a school.

As indicated in chapter I, for Kuper and Firey, a particular site becomes symbolically important and creates social solidarity within the group that regularly meets there. In the light of these findings, it will be demonstrated that for the Ismaili community

in Kenya, it is the distinct site of the jamat khana that is conceived of as "sacred" by the community, and that consequently results in integration. The jamat khana structure provides for the study the framework in furthering our understanding of the detailed communal organisation of Ismaili society in Kenya.

Within this structural pattern of the jamat khana, we find that the traditional organisation as described in the 1866 Bombay High Court Reports has largely been retained.[2] The jamat, the congregation, is at the very base of the communal organisation. Each jamat khana has its own local jamat constituting the larger Ismaili community elsewhere in the world. Theoretically and constitutionally, the religious authority and absolute leadership of the entire Ismaili community is vested in the person of the imam. The imam is at the apex of the congretion, but as he cannot be physically present in every congregation to preside over the ritual prayers, his religious authority and leadership are maintained by his appointed representatives, who are known as the mukhi and the kamadia. Every jamat and every jamat khana is thus headed by a mukhi and a kamadia. The mukhi is more senior in position to the kamadia, but both derive their position of authority by virtue of the rights and duties conferred upon them by the imam. Their authority, derived from the imam, is thus recognised and accepted by the entire congregation. These two officials are the most important dignitaries in the jamat khana and are primarily responsible for the smooth functioning of the jamat khana.

Initially the local mukhis were entrusted with all matters concerning communal life - religious, social and economic. They, as local leaders of the community, appointed by the imam and representing his authority, guided the immigrant community in its early phase of settlement in the country. In 1905 when the first council was set up, the mukhi was appointed president of this administrative body.[3] The functions of the mukhi were therefore administrative and secular as well as religious. This wide range of duties came to be defined in the Ismaili Constitution when the latter was drawn up in 1905. With the establishment of specific administrative bodies in the community over the years, the administrative role of the mukhi decreased considerably. Today, the mukhi and kamadia conduct the religious ceremonies in the jamat khana, and arrange the procedures that are to be followed in the jamat khana. Apart from this duty, they preside over funeral rites and perform marriage ceremonies. All the rites of transition of an Ismaili are solemnized in the jamat khana. A new-born Ismaili is formally registered and accepted into the faith by the mukhi-kamadia in the jamat khana, Ismaili marriages are performed in the jamat khana by these two officials and all ceremonies attendant upon death are also conducted in the jamat khana by the mukhi and kamadia of the jamat. The mukhi and kamadia thus witness "les rites de passage" of an Ismaili individual as he goes through these phases in the course of his life. Every jamat khana is essentially the concern of the local mukhi and kamadia who are appointed by the imam to their offices. The appointment is usually for a term of two years, although this period may be extended by the imam.[4] The wives of the mukhi and

kamadia are referred to as mukhiani and kamadiani and they officiate for the female congregation in the jamat khana.

Other officials representing the imam sit next to the mukhi and kamadia in the jamat khana. All these dignitaries therefore face the rest of the congregation. The chairmen and members of the various Ismaili Councils are also appointed by the imam and their primary function is the socio-economic welfare of the community. These councillors sit to the right of the mukhi. To the left of the kamadia sit all those Ismailis who are collectively known as "titleholders". These people have been given titles by the imam for their services to him and to the community. These titles range from "dount" and "vazier" to "alijah" and "huzurmukhi". This category of Ismailis are detailed further on in the study when dealing with the theme of service. Thus we can see that the traditional organisation of the jamat headed by the mukhi and kamadia has given way to a more sophisticated hierarchical structure in the community.

Finally, the body of "volunteers" comprising of men, women and young girls needs to be mentioned. These individuals render all kinds of services to the community, although we shall in this study confine ourselves to their function vis-a-vis the jamat khana. The volunteer corps maintain order and discipline in the jamat khana everyday during the time prayers and religious ceremonies are being conducted. Furthermore, they are responsible for organising the details of rituals, and for keeping the jamat khana clean. Under the supervision of the mukhi and the

kamadia, it is mainly due to the voluntary workers of the community that the jamat khana functions effectively. Originally, the upkeep of the jamat khana was in the charge of the jamatbhai, a male Ismaili who usually resided in rooms attached to the jamat khana. It was his duty to open the jamat khana everyday, and tradition in the community holds that the jamatbhai checked that Ismailis alone entered the jamat khana. Today, he can be regarded as a caretaker of the jamat khana.

A description of the formal structure of the jamat khana cannot be complete without briefly discussing the mode of dress of the jamat in Kenya. This is necessary because "Clothing as an aspect of decorum pertains to the scene as a whole...."[5] and it seems relevant to describe the appearance of the Ismaili community in Kenya. Ismailis do not have any special attire to distinguish them from other minor groups in the country, either for everyday wear or for prayers in the jamat khana. The women wore the traditional Indian dress until the early 1950's when the Aga Khan III urged them to adopt the "colonial" dress, then in the form of a short dress.[6] This was perhaps the first external sign of adaptation to an East African environment in the pre-independence era, a move which was aimed at doing away with an Asiatic way of life.[7] Ismaili women thus were attired in the same manner as women from most western communities, except that in the evenings when they go to jamat khana, a large number wear sarees, an Indian mode of attire. Ismaili men wear the conventional trousers, jacket, shirt and tie and do not have any distinctive traits of dressing.

THE TAKHT AS A SYMBOLIC STRUCTURE IN THE JAMAT KHANA

An aspect of the structure of the jamat khana that merits special attention is that of the takht.

Symbolic value as a visible expression in the jamat khana is embodied in the structure of the takht. The word takht literally means "throne" in Persian. Based on this primary definition of the word is the common understanding of this symbolic structure in the jamat khana. When and where it originated is not definitely known. But given its root-origin, it can be deduced that the pirs from Persia who went to the Indian sub-continent and converted the local people to the Ismaili faith may have found a similar structure among the Hindu groups with whom they came into contact, and adapted it to the new religion. Or, it may have been an innovation altogether. However, there is no concrete evidence which points to these assumptions. Traditionally, therefore, inspite of its indefinite origin, the takht has been the seat which the imam, when present in the jamat khana, sat upon. So that the entire assembly could see him, the seat was a raised-up structure. Made of wood, square or rectangular in shape, it is well-cushioned on all sides. This basic structure has been retained in Kenya and against the back-end of the takht is placed a photograph of the Aga Khan IV, the present imam. It is therefore a tangible expression of the presence of the imam. Incense, as an aromatic and purificatory agency, is burned before it to sanctify the takht - structure. Flowers are regularly placed at the takht by any individual who

wishes to do so, and it is generally believed that these flowers must not be smelt beforehand as they are destined for a sacred place.

Having described the takht, analysis of the information collected on the subject yields varied results and attitudes. Respondents were asked what their personal feelings towards the takht were. More than half of the total number, 57% indicated that it represented for them the symbolic presence of the imam. In the physical absence of the imam, the seat of takht symbolised both the religious authority and the eternal presence of the spiritual head of the community. Being therefore symbolic of the throne of imamat, it was a sacred and a concrete symbol of the existence of God. Symbolism, therefore, in this context, implies the presence and authority to the imam. It was compared by a few informants to an altar in a church, to a shrine in a temple. These comparisons reveal an awareness of the existence of sacred symbols in other religions. Comparisons such as these show an understanding, or a means towards the understanding of symbolism in one's own religion. Intrinsic value attached to concepts and beliefs in one's faith cannot always be explained or justified, and analogies with similar symbols in other religions help towards furthering this understanding, as quite frequently, religious belief finds its expression in symbolism. The takht is that link between the mu'min, the believer, and the imam, tangible and concrete, which provides a convenient object of reverence. Whether it be an altar in a church, a shrine in a temple or a takht in a jamat khana, these external symbols

represent in the minds of the worshipper that unique, isolated area in the place of worship, symbolic of the divine presence.

Apart from this general reiteration of the symbolic presence of the imam, 28% of the respondents gave a more personal emphasis to their understanding of the takht. These informants maintained that it was a place set apart, unique and distinct from any other, in the jamat khana, to which they resorted for a silent, personal prayer. Personal communication made with the Almighty while standing before the takht was a soothing experience. Especially in times of stress, intimate soliloquy at the takht was a source of courage and strength. Here the emphasis on personal prayer as against congregational prayer in the jamat khana is obvious. One respondent confided that a minute spent bowed in prayer before the takht everyday proved to be a source of inspiration in the course of his lifetime. A lot of sentimental attachment is therefore attributed to the takht. The above responses reflect that a symbolic structure like the takht can evoke rather strong emotions in the individual.

The remaining 15% observed that they either did not know the significance of the takht, or did not believe in it, or it specifically meant nothing to them. Compared to the other 85%, these results indicate that this is a specific minority who feel no emotion, sentiment or attachment, who give no value to the takht structure. These responses therefore reveal that a symbol has plural meanings at different levels, and different interpretations are consequently attributed to it.

Whether they believed in it or not, whether they understood its significance or not, all the respondents were then asked if they ever went to the takht when they attended jamat khana prayers. Seventy-two per cent responded that they do go to the takht regularly, or at least when they go to jamat khana whereas the remaining 28% said that they never went to the takht. This question was asked as a follow-up to the first one in order to determine further the importance of the takht to the individual Ismaili. Significant information that comes to light is the assessment shown in the following table, (see table 6) whereby those who understood the significance of the takht were sub-divided into two groups: the first who were in the practice of going to the takht and the other who refrained from doing so, despite the fact that they claimed to understand its significance. In contrast, we have the minor category of respondents who did not understand the meaning of the takht, and yet made their personal communication there, and again, from the same group, those who neither understood, nor practised the act of bowing in prayer at the takht.

TABLE 6: VISITING TAKHT AS DETERMINED BY UNDERSTANDING

	Visit Takht No.	%	Do not Visit Takht No.	%	TOTAL No.	%
Understand Takht Meaning	40	77	12	23	52	100
Do not Understand	4	44	5	56	9	100
TOTAL	44	72	17	28	61	100

The table therefore illustrates that the understanding of a symbolic structure like the takht is a determinant factor in the practice of either visiting the takht or refraining from so doing. A preponderant majority, 77% understand the significance of takht and visit it as well, and again a fairly large number, 56% neither understand its meaning nor visit the takht. In contrast, the remaining 44% do not understand what the takht signifies, and yet they do visit it. This practice is probably a result of habit, of long-established custom as they do not understand its significance. What is, nevertheless, noteworthy is that these attitudes and responses reflect that it is entirely upto the individual to follow a certain practice or not. Furthermore, he indulges in the practice depending upon his understanding of the symbol, and the emotions evoked in him by that symbol.

Further insight was sought by probing into the male and female practice of visiting the takht, in order to determine

whether emotions and sentiments evocative of a symbol are predominant in either sex. It was found that more women, 82%, pray at the takht, than do men, although a large number of men, 65% do so as well. Table 7 depicits the results according to sex.

TABLE 7: VISITING TAKHT ACCORDING TO SEX

Sex	Visit Takht		Do not Visit Takht		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	22	65	12	35	34	100
Female	22	82	5	18	27	100

What is, of course, quite a remarkable coincidence is that, looking at the numbers alone, an equal number of men and women, 22 in each case, do regularly visit the takht. A larger number of men, 12 in comparison with 5 women, do not visit the takht. It can however be concluded that both men and women respond to the takht to a large extent.

The symbolic structure of the takht is, as indicated, interpreted and understood in varying terms by the Ismailis in Kenya. For a good number of Ismailis, it symbolises the presence of the imam, and is a direct association with him. It is a consciousness of the reality that he represents, rather than a wooden image tending towards idolatry. For, "the wise man does not worship the symbol, the shape in clay or wood or

stone, but is thereby, reminded of the invisible substance or reality which they each represent".[8] A symbol is therefore a visible form which represents something other than itself, and consequently has some meaning. What is symbolised is always an object of value, something that is considered to be worth expressing. In the instance of the takht, the religious authority and the presence of the imam is symbolised. Results obtained reveal that no indifferent attitude was shown by the respondents, that they either indicated some positive value, or a negative attitude. This further reflects that a symbol has some kind of a reaction amongst the people in whose system it exists. The jamat khana itself, may be viewed as a visible symbol of the social, cultural and religious identity of the Ismaili people in Kenya.

Having outlined the formal structure of the jamat khana, it will now be meaningful to explain the functions of this institution by means of an analysis based on the survey that was conducted within the Ismaili community in Nairobi.

Operational Definitions

In order to avoid any ambiguity, two of the common terms used in this survey are to be understood according to the following definitions:

1. Religious: for the purpose of the study refers only to acts of worship, prayers, and ritual activity in the jamat khana.

2. Social: is to be understood as referring to any overt group or individual activities inside or outside the jamat khana that do not have any obvious religious connotations according to those who participate in these activities.

FUNCTIONS OF JAMAT KHANA

The following section has been reconstructed mainly from the results derived from the survey. It is significant that only one question from the entire questionnaire was answered 100% in the affirmative by all the respondents. This was the question on the need of a jamat khana, formulated as: "Do you think a jamat khana must be established where Ismailis reside? If so, why?" Irrespective therefore of age, sex, length of residence in Nairobi, or profession of the respondent, each interviewee confirmed the basic assumption that a jamat khana must be founded wherever a number of Ismailis made their home. The reasons given for the need of having a jamat khana obviously varied from one person to another, although a little more than half of the total number: 52% felt that the reason for having a jamat khana is purely a religious one, that is, a jamat khana visualised as a prayer house primarily for the practice of the faith.

Classifying reasons under the term religious, it was found that a typical answer was that only a distinct place, like a jamat khana, could create an effective atmosphere conducive

for prayers. Or another characteristic response was that the jamat khana was the only institution where, without any inhibitions whatsoever, the whole jamat would come together for prayer in congregation. An answer such as this reflects that Ismailis think in terms of, or at least give emphasis to, communal worship. This seems to correspond with the teachings of the imam on the subject of communal prayer. A farman of the 48th Imam Sultan Muhammed Shah, Aga Khan III, for example, which is familiar to all Ismailis, reads as follows:

> "Every Ismaili, young or old must regularly and necessarily attend jamat khana daily and offer prayers in congregation." (9)

The present Imam Karim Shah Aga Khan IV has also reiterated the same views on congregational prayer.[10] Keeping in mind the fundamental belief in the imam of the time, it is possible that the views of the imam can influence the responses and attitudes of the individual Ismaili.

Apart from this emphasis on communal worship, some respondents maintained that the jamat khana was necessary for the upliftment of the soul, for meditation, individual communication with the Almighty and for peace of mind. In recent times, that is, during the imamat of Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III and Karim Shah Aga Khan IV, innumerable farmans on the necessity of meditation and contemplation of the divine vision exhorting the believers not to neglect their spiritual life have been made by both the Imams.[11] Many Ismailis therefore feel that the exercise

of meditation practised in the jamat khana is of immense value and importance. And finally, some respondents held that both the Ismaili faith and the practice of its religious tenets would disintegrate without a jamat khana. These responses reflect that in some form or another, the jamat khana is conceived of as being the core of Ismaili religious life.

The other half of the respondents, 49% felt that the reason for having a jamat khana was religious as well as social. According to our definition of the two terms, this attitude indicates that the jamat khana is envisaged both as a house of prayer and as an exclusive region for the socio-religious life of the community. Responses classified under this section gave importance to the need to maintain contact between members of the community in an informal atmosphere. The jamat khana, we have indicated, permits all Ismailis, from all kinds of backgrounds, to enter it without any restriction whatsoever. This is unlike other Ismaili organisations which usually have specific regulations regarding membership. Therefore, once the formal religious ceremonies in the jamat khana are over, the atmosphere is sufficiently relaxed and informal for social intercourse.

Of these numbers, 18% indicated that the basic need for the establishment of the jamat khana is to enhance the sense of belonging of the individual Ismaili. Respondents maintained that communal feeling and a sense of togetherness was possible only because of an institution like the jamat khana. A majority of them explained their answers in these terms:

> "A Jamat khana must be established because it is the only institution in the Ismaili community that creates for every Ismaili a sense of belonging, a feeling of being together."

Responses such as these indicate that the individual Ismaili does feel the need to belong and to be accepted by the rest of the community. This is a very basic human need felt by any individual, irrespective of the society that he is born in. The fact that the jamat khana is visualised as fulfilling this need, of giving to the individual a sense of belonging, gives us insight into the multi-functional nature of the jamat khana. Keeping the thesis of the study in mind, it is significant that besides obvious answers of the majority that the need to pray and to meet those with whom basic values and beliefs are shared necessitated the establishment of the jamat khana, a small percentage of respondents expressed the basic need of the jamat khana as being an institution which gave them a sense of belonging, a feeling of being together with other Ismailis. This need, realised in the jamat khana, is conducive towards bringing close together individuals and strengthening the integrative bond, an obvious result of frequent contact as argued by Durkheim. Responses explaining the need of the jamat khana are classified below:

TABLE 8: NEED OF THE JAMAT KHANA

	Religious	Socio-Religious	Sense of Belonging	TOTAL
Number	32	19	11	61
Percentage	52	31	18	100

Even though the primary need of the jamat khana may be just for the purpose of prayers, the data obtained from the interviews reflects that the jamat khana is mainly responsible for creating an atmosphere that encourages an interchange of viewpoints where it is practical to meet and to get to know different people. An institution of this nature which opens its doors everyday to all Ismailis undoubtedly promotes frequent and close contact between Ismailis who share a common value system. According to Durkheim, a high level of frequent contact and mutual exchange reinforces social solidarity within a group, and as the foregoing discussion indicates, the institution of the jamat khana makes this feasible for the Ismaili community in Kenya.

The need for the establishment of an institution is very intimately linked with the functions of that particular institution. The distinction between the two, inspite of being a fine one, needs to be clarified here. The question: "Do you think a jamat khana must be established where Ismailis reside, and if so, why?" seeks to know the reasons for giving priority

to a particular institution, in this instance, the jamat khana. It is distinct from the second question which asks: "What, in your opinion is the function of the jamat khana?" This presumes that an already existing institution must necessarily have specific functions to perform. Such a question helped to determine more substantially the jamat khana as essentially a socio-religious institution. The following table 9 shows the distribution of respondents according to the functions indicated.

TABLE 9: FUNCTIONS OF THE JAMAT KHANA

Religious		Socio-Religious		Only Social		TOTAL	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
35	57	25	41	1	2	61	100

It will be noticed that responses classified under each section were somewhat similar to those which explained the need of the jamat khana alone. When both these dimensions were compared, it was found that 81% felt that both the need and the function of the jamat khana was fundamentally 'religious' in nature, whereas 74% indicated that the term 'socio-cum-religious' expressed more accurately the need as well as the function of the jamat khana. From the responses of the majority therefore, we can conclude that the function and the need of the jamat khana are religious as well as social.

To further illustrate the role and function of the jamat khana and also to probe further into the individual understanding, the personal commitment, and attitude towards the jamat khana, respondents were asked either to agree or to disagree with the statement that: "The jamat khana is just a place for prayer." This was an indirect way of defining the functions of the jamat khana. The responses were fairly well-balanced as 56% agreed with the statement whereas the remaining 44% disagreed with it. A higher percentage was expected to agree with the statement because it was based on the assumption that the jamat khana was exclusively a prayer house. Further analysis showed that from among the male respondents, exactly 50% felt that the jamat khana was for prayers alone, and the other 50% felt otherwise. Responses from the female informants were less balanced, with the majority, 63% being inclined to agree with the view that the jamat khana is only for the purpose of prayer, while the remaining 37% disagreed with it. The following table 10 illustrates the responses to the statement according to sex.

TABLE 10.a

RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT THAT:
"THE JAMAT KHANA IS JUST A PLACE FOR PRAYER"
ACCORDING TO SEX

Sex	Agree with the Statement		Disagree with the Statement		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	17	50	17	50	34	100
Female	17	63	10	37	27	100
TOTAL	34	56	27	44	61	100

A further breakdown among the male and female respondents according to age groups showed that there was a marked tendency to agree with the statement among the female middle-age group. Eighty per cent women between 40 and 60 years of age agreed with the statement proposed, and 20% from the same age group disagreed. Responses of the female respondents under the age of 40 were less distinct, as 53% agreed and 47% disagreed with the statement respectively. The male age breakdown did not reveal any significant results. From those who were under the age of 40, almost an equal number 44% accorded with the opinion, whereas 56% did not. In the middle-age group, 45% disagreed whereas 55% agreed with the statement. It can therefore be deduced that disagreement with the statement that the jamat khana is just a place for prayer decreases with increasing age. Table 10.b indicates the results according to sex and age.

TABLE 10.b

RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT THAT:
"THE JAMAT KHANA IS JUST A PLACE FOR PRAYER"
ACCORDING TO MALE AND FEMALE AGE GROUPS

		Agree with the Statement		Disagree with the Statement		TOTAL	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male age group	20-39	7	44	9	56	16	100
	Over 40	10	55	8	45	18	100
Female age group	20-39	9	53	8	47	17	100
	Over 40	8	80	2	20	10	100

Further results were sought by examining two specific occupational categories, a highly skilled group against a group of housewives. Although this was limiting the scope considerably, the results derived show distinct inclinations which were not so evident when analysis was made according to sex and age. The majority of housewives, 88% agreed with the statement, and 12% disagreed with it. In contrast, the majority from the professional group, 70% disagreed whereas the other 30% agreed with the opinion. Such representation definitely indicates that age, sex, education and skilled training do influence attitudes to specific topics. All these variables therefore help explain more of the variance in attitudes and responses. This is even more significant when contrasted with a group of housewives, who are obviously all women, who maintain to a large extent traditional opinions, and who, it may be assumed, have not been educated, or who are not as highly trained as skilled professionals.

TABLE 10.c

RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT THAT:
"THE JAMAT KHANA IS JUST A PLACE FOR PRAYER"
ACCORDING TO OCCUPATION

Occupation	Agree with the Statement		Disagree with the Statement		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Highly skilled	6	30	14	70	20	100
Housewives	7	88	1	12	8	100

Finally, the length of residence in Nairobi of respondents was incorporated as another variable in order to examine another possible source of individual variation in religious attitudes, and hence in individual integration into the community. It was found that just over half the respondents in each category of residence agreed with the statement that the jamat khana is only a place for prayer. A larger number of respondents, 67% who had resided in Nairobi for less than five years were inclined to agree with the statement. On the other hand, relatively equal percentages of residents between 6-10 years fall in both the columns, that is, equal percentages both agree and disagree with the statement. It would seem therefore that respondents who had not lived for more than five years in Nairobi were inclined to be more conservative in their opinions. Long-term residents indicated more disagreement with the statement, thus showing that they perceive the jamat khana both for purposes of prayer as well as for social activity. Table 10.d illustrates these results.

TABLE 10.d

RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT THAT:
"THE JAMAT KHANA IS JUST A PLACE FOR PRAYER"
ACCORDING TO LENGTH OF RESIDENCE IN NAIROBI

Length of Residence	Agree with the Statement		Disagree with the Statement		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
0 - 5 years	4	67	2	33	6	100
6 - 10 years	5	50	5	50	10	100
Over 11 years	15	54	13	46	28	100
Lifelong	10	59	7	41	17	100
TOTAL	34	56	27	44	61	100

Respondents were then asked if they went to jamat khana solely for prayers with the rest of the community, or for meeting their friends and relatives, or in order to meet new people. Inspite of the fact that a preponderant number, 88% answered that they attend jamat khana in order to participate in the communal prayers, a fairly proportionate number, more than half of the total, indicated that the social pull of the jamat khana could not be totally denied. The results derived in the following table 11 point to this conclusion. The cases in the second and third left-hand cells show that 57% admit that they hope to meet friends, and 52% said that they would like to meet new people when they attend jamat khana prayers. In contrast, 43% and 48% respectively excluded the idea of either meeting acquaintances or making new contacts in the jamat khana.

TABLE 11: REASONS FOR ATTENDING JAMAT KHANA

Attendance	Frequently No.	%	Never No.	%	TOTAL No.	%
To pray in congregation	54	88	7	12	61	100
To meet friends	35	57	26	43	61	100
To meet new people	32	52	29	48	61	100

From these results we can conclude that the jamat khana is not exclusively a prayer-house. It ought to be emphasised once again that an institution like the jamat khana which functions everyday serves also as a media of communication. The act of prayer is a form of communication made by the worshipper with the imam. Individual members of the jamat also communicate with each other in the jamat khana. It is held that this interchange within the precincts of the jamat khana is considerably responsible for creating a cohesive and an integrative unit of the Ismaili community. When contrasted with other places of worship in the country like a Muslim masjid (mosque) or a Christian church, where usually weekly prayers are conducted, this very regular interchange in the jamat khana becomes even more significant.

Further representation was sought by comparing results in the column for prayer with those in the column for meeting

friends. It was found that most Ismailis said "frequently" to both these alternatives, and they seldom said "frequently" to prayers, and "never" to meeting friends. From these results we can see that just over half the number of Ismailis, 52% indicated that they go to jamat khana to pray together with other Ismailis as well as to meet their friends. This shows that they think of the jamat khana both as a prayer-house as well as a meeting place. In contrast, only 7% answered that neither of these two alternatives were their reasons for going to jamat khana. On the other hand, only 5% said that they never go for prayers but to meet friends, whereas 36% indicated that they go for prayers and not to meet their friends. The results are tabulated below table 12.

TABLE 12:

PRAYING TOGETHER COMPARED WITH
MEETING FRIENDS IN THE JAMAT KHANA

	Number	Percentage
Frequently for friends and prayers	32	52
Frequently for prayers and never for friends	22	36
Frequently for friends and never for prayers	3	5
Never for friends and prayers	4	7
TOTAL	61	100

Having examined the functions of the jamat khana, particularly the reasons for attendance, we can now proceed to consider variations

in attendance according to specific circumstances.

Attendance in Jamat Khana under Different Circumstances

It has been more or less ascertained from the foregoing analysis that the jamat khana is the hub of the Ismaili community today. To gain insight into whether this has always been the case, a question was asked if in the recent past, in the 1940's and 1950's for example, people attended jamat khana for the same reasons as enumerated above. Although such a question would rely on the memories of the respondents, and would be only partially representative, it would help to determine to some extent whether respondents view the jamat khana any differently today. Forty-six per cent felt that there had been no change whatsoever, that the jamat khana has been both a prayer-house and a meeting-place and continues to be so today.

Thirty-three per cent felt that the need of the jamat khana had increased today. Though this reponse does not directly answer the question posed, it lends a different emphasis to the information sought. According to one respondent, he felt that the youth today are more educated and therefore more conscious of the need to go to jamat khana. They can evaluate the reasons for attending jamat khana which the youth in the past did not have an opportunity of doing. This was because in the past, people went to jamat khana out of habit, very often the younger people were compelled to do so by their parents. There is no force today, said the respondent, and, as a result, an awareness of the

Ismaili faith and the values it upholds has been created among the people. It seems therefore that a change in attitude, and factors like education, as well as variation in individual commitment, do influence the understanding and the conceptions people have of their religion. This however, does not mean that an individual understands his faith better than his parents, but that he is able to rationalise and to evaluate, and consider issues of religious sentiment with less emotion. The data obtained from this question (see table 13) is indicative of the fact that the jamat khana is no more social or secular today than it was in the past, even though, because of the increasing size of the community, it may appear to be so. The remaining 21% either did not remember or were too young or not as yet born to be able to answer the question.

TABLE 13:

ATTENDANCE IN JAMAT KHANA IN THE PAST COMPARED WITH ATTENDANCE IN JAMAT KHANA TODAY

	No change	Increased need	Don't remember	N/A	TOTAL
Number	28	20	4	9	61
Percentage	46	33	6	15	100

These results become more explicit when further analysed according to the different ages of the respondents. We find that 75% of those who did not answer the question were below 30 years of age. Thus they were too young or not as yet born

to be able to answer the question whether they perceived any changes regarding attendance in jamat khana. From the other age groups, the majority indicated that there had been no change in attendance in the jamat khana. Fairly high numbers in the age groups ranging from 30 years to over 50 years felt that the need of the jamat khana had increased today in comparison with the past, and table 14 indicates these results, and confirms more clearly the conclusion reached from table 13, that the jamat khana continues to be both a centre for religious and social activity of the community.

TABLE 14: ATTENDANCE IN JAMAT KHANA ACCORDING TO AGE GROUPS

Age Groups	No Change		Increased		Don't remember		N/A		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
20 - 29	1	8	2	17	0	0	9	75	12	100
30 - 39	11	52	7	33	3	15	0	0	21	100
40 - 49	10	59	7	41	0	0	0	0	17	100
Over 50	6	55	4	36	1	9	0	0	11	100
TOTAL	28	46	20	33	4	6	9	15	61	100

During the course of the interview, respondents were asked if they felt more in need of a jamat khana in times of stress and of crisis as compared to normal circumstances. Sixty seven per cent answered that they did resort to the jamat khana more regularly when confronted with difficulties and that the atmosphere in the jamat khana was a source of strength under

duress, whereas 13% said that the need of a jamat khana under such a phase did not increase at all. In fact one respondent clarified by saying he prayed better when he was least troubled. The remaining 20% maintained that the need was constant, that changing circumstances did not influence or affect their need of the jamat khana, nor the need to pray and communicate with the Almighty. These figures were further analysed to see whether men or women were likely to turn to the jamat khana more under times of stress. Table 15 indicates that large numbers of both the sexes, 65% men and 70% women said that according to them, the need of the jamat khana increased in times of strain.. Fifteen per cent men and 11% women held that the need did not increase, and once again, almost equal numbers, 20% men and 19% women felt that the need of the jamat khana remained the same. These numbers are interesting as they reflect that, contrary to popular opinion, women alone are not emotional or sentimental about jamat khana, that men too acknowledge their need of the jamat khana when faced with problems. The results are tabulated below: (see table 15).

TABLE 15:

NEED OF JAMAT KHANA IN TIMES OF STRESS ACCORDING TO SEX

	Need of Jamat Khana Increases		Need of Jamat Khana Constant		Need of Jamat Khana does not Increase		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	22	65	7	20	5	15	34	100
Female	19	70	5	19	3	11	27	100
TOTAL	41	67	12	20	8	13	61	100

These results were further classified to see whether the need of the jamat khana in times of stress depended on the number of years the respondents had lived in Nairobi or not. Large majorities in each group said that the need of the jamat khana increased when confronted with difficulties, and small numbers in all the groups said that the need of the jamat khana was the same all the time. It must be noted however that respondents who had not spent more than five years in Nairobi felt more strongly that the need of the jamat khana increased for them in times of stress. This may be due to the fact that being relatively recent arrivals in the community, they are not as socially integrated within the community as residents who had lived a longer period in the city. This becomes even more evident because none of them feel that the need of the jamat khana does not increase. This indicates that length of residence may play

a small part in determining different levels of individual dependence on the jamat khana in times of need. The results are indicated in table 16.

TABLE 16:

NEED OF JAMAT KHANA IN TIMES OF STRESS ACCORDING TO LENGTH OF RESIDENCE OF RESPONDENTS IN NAIROBI

Length of Residence	Need Increases		Need Constant		Need does not Increase		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
0 - 5	5	83	1	17	0	0	6	100
6 - 10	6	60	2	20	2	20	10	100
Over 11	18	64	7	25	3	11	28	100
Lifelong	12	70	2	12	3	18	17	100
TOTAL	41	67	12	20	8	13	61	100

From the foregoing, we can see that the majority of the Ismailis appear to be considerably dependent on the jamat khana most of the time both under normal circumstances and under duress. It has been mentioned that the jamat khana, unlike any other communal institution, is unique by virtue of the fact that it is open everyday of the year, both in the morning as well as in the evening, to all members of the Ismaili community, irrespective of their social status, education, wealth or sex. The study will later show in chapter VI that not only ideally, but in reality as well, Ismailis from diverse backgrounds and occupations come into regular contact in the jamat khana.

The bond of common prayers, of common beliefs and values, expressed in the jamat khana, links together a multitude of people from all walks of life. It not only brings them closer together, but increases and reinforces the social solidarity of the community.

Finally, the question on the system of making announcements in the jamat khana brings to a conclusion this discussion on the functions of the jamat khana. Respondents were asked their views on this practice whereby announcements regarding social events which generally concern the community are made in the jamat khana. These may range from floral demonstrations and cooking classes organised by the women's organisation, a blood donation day organised by Ismaili youth and a meeting of the volunteer corps, to a film show, a play in aid of charity and a programme of traditional dancing, organised by some of the other communal institutions.

On this subject 43% of the total number felt that it was essential that the jamat was kept informed of communal activities, and the only way in which this could be done effectively was in the jamat khana. As there is no other communal media of communication, the system of announcements in the jamat khana is a practical way in which an awareness is created within the jamat of the activities of the community. Thirty one per cent of the respondents indicated that the system encouraged social interaction between members of the community. Other responses classified in this category showed that respondents

consider this media of information as a means to promote better understanding between Ismailis, and as a means to encourage them to participate actively in these communal functions. Eisenstadt[12] in his study of immigrants reaches a similar conclusion, showing that one of the main functions of communication within the social system is to assure full participation within its various spheres. If communication in a community becomes weakened or ineffective, it often results in a decline of social solidarity within that group, as Eisenstadt has also reported.

However, from the responses of the majority we can conclude that the system of making announcements is perhaps one of the more "necessary" functions of the jamat khana. It is also evident that the jamat khana is conceived of as being the only effective medium of information by the large majority of the respondents. Finally, it ought to be emphasised that the various institutions of the community depend on the jamat khana to impart to the jamat information regarding their activities. Thus the effective functioning of communal institutions is made possible through this media, as the success of a function to a great extent depends on the response of the participants. What is, of course, important is that all the representatives of institutional organisations resort to the jamat khana rather than depend on their own resources. This reflects once again the central position of the jamat khana in the Ismaili community in Kenya. The results are tabulated below (table 17).

TABLE 17:

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF SOCIAL EVENTS IN THE JAMAT KHANA

	Number	Percentage
Necessary	26	43
Encourages social interaction	19	31
Preferable after prayers	9	15
Should be brief	5	8
Unnecessary	2	3
TOTAL	61	100

In concluding this section, it must be emphasised that the jamat khana is deemed an essential communal institution by the Ismailis in Kenya. We have been able to demonstrate this from the analysis of empirical data, and results elicited from the open-ended questions on the functions of the jamat khana, on its need and its role in the Ismaili community in the country reveal this institution as a focal centre of socio-religious activity. Interpretations obviously vary according to attitudes and different levels of commitment of the individuals, and these in turn are dependent on variables like age, sex, length of residence, and profession. Using these variables, we have been able to show both similarities as well as differences in responses. Nevertheless, these point to the fact that the jamat khana is the only institution par excellence in the community where regular congregational prayers and the consequent interchange between members professing a common belief system are maintained consistently.

This further makes feasible a feeling of togetherness, and a sense of belonging that individuals feel as being an integral part of the communal structure. These respondents gave emphasis to the jamat khana as an exclusive Ismaili institution, thus enhancing the notion of belonging that it creates. Furthermore, the jamat khana is an important source of information for the community, being its only media of communication. All these factors make the jamat khana an active integrative force, and communal life is focused on the jamat khana, a site distinct and symbolic, within which religious sentiments and basic values are realised, and regular interaction maintained. Finally, results derived from the survey indicate that Ismailis from varying occupational and age groups, irrespective of the number of years spent in Nairobi, or of their social status or educational qualifications, cannot visualise the community without a jamat khana. The study now aims to show how regularly repeated ritual activity in the jamat khana reinforces the bond of solidarity in the community.

Footnotes

1. Aga Khan, Memoirs of the Aga Khan, 1954, p. 193.

2. Bombay High Court Reports - 1866, quoted as The Khojah Case in A.S. Picklay, History of the Ismailis, 1940, p. 142.

3. Information provided by Ebrahim Jamal. His brother Count Hasham Jamal (d), a pioneer settler in Kisumu, was appointed the first mukhi of Kisumu jamat, and in 1905, the first president of the Provincial Council for Kisumu and districts, by the Aga Khan III. See also Rules, 1905, Ch. I, rule 73, p. 14.

4. Constitution, 1962, see IX "Jamati Affairs", pp. 38-40.

5. Goffman, E. Relations in Public, 1971, p. 3.

6. The imam's farman made in 1952 has been recorded as follows: "I give my best paternal blessings to all who adopt simple colonial dress."

7. Aga Khan, op.cit., 1954, p. 190.

8. Geden, "Hindu Symbolism", ERE 12, 1967, p. 141.

9. Precious Pearls, farman made at Tananarive on 8-9-1946.

10. See Farman Mubarak, Part II, Pakistan Visit, pp. 24-25, et passim., 1964.

11. See in particular Kalam-e-Imam-e-Mubin, Part I, 1953.

12. Eisenstadt, G.N. "Communication Processes among Immigrants in Israel", 1949-1950, p. 586.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE JAMAT KHANA IN PRESENT-DAY KENYA: OBSERVANCE OF CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS

In discussing the framework of the institution of the jamat khana in the preceding chapter, emphasis has been given to the role of the jamat khana as a socio-religious institution. The study now focuses on some of the varied aspects of religious activity in the jamat khana. The belief system of the Ismaili community is institutionalised in the jamat khana, and this institution, we have shown, constitutes the fundamental structure, and is the very core of the communal set-up. In the jamat khana, therefore, the beliefs which are expressed and symbolized in ritual practices emphasise what all Ismailis have in common rather than their differences. The shared experience resulting from observing religious ceremonies together in the jamat khana and celebrations occasioned by religious festivals creates a common bond, and even social solidarity. It points to the notion postulated by Clifford Geertz[1] that a ritual is not merely a pattern of meaning, but also a form of social interaction. Social interaction in the jamat khana takes the form of face-to-face interaction during religious ceremonies for instance, and is an everyday experience for those Ismailis who participate regularly in these ceremonies. Social interaction may result in either social integration or in social conflict, and this study illustrates that the jamat khana creates the former very forcefully. This is largely because religious ritual is repeated everyday and this regular face-to-face

interaction involves all those individuals who regularly meet in the jamat khana, since the jamat khana functions as a prayer house as well as a meeting-place. The presence of the jamat is necessary for regular repetition of religious activity, and it is this repetition that reinforces the integrative bond.[2]

RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES IN THE JAMAT KHANA

Organised religious ceremonies in the Ismaili community in Kenya are permitted only in the jamat khana.[3] A routine procedure regarding religious ceremonies has been established in the jamat khana, and this is more or less uniform in all jamat khanas in the country. Time has become an important factor, and jamat khana prayers begin late in the evening, presently at 6.40 - 6.45 in Nairobi, by which time the working day of the majority of people is over. All prayers and religious ceremonies are over by 7.15 p.m. so that an individual spends an average of thirty minutes in the jamat khana every evening. The time-factor has become necessary for regulating religious ceremonies in a uniform manner and the certainty that jamat khana prayers begin "on time" helps the Ismailis to adapt to the exigencies of contemporary life without much inconvenience.

In the jamat khana certain ceremonies take place everyday whereas others are less frequent and are observed on special occasions alone. A few of the regular ceremonies were listed and respondents were asked to rank them in the order of importance that they attached to the specific ceremonies. These ceremonies

were rated as shown in the following table 18.

TABLE 18:

RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES RANKED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

Rank / Ceremony	1	2	3	4	5
	Du'a	Reading of Farmans	Talika	Ginan	Chaanta

The procedure adopted for deriving these total ranks is explained in Appendix A. Of the total number interviewed, 79% ranked du'a as the most significant of the ceremonies listed. Du'a is the basic Ismaili prayer, incumbent upon all Ismalis to be recited three times a day, and these figures reveal the importance attached to the fundamental Ismaili prayer. Besides being most frequently ranked as first among the ceremonies, it was also the most well-known of all the ceremonies listed. The word du'a literally means an "appeal or invocation (to God) either on behalf of another or for oneself." It is also translated as a "prayer of request". Any prayer, and not necessarily Ismaili prayer, takes some form of request and gratitude or praise. The suggestion that du'a can also "assume a communal value and aspect"[4] seems to describe aptly the Ismaili prayer, regularly said in congregation. The individual Ismaili is urged to say his du'a with the jamat,

but if he is unable to reach jamat khana, he ought to say his prayers wherever he happens to be.[5]

The du'a was recited in Gujarati until 1956, in which year it was introduced in its Arabic form.[6] It was yet another way on the part of the imam to direct his community away from a predominantly Hinduistic set of beliefs and practices, and to reorient them in the direction of an Islamic outlook. Verses from the Qur'an known to all Muslims alike are included in the Ismaili du'a. The Sura-t-ul-Fateha, for example, which forms the opening chapter of the Qu'ran (Sura 1, verses 1-7) and the beginning of the Ismaili du'a is recited on all important occasions by Muslims of every school of thought.

The Ismaili du'a is recited by any member of the jamat male or female, without referring to the written text. It is divided into six chapters, each beginning with the invocation "Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim", reiterating the benevolent nature of God the Creator. This address emphasises the basic Quranic concept of the beneficence of Allah. Each chapter of the prayer concludes with a prostration, signifying an act of devotion and of submission. The du'a ends with a chronological recitation of the forty-nine Ismaili Imams, beginning with the first Imam Ali and ending with the present Imam the Aga Khan IV. This "long bead-roll of the ancestors of their Murshed Aga Khan the hereditary chief of the Ismailis"[7] is the only section in the du'a that has been retained from the previous Gujarati version. Du'a is recited while sitting, and at the end of it, every member of the jamat

offers his hand to the person seated to his immediate left and to the right. This symbolic handshake was interpreted as signifying togetherness, unity and equality, all being important facets of the idea of cohesiveness, by some of the respondents. This is discussed in the section on "Equality in the jamat khana" (in Chapter Six). Barring all distinctions, and irrespective of the status of the person, every Ismaili offers his hand at the end of the du'a in the jamat khana.

Except for the du'a, respondents had quite a lot of difficulty in rating the other ceremonies on the list. However, the reading of farmans in the jamat khana was ranked as the second important ceremony. Farmans are dictates or directives from the imam embracing an extensive range of subjects varying from religious matters to those pertaining to economic, education and health. Farmans are usually addressed to the jamat in the jamat khana when the imam visits his followers, and are seldom made in writing. These oral addresses are then collected together to compile books of farmans. They are then regularly read in the jamat khana to remind the Ismailis of the words of the imam on any specific topic. Although the word farman literally means a "command"[3] it is general advice and guidance from the imam, and the importance of a farman varies according to the interpretation rendered by an individual. The imam may for example deplore "social evils" like smoking and drinking, and may warn his followers that these intoxicants are detrimental to one's health, clarifying that:

> "As Imam I do not say that it is sinful to use such intoxications but as I would advise my children for their health.... I advise you my spiritual children for your health...." (9)

This does not necessarily make the Ismaili society a teetotal one, although the words of the imam do create an awareness within the community regarding this matter. Generally, farmans are greatly revered by the Ismailis and are considered not merely essential rudiments of the faith, but also glimpses of immense profundity.

Talika, which is a written official message, a communiqué from the imam, was ranked as third by the respondents. The imam maintains regular contact with the jamat through this medium of communication and it usually contains blessings and prayers. Frequently a talika is a form of acknowledgement of reports, sent to the imam by any of the numerous communal institutions. Appointments of mukhi - kamadia, for example, or of any other officials, are conveyed to the jamat by means of talika. Thus, like farmans, a talika is revered by the Ismailis as being direct communication from the imam, having religious sanction. In fact some respondents, 23% of the total number attached equal importance to both farmans and talika, and failed to distinguish between the two. It must, of course, be be admitted that the distinction between farmans and talika, both originating from the office of the imam either as directives or as communiqués and thus having religious sanction, is a fine one. Technically, a talika is rarely, if ever, repeated in

the jamat khana, unless specified by the imam, and always comes from the living imam. Farmans, on the other hand are usually repeated in the jamat khana, by having them read and re-read, and may be dictates of either the present imam, or his predecessor. According to the regulation in the Constitution, talika is to be read in the jamat khana alone.[10] One of the functions of the Executive Council in Nairobi is to circulate the talika to all the jamats in the country with its translation in Gujarati[11] so that everyone can understand the message sent by the imam. Talika is therefore read both in English and in Gujarati in the jamat khana.

The next ceremony that merits our attention is that of the recitation of ginans, hymns composed by Ismaili pirs. When the pirs went from Iran to India and undertook the process of conversion of Indian castes to the Ismaili faith, they introduced the new religion via the media of ginans. Ginan literature is vast and varied, its content ranges from basic teachings such as belief in the everliving nature of the imam, eschatology, and a code of ethics, to accounts of the creation, and Hindu mythological tales. Both the literary value of the ginans and the realm of ideas in them combine to make ginan compositions a rich field of study. Ismailis today learn ginans as part of the religious curriculum, and they have been transliterated into English for the benefit of the English reading jamat. Originally the pirs had composed the ginans in various Indian languages and dialects, and they were transmitted orally from one generation to another.[12] Since the

turn of the century ginans have been recorded and printed and are thus preserved today in the community. All members of the jamat can therefore recite ginans. Specific ginans are recited on special occasions, as for example, a ginan expressing the sentiments of the devotee on receiving talika is recited in the jamat khana on the day when talika is received from the imam. Efforts are continually being made within the community to maintain uniform tunes for the ginans, and to preserve the original form as much as possible, because oral literature is always exposed to different influences, and thus subject to change.

Finally the ceremony of chaanta which does not take place everyday but once a month, was ranked fifth in this list. There is no confession of sins in Ismailism as there is in the Roman Catholic Church, or a priest to whom such confession may be made. Ismailis pray for forgiveness of their sins everyday by addressing their prayer silently to the imam. Or, once a month on the day of Chandraat, that is the beginning of the lunar month (the day of the new moon), pardon of sins is sought when the chaanta ceremony is performed. The penitent offers a coin as a token of repentance and repeats the formula "I repent for my sins and beg forgiveness for them" three times. Officials who preside over the ceremony then sprinkle the face of the confessor with water, thus symbolising purification. The use of water as a purifactory medium is not exclusive to Ismailis alone. Water has been described as "the great purifier and cleanser practically and symbolically"[13]

and the state of impiety or impurity that the worshipper is in, is believed to be symbolically dispelled by a sprinkling of water. Water is the most natural and simplest of purifiers, and Ismailis believe that one of the means by which it is possible to achieve purification is through the ritual use of water, in the ceremony of chaanta and of ghatpat. A discussion of ghat pat follows further on in this section.

In concluding this section on some of the regular religious ceremonies in the jamat khana, it must be clarified that the ceremony of chaanta is the only one in which direct face-to-face interaction is involved between the confessor and the person presiding over the ceremony. In the other ceremonies which we have discussed above, there is no such contact made as the jamat is largely a passive observer. Du'a is recited by one individual and the rest of the jamat follow him; ginan is also recited by one person, and if the words of the ginan are familiar to the jamat, then they join in the singing of the ginan. Both farmans and talika are read to the jamat which makes it a silent participant. Therefore, except for the ceremony of chaanta, in which each individual asks for forgiveness of his sins and has his face sprinkled with water, very little interaction takes place during the course of the other ceremonies. This however does not mean that communication is minimised, in fact each ceremony requires the presence of an audience, in this case the jamat, for it to be observed, and a rapport is established between the performers and the jamat. Communication is effected, not necessarily in words, but by

common participation in ritual and religious ceremonies, which express the values and beliefs of the Ismaili religious system.

Two more ceremonies were listed apart in order to determine the purposes of these ceremonies based on the answers of the respondents. One of these, that of *ghatpat*, is the only other Ismaili ceremony besides that of *chaanta*, in the observance of which water is used as a purifying medium. There is, nevertheless, a fundamental underlying difference in the properties of the water used for the *ghatpat* ceremony. It is considered holy water because it has been blessed by the *imam* before it is used in the ritual ceremony. Or, as Ivanow in his exposition of the Indian Ismaili religion remarks,

> "The most interesting detail is the distribution of sacred water from a vessel in which water is either mixed with clay of Kerbala, or with water blessed by the imam." (14)

Kerbala is revered as a holy place by Shia Muslims because Imam Husein died a martyr's death in 680 A.D. in Kerbala and its clay is therefore said to have sacred properties. The martyrdom of Imam Husein has been discussed in Chapter Two, which deals with the history of the Ismaili *imams*.

The ceremony of *ghatpat* is performed every morning and in the evenings at dawn and at sunset according to the Ismaili Constitution,[15] on special occasions, such as when *talika*

has been received by the jamat, or on religious festivals like chandraat. In detailing the structural pattern of the jamat khana, it has been mentioned that low tables called pat are to be found against the wall-sides of the jamat khana. On some of the pat, utensils for use in the ghatpat ceremony are placed; these mainly consist of a large vessel from which water is distributed, and little cups from which each individual partakes of the water. The person presiding over the ghatpat ceremony first washes these utensils with water, and then incense (lobaan) is burned over them to make them 'pure'. We have already noted that water is a common means of purification. Incense too is used in ritual ceremonies, it being a media of purification. Thus, once the utensils have been cleansed, water that has been blessed by the imam is mixed with ordinary water in the vessel, and the ab-e-safa, water of purity obtained is made ready for distribution. Besides the phrase ab-e-safa two other terms are used to refer to this water. Ami, the "old term for consecrated water"[16] frequently found in the ginan literature. The other word is ni'az, popularly used to refer to ab-e-safa by Kenyan Ismailis. Syed Mujtaba Ali[17] suggests that the word niyaz (sic) means a gift. He does not elaborate further, so it is difficult to say whether the translation is a literal one, or whether it is an interpretation that he postulates, that water blessed by the imam is a "gift" that his followers receive. A special ghatpat du'a which was in use until 1956 when the new du'a was introduced has now been discontinued. The du'a that is said thrice a day is the same du'a which is recited when ghatpat ceremony is performed.

Along with the distribution of ab-e-safa, sukhrit, a sweet dish made of butter, milk, semolina and sugar, is also given to the jamat. To this, a little ni'az is added. According to Ismaili tradition, these four ingredients are supposed to represent the qualities of malleability, purity, kindness and sweetness. Being made of four pure ingredients, sukhrit is considered the best of foods that is offered to the imam. Therefore, by partaking of it, an Ismaili is expected to attain these virtues. References to this tradition are to be found in the ginans,[18] and it is commonly believed by Ismailis that the entire ghatpat ceremony was introduced by Pir Sadardin who founded the first jamat khana in Kotla in India. Ivanow[19] attributes to the ceremony Sufic origins. This may be true because the pirs came from Iran and Sufi thought is quite explicit in the ginans that they composed, and the communal partaking of consecrated water may have been familiar to the pirs.

Given the foregoing discussion as a background to an understanding of the ghatpat ceremony it will now be meaningful for this study to analyse the responses of the respondents to this question which was open-ended and formulated as: "What purpose do you think is served by ghatpat?".

TABLE 19: INTERPRETATION OF GHATPAT

	Number	Percentage
Source of Purification	20	33
Creates Togetherness	14	23
Traditional Ritual	9	14
Don't know	18	30
TOTAL	61	100

Thirty-three percent of the total number felt that the purpose of ghatpat is to purify the soul of the individual who partakes of the ab-e-safa. Purification, therefore, in this ritual ceremony, is to be understood on two different planes. First of all, ablution of ghatpat vessels by the ceremonial washing with water make the utensils free of any impurities. Secondly, at a spiritual level, the Ismaili who drinks a cup of ni'az believes that by so doing, the sacred properties of this holy water will cleanse and purify his conscience and his character. As one respondent explained, holy water purifies both mind and soul of the individual if he drinks it with sincerity and faith. Another respondent compared the ceremonial purification of ghatpat to the Catholic Holy Communion, explaining that both helped purify the inner self of the individual.

The second class of respondents, 23%, felt that the purpose of ghatpat is to create togetherness and unity within the community. The "feeling of solidarity created by a common ceremony is tremendous" was the answer of one informant. Other characteristic responses ranged from a reinforcement of the spiritual bond between the imam and the mu'min, and between the individuals, to a close physical bond within the jamat as a result of the communal partaking of ab-e-safa from one vessel. This idea of the unity of a congregation is well emphasised by Ivanow:

> "Communal drinking of consecrated water, or whatever it may be, or partaking of consecrated food, is a custom of immense antiquity amongst all races and nations, accepted as a symbol of bond between the members of an assembly...." (20)

This is therefore one of the significant religious ceremonies observed in the jamat khana that characterises the symbolic bond of love and unity, and which thereby promotes cohesiveness. Yet another respondent elaborated upon the reason which made ghatpat an integrative force. The atmosphere in the jamat khana on the occasion of ghatpat is "pious and solemn", which according to the respondent, creates an urge in the person engrossed in prayer to partake of, and to receive something sacred. This urge is fulfilled and satisfied by the ghatpat ceremony, and the knowledge that every individual in the jamat khana participates by partaking of ni'az and thereby sharing together something sacred creates close ties within the congregation. Keeping in mind the fact that the

question was open-ended and respondents were thus not restricted by limited choices, it is significant that an important minority 23% feel that the purpose of the ceremony of ghatpat is to create cohesiveness in the community.

Ghatpat was understood as a traditional ritual by 14% of the respondents. Various answers such as it being an important ritual, a symbolic ceremony, or merely an old-established custom were classified together in this category. One respondent dismissed it as a "remnant of Hinduism", thus attributing to the ghatpat ritual Hindu origin.

Lastly, it is significant to note that although ghatpat is considered an important communal ritual, the question on it yielded a remarkable number of "don't know's". Thirty per cent, a proportionately high percentage when compared with the other classifications, said that they did not know either the meaning, or the significance, or the purpose of the ghatpat ceremony. They partook of the ab-e-safa but did not know why, or what it symbolised. This category was further classified into occupational groups to determine what occupation constituted the majority of "don't know's". Results are tabulated below (table 20) and show that the majority, 61%, of those who did not know the purpose of the ghatpat ceremony came from the semi-professional group. A fairly good number, 28%, represented the category of professional, and in contrast, less than half that number, 11% belonged to the non-professional group. It would therefore seem that an overwhelming number of

respondents, 89% which is a total of the percentages in the semi-professional and the professional categories, who do have some sort of educational qualification, do not know the meaning of the ghatpat ceremony. Therefore, inspite of the occupation of the respondents, it seems possible that the understanding of a specific ceremony is not as dependent on education as would be expected, but on individual commitment.

TABLE 20:

BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS WHO DID NOT KNOW THE PURPOSE OF GHATPAT CEREMONY ACCORDING TO OCCUPATION

	Occupation			
	Semi-Professional	Professional	Non-Professional	Total
Number	11	5	2	18
Percentage	61	28	11	100

Similarly worded as the question on ghatpat was one on the ceremony of nandi. The practice of nandi is a traditional custom whereby all offerings, primarily in the form of food to the imam, are brought to the jamat khana. The food is not partaken of in the jamat khana, nor is there a sacrificial feast.[21] Tradition in the community which is not historically sound says that the practice of taking food to the jamat khana dates back to the time of Prophet Muhammed. All those who had gathered together for prayers then shared the food with

the prophet. Today, it is distributed in a more 'sophisticated' fashion, it is auctioned and bought by anyone wishing to do so. The necessity of dispensing with such offerings is obvious. It would be impossible for the imam to literally accept such innumerable quantities of cooked food, and it would be equally impracticable to feed the large congregation everyday. Therefore, offerings that are brought to the jamat khana are believed to "reach" the imam, and the money collected from its sale is used for communal institutions.

Offering is a form of sacrifice, and ritual offering takes on a religious interpretation. Thus, Ismailis believe that the best portion of food, the first fruits of the season, milk and vegetables, given in offering to the imam is gratifying. Offered with faith and devotion, it symbolises the love between the imam and the mu'min the believer. We have already mentioned that one of the characteristic features of Ismaili religion is the personal relationship that every Ismaili has with the imam, based on love and faith. Nandi may therefore be termed an honorific offering, a "free-will offering in grateful recognition of the goodness and beneficence of the diety."[22] Taking food to the jamat khana is further considered beneficial for those who make the offering, since they will never want for food in this world. Besides therefore being an expression of gratitude for the blessings of everyday, it is also meant to secure favour and prosperity for the days to come.

A wide range of interpretations was given to the ceremony of nandi. Almost half the respondents, 46% emphasised that it was a devotional offering to the imam, symbolising and reinforcing the spiritual bond between the imam and the mu'min. The imam represents for the Ismaili the spiritual head and sacrifice to him in any form is deemed meritorious. In this instance, the food offered is "cooked with faith, love and devotion" responded one interviewee, and is accepted in the spirit in which it is offered. A number of respondents believed that the offering would help their souls in the hereafter. It ought to be clarified that belief in life after death is deep-rooted in the Ismaili faith. Good deeds in this world help the soul in the hereafter. Therefore the act of offering of one's best, whether it be a morsel of food or a piece of cloth, is a rewarding act and carries with it a promise of salvation that every soul yearns for. Another respondent felt that the offering, irrespective of its material value, was given equal importance in the jamat khana. Equality attributed to the large variety of dishes, each considered worthy of acceptance, gives to the nandi ceremony a very egalitarian emphasis. Finally, a response which is directly relevant to the thesis of this study came from a young lady who maintained that being able to make a regular offering, to be able to participate in the nandi ceremony gave her a sense of belonging to the community. She elaborated further by saying she felt very close to the other Ismailis in the jamat khana, in brief, a part of the jamat. The ceremony of nandi thus strengthened her feeling of being an Ismaili. Thus

the notion that these specific ceremonies are exclusively Ismaili and symbolize for most a spiritual bond between the imam and his followers, as well as a link between all Ismailis, have contributed to the solidarity and cohesion of the community.

The second category of respondents, 26% claimed that the purpose of nandi was the original cause of its establishment - to aid the poor and needy members of the community. A response such as this reveals an awareness within the community of its less fortunate members. It is made easy for this category of persons to acquire cooked food in the jamat khana at reasonable prices, at prices much lower than if they had to cook the same food themselves. Respondents however clarified that this was not always the case. Allied with the poor is the group of travellers. Newcomers to a place, as in the case of Ismaili migrants who came to Kenya from India and settled in the new country, could without much inconvenience get a meal by buying nandi in the jamat khana. Thus the jamat khana functioned not solely as a house of worship but catered for the wayfarer by giving him a shelter and providing him with food. In this respect therefore, the jamat khana created close ties that neither kinship affinity nor communal institutions did, and the data collected and analysed points to this conclusion.

A small number of informants, 8%, of whom 5% fall in the occupational category of professional, and the remaining 3% in the semi-professional group, gave a different emphasis to this accessibility of cooked food. They maintained

that it was ideal for the working mother, for those without any family, for bachelors and university students, to get a ready meal. Once again, responses such as these illustrate a consciousness within the community of a very recent development of the purpose of nandi. Recent, because these categories of university students and working mothers are relatively new institutions in the Ismaili community. It is perhaps in the last two decades that these numbers have considerably increased to be distinguished apart. Minimum as these responses may be, they reflect an awareness of present-day Ismaili society in Kenya. Furthermore, from these responses we can detect the trend that the ceremony of nandi has taken. It has served specific categories of people in the Ismaili community - from migrants to Kenya in the early period of settlement of the community, to the emancipated Ismaili women of the present decade. Both categories of people have taken recourse in the jamat khana, and it would seem that the ceremony of nandi continues to satisfy and hold some meaning since it serves a definite purpose. This dependence on the jamat khana reveals a strong inward focus that the community has maintained, an attitude which is greatly responsible for creating a close-knit group.

Every question yielded a number of respondents who believe that the practice of ceremonies in the jamat khana is a traditional custom. In the instance of nandi, 10% felt that it was out of habit and long-established usage that offerings were made to the imam. These people therefore did not attribute any religious significance to the ceremony of nandi. An equal

number of respondents, 10% claimed that they did not understand either the meaning of nandi, nor the purpose that it is supposed to serve. Table 21 shows at a glance the four major interpretations given to the ceremony of nandi.

TABLE 21: INTERPRETATION OF THE CEREMONY OF NANDI

	Number	Percentage
Devotional offering	28	46
For benefit of poor	16	26
Tradition	6	10
Cooked food easy to acquire	5	8
Don't know	6	10
TOTAL	61	100

Having analysed the responses to the question on nandi, it is necessary now to turn our attention to the interaction that takes place during the nandi ceremony. In a separate hall attached to the jamat khana, or in one corner of the jamat khana, low tables (pat) that we have mentioned as part of the jamat khana structure are used upon which food offerings are placed. Around these tables stand all those who are interested in buying nandi. The ceremony takes place after all the other religious ceremonies that we have discussed are over. Thus an informal atmosphere prevails in the region where nandi takes place. Consequently, those gathered to buy nandi chat with one another, and here, acquaintances are renewed, and new

friendships made. Voluntary workers who help in the nandi, who distribute the dishes and collect the money become familiar personalities and are well-known because they participate regularly in the nandi ceremony. The direct face-to-face interaction that results is a striking feature of the nandi ceremony. The atmosphere is free of any solemn or pious feeling that pervades the other religious ceremonies in the jamat khana. Relationships thus are purely at a social level, and contact made with other participants is informal and devoid of any religious sentiments. The pattern that the nandi ceremony has taken makes relationships among members of the community very personal, at least amongst those Ismailis who regularly participate in it, for it is one ceremony where a high level of communication is maintained.

In concluding the foregoing section on religious ceremonies in the jamat khana, it must be emphasised that it is only in the jamat khana that organised religious ceremonies are permitted in the Ismaili community. Religious ceremonies find practical expression in the jamat khana. We have shown that most of these ritual ceremonies convey messages, and the various interpretations rendered by the informants illustrate the wide range of meanings that may be attributed to any one specific ceremony. Variance in interpretation is, as shown, dependent upon several factors, including different levels of commitment of the individual. None of these interpretations can therefore be ignored, for it is very difficult to be able to meaningfully distinguish the more important reasons from the

less important ones. Ceremonies continue to be important because they are observed, and serve some purpose, and perhaps even satisfy the needs of a particular system. The study will now concentrate on the significance of religious occasions of the Ismailis.

OBSERVANCE OF RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Ritual activity in the jamat khana is an everyday experience, as illustrated in the preceding section. This activity continually reinforces collective sentiments and values of the Ismaili socio-religious system. Collective sentiments and their regular reiterated expression in the jamat khana becomes an integrative force, a force that binds together individuals, besides embodying a system of meanings comprehensible to the group. One of the functional aspects of religion is to reaffirm the sentiments and values shared by the particular group. The observance of religious festivals, apart from that of religious ceremonies, is another dimension of the religious activity that is formulated in the jamat khana.

Religious festivals, observed in all religiously oriented societies, are important occasions in the Ismaili religion, and are days when attendance in the jamat khana substantially exceeds the everyday numbers. On such occasions, the jamat khanas are illuminated, an air of festivity pervades the atmosphere in the jamat khana, and everyone is attired in their best clothes. A day in the jamat khana on the occasion of a religious

festival is much the same as a typical evening, except for special recitation of ginans and reading of farmans specifically pertinent to the occasion. Some of the more important religious festivals were listed on the questionnaire, and, as for the question on religious ceremonies, respondents were asked to rank them in the order of importance. The procedure for determining the ranking is explained in Appendix A.

The festival given the utmost importance was Imamat day. This is the day when the present Imam, Shah Karim, the Aga Khan IV, became the 49th Ismaili Imam in direct succession as the Ismailis believe from the Prophet Muhammed. Thus, once every year, on 11th July, Imamat Day is observed by Ismaili communities the world over, including Kenya. Imamat Day is therefore considered a "spiritual birthday" of the imam who accedes to the office of imamat. The day marks the permanent nature of the institution of imamat, belief in the eternal presence of the imam being a fundamental tenet of the Ismaili faith. It further reinforces the belief in the historical continuity of the line of imams, giving to the concept of imamat not merely a historical perspective but also an everyday social reality. The right of imamat is based on divine investiture, and the imam is blessed and chosen by God. His task is to lead man away from evil and wrongdoing, and to steer him towards ultimate re-union with the divine presence. To be able to do so, he has to be an infallible authority, the prototype of insan al-kamil, the most perfect of beings. Each Ismaili is addressed as a "spiritual child" of the imam which makes him conscious of the benevolent force of the imam.

Thus there exists a strong sentiment of love and devotion between the imam and his followers, and the entire concept of imamat is based on the strength of this expression of love and affection. We have shown already that regular contact is maintained by the imam with his followers through the media of farmans and talika in the jamat khana. It is this foundation based on love that makes comprehensible the notion of service in the community, which acts as a cohesive force, that the study illustrates in Chapter VI.

Festivities of Imamat day celebrations last a week-end every July. Special prayers are recited in the jamat khana, specific ginans praising the auspicious day are recited, and relevant farmans are read. On Saturday night there is a programme of traditional stick-dancing in which the whole jamat participates. This is held in the cultural centre in Parklands, and the celebrations last well into the early hours of the morning. The following day, on Sunday, a fête is organised in the club grounds, where amusement stalls, film shows, pony rides and merry-go-round contribute towards the entertainment. This lasts the whole day, and lunch is provided for the jamat. On the subject, respondents were asked the question: "What do you think is the significance of the annual Sunday luncheon to celebrate Imamat Day?" An overwhelming majority, 81% of the informants, responded that it was an annual event which promoted togetherness within the community. Answers varied from equality and unity resulting from a shared meal, to a sense of belonging being created by eating together. All these are

important variables of the concept of cohesiveness, and reflect a consciousness of communal affinity amongst individual Ismailis. One respondent said that it was a reminder that all Ismailis, rich or poor, young or old, are part of the larger Ismaili communal organisation, and are all equally responsible for maintaining communal well-being. Generally, the luncheon was described as an ideal "get-together" with friends and relatives, and at the same time providing an opportunity of renewing acquaintances and making new friends.

Of the remaining 19%, 12% of the respondents described it as a traditional observance, as just a celebration. Six per cent either did not know its significance, or felt that there was no worthy purpose attached to the celebration. One respondent suggested that the money spent on the feast could be donated to a needy cause. And finally one respondent did not answer the question at all. Table 22 shows the responses to the Imamat day luncheon.

TABLE 22:

SIGNIFICANCE ATTACHED TO THE IMAMAT DAY FEAST

	Creates Togetherness	Traditional Celebration	No Significance	No Answer	TOTAL
Number	49	7	4	1	61
Percentage	81	12	6	1	100

The occasion of Lail-at-al-Qadr was ranked as the second important festival by the respondents. Translated as the "night of power" it refers to the night when Prophet Muhammed is believed to have received the first revelation from God through the intermediary of the angel Gabriel, exhorting him to reach the idol-worshipping Arab society with the mission entrusted to him. Quranic verses explain the event thus:

> "Verily, we sent down the Quran in the night of Al-Qadr. The night of Al-Qadr is better than a thousand months. It is peace until the rising of the sun." (97, 3-5).

This night occurs once annually in the month of Ramadhan, the Muslim month of fasting. It is therefore considered a holy night and prayers are offered throughout the night in the jamat khana. It is held that prayers offered on the night of al-Qadr are answered, and Ismailis consider it an important night for meditation as well, the practical exercise of which, according to a respondent, is the purpose and ultimate goal in life. Furthermore, the ceremony of chaanta, whereby the penitent repent for sins, takes place on the night of al-Qadr, and the ceremony of ghatpat is also observed.

Closely associated with the celebration of Imamat day is that of the actual birthday of the present Imam which falls in December every year. This occasion was ranked as the third important festival by the respondents. On both these occasions, talika are usually received from the imam, and very often, new

appointments of mukhis, kamadias, of councillors and other officials are made. The birthday of the imam does not however have any religious significance and this perhaps explains why respondents ranked it after the occasion of Lail-at-al-Qadr. Nevertheless, it is a day of joy and festivity for the Ismailis. Imamat day and the birthday of the Imam are exclusive Ismaili festivals. It is therefore quite significant that Ismailis attach a great deal of importance to these two occasions. In contrast, except for the festivals of Lail-at-al-Qadr, which was ranked second, the occasions of Navroz and Idd were rated fourth and fifth respectively. All three are common Muslim festivals of varying importance to the different sectarian persuasions. Navroz, for example, is a Shia Muslim festival, unknown to the Sunni Muslims. These festivals are, however, not celebrated in exactly the same way by all Muslims alike. Each sect observes them according to their interpretation of varying latitude, and understanding.

The festival of Navroz (lit.: Nau Ruz) is the beginning of the Iranian New Year. While narrating the history of the imams in chapter II, it has been shown that the Ismaili imams lived in Persia for over seven centuries, from the end of the eleventh century to mid-nineteenth century. The title "Aga Khan" first given to the 46th Imam Aga Hassanali Shah, is a Persian one. Moreover, the pirs who converted the Hindus in India to the Ismaili faith were Iranian. Thus, one of the Iranian festivals that has penetrated into Indian Ismailism and which has been retained upto the present times is that of Navroz. It falls on

21st March, and coincides with the first day of Spring. Many legends associate the advent of spring with that of the New Year, Navroz, although for Kenyan Ismailis, Navroz is just the celebration of the Persian New Year. Frequently, on the occasion of Navroz, the imam appoints new officials via the message of talika. In the jamat khana, Ismailis exchange new year greetings amongst themselves.

On the day of Navroz therefore, prayers for peace and prosperity are offered, the ceremony of ghatpat is performed, and grain with nuts and sweets is distributed along with the sukhrit to the jamat. The grain is symbolic of prosperity and is given to the jamat only on this occasion. The order in which the religious festivals were ranked by the respondents is illustrated in table 23.

TABLE 23:

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS RANKED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

Rank	1	2	3	4	5
Religious Festival	Imamat Day	Lail-at-al-Qadr	Imam's Birthday	Navroz	Idd

The last festival that remains to be discussed and that was rated fifth on the list is the celebration of Idd. Idd is a bi-annual festival, and is observed by all Muslims. Idd-al-fitr is the "festival of breaking the fast"[23] and marks

the end of the month of fasting observed during the month of Ramadhan. It is therefore celebrated with a lot of feasting and rejoicing. Idd-al-adha is the sacrificial feast and is a symbolic remembrance of the sacrifice made by Ibrahim of his son Ismail. A lot of uncertainty precedes the celebration of both the festivals because its observance depends on the sighting of the moon. We have seen that the new moon every month is celebrated as Chandraat. The Muslim calendar is fixed according to the lunar phases, and differences arise because the Shia Muslims determine the new moon by astronomical calculation, whereas for the Sunni, it must be "established empirically and attested by witnesses."[24] Subsequently, it often happens that Shia and Sunni muslims observe Idd on different days.

Nevertheless, all Muslims offer the idd prayer known as Idd namaz in the morning. Ismailis in Nairobi usually say the namaz at 10 a.m. in the jamat khana. This time is so fixed in order not to clash with the namaz offered in the Muslim mosques at which Ismaili men may wish to participate. The obvious difference is that in the mosque men alone assemble to say the idd namaz. Muslim women either hold separate assemblies or say their namaz at home. Ismaili women in Nairobi attend the namaz prayers with the menfolk in the jamat khana. At the end of the namaz, which is recited by a man, as women can never lead prayers in Islam, congratulatory greetings are exchanged for the occasion. Sherbet, a drink made of sweet milk comparable to milk shake, is distributed to the jamat. The ceremony

of nandi takes place, but there are no further ceremonies or any special prayers apart from the namaz on this occasion. Idd-al-fitr is recognised as a public holiday in Kenya, and this allows the Muslims to celebrate the occasion without much inconvenience.

Although Idd was ranked as the least important of Ismaili festivals, it was found to be the most popular of these for the respondents. This conclusion was reached from results obtained from questions which sought to know to what extent religious festivals were celebrated outside the jamat khana by individual Ismailis. In order to determine whether, apart from the communal celebration of these occasions in the jamat khana, festivities extended beyond the jamat khana, respondents were asked if they undertook special preparations to celebrate these festivals. Of those who celebrated religious festivals outside the jamat khana, the majority, 70% indicated that it was on the occasion of idd rather than on any other occasion that they issued invitations for dinners, and exchanged gifts. Whereas 66% of the respondents celebrated idd by inviting friends and relatives for meals, only 2% celebrated the occasions of Navroz and the Imam's birthday in the same manner. Another 2% indicated that they celebrated all the festivals by inviting people for meals. The only festival that was not celebrated at all outside the jamat khana was that of Lail-at-al-Qadr, and, in fact 20% said that they never celebrated any of the occasions outside the jamat khana at all. Results of the break-down of these festivals are illustrated below in table 24.

TABLE 24:

CELEBRATION OF RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS
OUTSIDE THE JAMAT KHANA:
ISSUE INVITATIONS FOR MEALS

	Number	Percentage
Imamat Day	5	8
Lail-at-al-Qadr	0	0
Imam's Birthday	1	2
Navroz	1	2
Idd	40	66
All Festivals	1	2
Celebrated None	13	20
TOTAL	61	100

Similarly tabulated are results which illustrate that it is on the occasion of idd that more festivities are indulged in rather than on any other festival. Table 25 reveals these conclusions.

TABLE 25:

EXCHANGE OF GIFTS ON IMPORTANT OCCASIONS

	Number	Percentage
Imamat Day	7	11
Lail-at-al-Qadr	0	0
Imam's Birthday	1	2
Navroz	0	0
Idd	45	74
All Festivals	8	13
Celebrated None	0	0
TOTAL	61	100

We may therefore conclude that in spite of the fact that idd was ranked last in the order of importance, and which means that it is not considered to be a festival of tremendous religious significance, it is nevertheless a most popular festival among the Ismailis. The results evinced in tables 24 and 25 clearly point to this conclusion. Festivals like Navroz, Lail-at-al-Qadr, the birthday celebration of the Imam and even Imamat day show that almost negligible numbers celebrate these occasions beyond the jamat khana. Whereas a large majority 74% exchanged gifts on the occasion of idd, in contrast, a mere 2% did so on the occasion of the Imam's birthday, and only 11% on Imamat day. Thirteen per cent claimed that they exchanged gifts on every religious festival. These results further indicate that the observance of religious festivals within the jamat khana

seem to be adequate, and that respondents do not extend the festivities beyond the jamat khana, except in the instance of idd.

In comparing the festivals of Imamat day which was classified as the most important religious festival, and idd, which was ranked as the least important religious festival, it is significant that the Ismaili celebration of idd resembles to a large extent the Muslim celebration of the same. Muslims too put on their best clothes, visit friends and relatives, exchange greetings and gifts to mark the occasion.[25] Furthermore, they remember the deceased by visiting cemeteries and praying at the graveside. Many Ismailis also visit cemeteries, not only on the occasion of idd, but on any one of the various religious festivals. The question nevertheless arises as to why Imamat day as the most important religious festival is not also the most important social event? This is perhaps because organised communal festivities whihh extend over a week-end and which have been elaborated upon at the beginning of this section minimise the necessity of exchanging social niceties. The entire jamat participates at the communal luncheon and at the Saturday night programme of stick-dancing. In contrast, there is no such organised communal activity to mark idd or any of the other occasions. The study does not seek to justify reasons for the observance of any of these festivals. However, it must be emphasised that Imamat day asserts the exclusive nature of the Ismaili community, being the only community within the Muslim society that believes in the ever-present imam. The concept of imamat is the raison d'être

of the socio-religious structure of the Ismaili society, the very root and foundation of the community. On the other hand, while retaining its exclusiveness, the Ismaili community attaches considerable significance to the Muslim festival of idd, and, as the results indicate, observes it with as much enthusiasm as do other Muslim sects. Finally, these results illustrate that the celebration of these festivals in the jamat khana is one of the functions of the jamat khana and that, on the whole, respondents do not attribute too much importance to festivities beyond the jamat khana. The importance of the jamat khana as a focal point of communal activity is thus made even more evident.

Having analysed each of the religious festivals by describing them from observation made in the jamat khana, and by further elucidating the same from data collected from the survey, we may now conclude this section by discussing whether such important occasions in the jamat khana create close ties between individuals or whether they tend to be treated with indifference by the Ismailis. Respondents were therefore asked to compare such occasions with ordinary days in the jamat khana to be able to determine whether they felt closer to the rest of the congregation when celebrating a religious festival. Of the total number, 77% admitted that an important occasion did in effect bring together Ismailis in the jamat khana. The remaining 23% did not seem to think so saying that important occasions were no different from ordinary days in the jamat khana. In classifying the responses of the majority, it was found that

almost all the respondents felt that celebrating a religious festival in the jamat khana, offering the same prayers, and sharing the festive atmosphere, created a sense of belonging and re-affirmed communal solidarity. The exclusive nature of the community became evident from some of the responses which maintained that Ismailis alone celebrated these occasions. Other responses indicated that the "large congregation and the reminder that it is a special occasion makes one feel very close to the rest of the community," and that it was only on such occasions that the opportunity arose of meeting many more Ismailis. The secondary function of the jamat khana, of creating an informal atmosphere where social interaction takes place, is thus realised in this response.

In order to see what percentage of men and women feel this sense of closeness on important occasions, further analysis was made between the responses of the two sexes, Of those who believe that closeness is created on days of religious festivals, from the group of male respondents, these numbered 82%, and from among the female respondents, 70% maintained that closeness is created in the jamat khana on these festivals. Thus high proportions of both men and women held that days of festivals do in effect create closeness. From both the groups, the majority of those who felt that closeness is not enhanced in the jamat khana on such occasions explained that the jamat khana was too crowded for the individual to be really able to feel close to other Ismailis. In fact, they felt that it created an impersonal atmosphere, although they sensed the mood of

festivity. Some respondents held that such an occasion was no different from an ordinary day in the jamat khana. More women, 30% compared to 18% men, did not think that religious festivals in the jamat khana necessarily created closer ties. The majority of the women held that it was much more of a social gathering, a 'fashion parade' for the women rather than a day of religious significance. These results are tabulated below (see table 26).

TABLE 26:

CLOSENESS CREATED IN THE JAMAT KHANA ON THE OCCASION OF A RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL ACCORDING TO MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS

Sex	Closeness is Created		Closeness is not created		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	28	82	6	18	34	100
Female	19	70	8	30	27	100
TOTAL	47	77	14	23	61	100

Finally, it ought to be emphasised that the beliefs and values shared in the jamat khana are made comprehensible to the individual by their formulation as an external system in the observance of ritual ceremonies and religious festivals. Collective sentiments of the Ismaili socio-religious system are reinforced via these practices in the jamat khana. This is particularly true of ceremonies like ghatpat and nandi for example, which were interpreted as being conducive towards

communal solidarity by significant numbers of respondents. Emphasis is also given to the notion that the mere existence of a belief system in a community does not by itself lead to cohesion, but acceptance of and adherence to the belief system by the majority of people, regular repetition of its ceremonies and rituals, and above all, the consequent interaction that results amongst its participants, are forces of cohesiveness. It is held that it is in the jamat khana that the belief system of the Ismaili community in Kenya finds full expression.

Footnotes

1. Cliffod Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change" in Demerath, ed. System, Change and Conflict, 1967, p. 247.

2. Durkheim, E. Elementary Forms of Religious Life, 1915, p. 464.

3. Constitution 1962, part IX, art. 394, p. 40; see also Rules 1905, Ch. I, art. 52, p. 10.

4. Gardet, L. "Du'a" El, II, p. 617.

5. Precious Gems; Farman Mubarak Pakistan Visit, Part II, 1964.

6. Message of Sultan Muhammed Shah, Aga Khan III, to the President of Ismailia Association, Mombasa, dated 19th September, 1956. Copy obtained from H.H. The Aga Khan Provincial Council, Nairobi: "The new Du'a should be commenced throughout Africa from 2nd November....."; See also Kritzeck, Islam in Africa, p. 153.

7. Bombay High Court Reports 1866, p. 358.

8. Busse, H. "Farman" El, II, p. 803.

9. "Chandrat Patrika" No. 2, 12th March, 1967; Nairobi Precious Gems, p. 55; farman made in London jamat khana on 18th June, 1964.

10. Constitution 1946, art. 18, p. 39.

11. H.H. The Aga Khan Executive Council for Africa, C7/28/66, Nairobi, 6th July, 1966.

12. Ivanow, "Satpanth" in Collectanea Vol. I, 1948; the author describes to some extent the ginan literature of the Ismailis, p. 40 ff.

13. "Water" ERE, XIII, p. 704-719; "Purification" ERE, X, p. 455-463.

14. Ivanow, W. "Satpanth", op.cit., 1948, p. 35.

15. Rules and Regulations 1905, Ch. II, Art. II, p. 22

16. Ivanow, op.cit., 1948, p. 38.

17. S.M. Ali, "The Origins of the Khojahs and their Religious Life Today" unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, University of Bonn, 1963.

18. See for example ginan entitled: "Eji Swami Rajo more manthi na visreji" by Pir Sadardin in Selected Ginans, Bombay, 1965, pp. 20-21.

19. Ivanow, op.cit., 1948, p. 37.

20. ibid., 1948, p. 37.

21. See ERE 11,, art. "Sacrifice",pp. 1-39.

22. ibid., p. 6.

23. "Id" Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, p. 156.

24. Lammens, Islam: Beliefs and Institutions, London, 1968, p. 152.

25. "Id" loc.cit., p. 156.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCEPTS OF EQUALITY AND SERVICE AS IDEAL AND PRACTICAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE JAMAT KHANA

The study has so far dealt with the beliefs of the Ismailis in Kenya which are regularly expressed and symbolised in ritual practices in the jamat khana. Emphasis has been given to the interpretations rendered by individual Ismailis to everyday ceremonies and specific occasions, and this, we have demonstrated, is further dependent on variables like age, sex, and occupation, as well as on individual attitudes and different levels of commitment. Two concepts that are relevant to the theme of cohesiveness and which will now be analysed in this chapter are the notions of equality and service. It is held that equality in a religiously-oriented community like the Ismaili is an important indicator of cohesion and unity. This will be tested in the following section. The theme of service in the community is another essential dimension that is understood both ideally and practically by the Ismailis, and serves as a major factor in making the values and sentiments of the Ismaili belief system an everyday reality. Relying on the results elicited from the survey, the study now relates the concepts of equality and service to that of cohesiveness.

EQUALITY IN THE JAMAT KHANA

The notion of equality can be given many interpretations, and it is to be found in all activities of life, ranging from equality before the law, equality of opportunity, and political equality of the sexes, to moral and social equality. The concept has as its natural corollary the notion of inequality. A relevant theme to the study however seems to be "the idea of a universal but imprecisely defined equality; behind all differences of talents, merits, and social advantages there is some characteristically human nature by virtue of which all men are equal".[1] According to Ismaili belief, equality is enhanced in a house of prayer, for, the imam explains that:

> "When you are in a place of worship, both rich and poor are equal. The servant and the master are equal when they stand for prayers before Almighty Allah. You are all equal when you come to Jamat Khana". (2)

Consequently, the study seeks to show whether, inspite of obvious differences between individuals as like age, sex, occupation, 'talent, merit and social advantages', the concept of equality remains an ideal, or whether it is practically realised in the jamat khana. This notion therefore prompted the researcher to probe into the Ismaili attitude to the idea of equality and the question was formulated as: "Does praying together in the jamat khana create equality? If so, how?" Thus the concept of equality is specifically confined to the socio-religious institution of the jamat khana

and is therefore to be understood in this context.

Seventy-four per cent of the respondents answered that there was no distinction in the jamat khana and that individual identity or separateness was lost or minimised in a sacred place. Other responses classified in the same category indicated that there was power in congregational prayer which gave a pull to all those united in prayer in the jamat khana, and bound them closer together. Thus prayer in a place of worship like the jamat khana, and common prayer not only served to create equality but strengthened the integrative bond between those engaged in prayer. A respondent explained that there was no room for differences in the jamat khana because at the end of the du'a, the prayer, every individual offers his hand to the person sitting to his immediate right and left. Irrespective of who the other person may be, in the jamat khana this symbolic handshake at the end of the prayer is an external act of acceptance of one's co-religionists as being equal rather than being inequal. This hand-shake was also interpreted as being symbolic of unity and togetherness by some of the respondents. Equality, togetherness, and unity are all viable factors of the notion of cohesiveness. The other 26% did not think that praying together resulted in equality because of social and economic differences. Most of these respondents said that they were conscious of the distinct seating arrangements in the jamat khana, which refer specifically to the leaders of the community. The seating arrangements have been described in the section on the structure of the jamat khana (chapter IV). Some of them said that such

obvious distinctions made them aware of social, economic and educational backgrounds. Further classification of those who said that prayer together in the jamat khana does not create equality revealed that the majority of them, 33% were from the semi-professional occupation group. Most of the respondents from the group of professionals, 75% said that the jamat khana does create equality, and all the respondents, from the category of non-professionals, 100%, also believe that praying together in the jamat khana creates equality between those engaged in the act of prayer. Responses of all the occupational groups are shown below in table 27.

TABLE 27:

EQUALITY IN THE JAMAT KHANA
ACCORDING TO
OCCUPATION

Occupation	Equality in a Place of Worship		Inequality in a Place of Worship		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Semi-professional	22	67	11	33	33	100
Professional	15	75	5	25	20	100
Non-professional	8	100	0	0	8	100
TOTAL	45	74	16	26	61	100

The idea of equality in the jamat khana was compared and contrasted with a question which aimed to find out if the jamat khana did in effect bring together all the different kinds of people, or whether these people made only superficial contact. The reason for comparing these two questions is because both of them are dimensions of one basic idea, that of equality, and because such a comparison defines more clearly for us the wider functions of the jamat khana. Respondents were therefore asked if they thought that the jamat khana effectively brought together the various categories of people. An overwhelming majority, 90% of the respondents, said that the jamat khana was the only gathering place for the entire community and that the daily congregation did result in harmonious and close associations. Responses indicated that according to the general feeling there was an absence of status difference in the jamat khana, and the fact that all Ismailis were free to come to jamat khana brought them closer together. Moreover, the common purpose of prayer, and of service to the imam, created oneness and made individuals feel part of one large family. The remaining 10% said that they were rather conscious of obvious differences like style of dressing, to cite an example. These respondents indicated that although Ismailis meet for prayers regularly in the jamat khana, there was little opportunity of really getting to know one another. Of this, 10%, interestingly enough, 5% were male and 5% female respondents. When these two questions were compared, the results revealed that the answers of the majority showed a fairly consistent trend of thought. Results of the total sample are represented below in table 28.

TABLE 28:

TOGETHERNESS CREATED IN THE JAMAT KHANA BY DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE COMPARED WITH THE NOTION OF EQUALITY IN THE JAMAT KHANA

	Number	Percentage
Both equality and togetherness	42	69
Togetherness but not equality	13	21
Equality but not togetherness	3	5
Neither equality nor togetherness	3	5
TOTAL	61	100

Thus it can be seen that of the total number, 69% felt that communal prayers in the jamat khana create equality, and that the institution of the jamat khana does bring together all sorts of people. This reveals a consistent attitude among the majority of people. Of those who claim that equality is not created, 21% did however indicate that different people do, in effect, come together as a result of going to the jamat khana. In contrast, 5% said that praying together in the jamat khana does create equality but does not really bring together different people. A mere 5% represent those who did not think that equality could be created in a place of worship, nor that people from diverse backgrounds could really come

together in such an institution. The main reason for this seems to be, as evinced from the results, an awareness of the difference in social status, an awareness of the hierarchical structure in the community. Nevertheless, we may conclude that the jamat khana is essentially that specific site in the community that effectively brings into regular contact a large number of Ismailis, and that the majority believe that the common purpose of prayer creates equality and closeness in the jamat khana.

The concept of equality as an ideal and practical expression in the jamat khana therefore is to be understood in the light of the foregoing discussion. The egalitarian view that "all men are alike in possessing reason, or a soul, or some other essentially human characteristic or nature, by virtue of which they stand equal"[3] has been used as a criteria for analysing the information, rather than many of the other criteria of equality like impartiality or social egalitarianism. This is because it is felt that in a place like the jamat khana, where Ismailis professing common beliefs and sharing common religious sentiments come together, the notion that all men, inspite of obvious resemblances and obvious dissimilarities, are in some deeper sense equal, has much more relevance to the study than any other aspect of equality.

THEME OF SERVICE

This section concludes with a theme that may explain the Ismaili interpretation of religion in practical terms, that of service. The theme of khidmat, service, highlights and completes the lifestyle of the community. It is a concept that seems to be very much Ismaili in inspiration as well as in practice. Ismaili in inspiration because its raison d'être springs from the imam, belief in the presence of the imam being a fundamental tenet of the faith. Service rendered to the imam and to the jamat is equated to the expression of love and devotion for the imam. The bond that exists between the imam and his followers can be fortified only by way of service. This idea undoubtedly takes different dimensions and attitudes, and the concept of service as interpreted by individuals during the interviews is here reconstructed in order to illustrate how this theme fits into the overall framework which delineates cohesiveness within the community.

The question however arises as to what prompts an Ismaili to serve, and for what reasons does he do so? Is there any material gain for him? Is his faith his source of inspiration? Does his concept of service embrace humanity at large or is it confined to the community alone? The entire structure of the community rests on the basis of voluntary service. Officials who man the administrative bodies of the community like the various councils, health, educational and economic committees, and mukhis and kamadias in the jamat khana are all honorary

functionnaries. There are, of course paid employees, but we are not here concerned with this category of people. Communal work to a great extent is thus carried out by individuals in a purely voluntary capacity. The concept of service consequently is a very pronounced one in the community, and every Ismaili is well-acquainted with it. It is generally believed that any form of service will be rewarded, and farmans of the imam make mention of the benefits of self-effacement, of happiness which can be attained by contribution, by giving of oneself in any way whatsoever. Service is deemed meritorious, and the imam frequently advises his followers to serve the jamat, and he frequently mentions that service is a foundation of the faith.[4] These words can inspire the individual to serve, especially as every individual conceives of the imam on a very personal level. The imam is not an impersonal entity, removed from all contact from the mu'min. It is this notion of a personal faith, of a personal rapport between each Ismaili and the imam that creates the urge in the individual to serve. Service however, varies according to the commitment and devotion to the imam and to the community.

Respondents were asked several questions on this theme. One of them was formulated to determine whether adequate opportunities existed for individual Ismailis who may not be involved in any one of the communal institutions to serve the imam and the community. The question of course presumes that membership in a communal institution ensures service in some form. Respondents however had no difficulty in

answering the question. More than half, 58% responded that every Ismaili did have the opportunity of serving, notwithstanding attachment to any institution. They maintained that the jamat khana provided ample opportunity to each individual to perform duties of various kinds. The fact that more than half the total number associate service immediately with the jamat khana is significant. This illustrates that they envisage service as a co-existing feature with prayer in the jamat khana and also that they consider the jamat khana as an institution that permits each individual Ismaili to give expression to his own personal interpretation of service. Thus it is a way of life realised in the jamat khana, as regularly as the observance of religious ceremonies and daily ritual.

Service in the jamat khana can take varying forms and these were well illustrated by the respondents. Keeping the jamat khana clean, for instance, by sweeping the floors, dusting and washing the utensils used for ceremonies like ghatpat and nandi, is a form of service to the imam, the jamat khana being conceived of as the house of the imam.[5] Thus the idea exists that doing these small favours, like keeping the house of the imam clean, reinforces the close attachment and spiritual proximity to the imam. The jamat khana is consequently kept scrupulously clean by all those who wish to do so, and they consider it a privilege to be able to do so. On a different plane, service in the jamat khana was interpreted as being able to participate actively in the daily ritual ceremonies. Therefore, persons who recite dua and ginan, read farmans, and presided over any of the

other ceremonies that have been elucidated, are deemed to be performing a kind of service to the imam and to the jamat. As there are no restrictions limiting the range of performers in the jamat khana, men, women and children all participate actively, and participation is on a voluntary basis. However, none of these varied expressions of service performed in a practical form in the jamat khana require the individual to be a member of any particular organisation.

On the other hand, service can also find expression outside the jamat khana and the notion of silent dedication seemed to be attractive to 36% of the respondents. These people maintained that service could be rendered in a variety of ways by any Ismaili. He can, for instance, give monetary aid, help the needy, educate the poor, and generally help to relieve the burden of the less fortunate. Or else he can help the welfare society of the community by donating books, clothes, and food. Selfless devotion can also find an outlet by transporting individuals to the jamat khana, by visiting the sick, and by imparting religious knowledge to school children. And, qualified members of the jamat can serve the imam and the community by giving of their knowledge, experience and expertise to others in an advisory capacity. Service therefore varies according to capability and willingness to serve as well as according to various levels of commitment of the individual Ismaili. The remaining 6% said that there was little opportunity available for an individual to render any service if he did not already belong to a communal organisation. The interpretation of this question is tabulated below (table 29), and as evinced from the

discussion, results indicate that the notion of service is mainly associated with the jamat khana by the majority of the respondents. Once again, the jamat khana focuses as the centre of communal activity and consequently, of social integration.

TABLE 29: OPPORTUNITIES OF SERVICE

	Number	Percentage
In jamat khana	35	58
In communal institutions	22	36
Little or no opportunity	4	6
TOTAL	61	100

The attention of the respondents was then directed towards specific bodies in whose framework the concept of service has been institutionalised. For instance, a question to determine their attitude towards the function of the volunteer corps in the jamat khana as a disciplinary body was asked. A predominant majority, 84%, commended the work of the volunteers, saying that they did a lot of good work, gave up a considerable amount of time to carry out their duties in the jamat khana, and were willing to serve the imam and the community. Respect and admiration for this category of Ismailis was voiced by the respondents. Nevertheless, a minority of respondents, 16% felt that the presence of the volunteer corps was no longer a prerequisite for discipline in the jamat khana. According to these respondents, the jamat today is very conscious of the

purpose of attending jamat khana and realizes the importance of maintaining order and of behaving respectably in the jamat khana.

The second specific area in which service has been institutionalised is that of communal leadership. In detailing the structure of jamat khana, specific categories of people who constitute the framework of the community have been described. We have noted that title-holders and councillors sit apart from the rest of the jamat, against the wall facing the rest of the congregation in the jamat khana. Respondents were asked how they felt about this seating arrangement in the jamat khana. It was considered to be a kind of recognition for their services to the imam according to 56% of the respondents. It was further explained as being necessary in any society, for it to function smoothly, that due recognition is given to leadership. An one respondent explained, ministers in a government organisation, heads of administrative bodies in any society are distinguished from the community at large. This special position was also equated to being symbolic of respect shown to the official representatives of the imam as leaders of the community. A few of the respondents made reference to a farman of the imam explaining that the jamat must be aware of who its leaders are. In order to create this awareness, therefore, a distinct place in the jamat khana is set aside to distinguish them from the rest of the congregation. Of the remaining 44%, 20% of the respondents revealed an attitude of indifference to the distinction made as a result of separate seating arrangements in the jamat khana.

The other 24% which is an important minority, disapproved of the system and asserted that such distinction should be reserved specifically for social functions outside the jamat khana. Six per cent said that the special position accorded to the leaders of the community was found to be a source of distraction in the jamat khana, especially during the course of religious ceremonies and prayers, and one respondent said that such a distinction encourages a class of élite in the community. Divergence from traditional opinion is thus indicated by a small number of Ismailis, who, according to the observations made by Morris in his study of the Ismailis in East Africa are probably those who have been "educated in the newer ways, who find that most of the positions in the bureaucratic organisation are already occupied by their elders....."[6]

This notion was compared with the question on equality being created as a result of praying together in the jamat khana. Results already indicated in table 27 show that the majority of respondents, 74% believe that praying together in the jamat khana can be a creative force resulting in equality. A lesser majority, 56%, (see table 30) believe that recognition given in the jamat khana to the category of leadership is justified. These two groups of attitudes are compared, and the results tabulated below.

TABLE 30:

EQUALITY IN THE JAMAT KHANA COMPARED WITH ONE STRATA OF ISMAILI SOCIETY

	Recognition given to Leaders		Recognition unnecessary in Jamat Khana		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Equality in the Jamat khana	27	60	18	40	45	100
Inequality in the Jamat khana	7	44	9	56	16	100
TOTAL	34	56	27	44	61	100

Thus an analysis of the results illustrated in table 30 reveal that 60% of the respondents felt that praying together in the jamat khana can create equality, and that the seating apart of leaders in the jamat khana is a sign of respect shown to them. The remaining 40% indicated that although they do believe that equality can be created as a result of congregational prayer in the jamat khana, recognition due to the group of leaders does not necessarily have to be made obvious in the jamat khana. From among those who feel that congregational prayer does not create equality, 44% however indicated that they agreed with the seating arrangements in the jamat khana. A greater number, 56%, felt that jamat khana prayer does not create equality, nor is there any need to continue with the system of of distinct positions for leaders in the jamat khana. Nevertheless,

the results are fairly well balanced and do not indicate very strong inclinations either for or against the present system. There is, of course, a considerable number who believe that prayer together in a place of worship creates equality, and this concept has been elaborated upon in the preceding section on equality.

From the results evinced from the following question on announcements made in the jamat khana, the conclusion was reached that the underlying notion was that of service. The question sought to find out how respondents felt about the practice of reading of names of people in the jamat khana. The list of names is confined to those who make any kind of offering to the imam, which usually is a sum of money. Individuals who do not wish to have their names read inform the mukhi, otherwise names of persons who make the offering are read. Results indicate a strong feeling towards discontinuing of the practice. A large majority of respondents, 74% indicated that the reading of names ought to be discontinued. The main reasons given were that it was not necessary at all, that it was mere publicity and rather time consuming. The remaining 26% who felt that the practice ought to continue stated that it was personally gratifying to themselves to have their names read in jamat khana. Some respondents felt that the system would inspire other individuals to make similar offerings, and others said that blessings received from the imam justified the continuation of the system. However, this in no way presupposes that the imam would not bless the jamat if names were not read

in the jamat khana.

Further insight was sought by classifying these results according to sex in order to see whether men and women showed any distinct inclinations. Table 31.a illustrates the results obtained. It is very revealing to see that an equal number of men and women fall in each of the four categories classified. Twenty-six per cent men and twenty-six per cent women indicated that the practice of reading names in the jamat khana ought to continue; the majority, 74% in each case, indicated that the system was redundant and should be done away with.

TABLE 31.a

PRACTICE OF READING NAMES IN THE JAMAT KHANA ACCORDING TO SEX

Sex	Practice to Continue		Practice to discontinue		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	9	26	25	74	34	100
Female	7	26	20	74	27	100
TOTAL	16	26	45	74	61	100

In comparing the attitudes of the two sexes, we find that results indicate a well-balanced view according to both male and female respondents. In order to check whether age made any significant difference to this attitude, results were further classified, and it was found that in all the age groups, the

majority indicated that the practice of reading names should be discontinued. Table 31.b illustrates these results.

TABLE 31.b

PRACTICE OF READING NAMES IN THE JAMAT KHANA ACCORDING TO AGE GROUPS

Age Groups	Practice to Continue		Practice to Discontinue		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
20 - 29	3	25	9	75	12	100
30 - 39	6	29	15	71	21	100
40 - 49	4	24	13	76	17	100
Over 50	3	27	8	73	11	100
TOTAL	16	26	45	74	61	100

Therefore, we can see that in this instance, although no opposition or antagonism was detected to the act of making an offering, since it symbolises service rendered to the imam, respondents felt rather strongly about the reading of names of such individuals in the jamat khana. Such service is preferred to be made in anonymity, whereby the need for having names read would be precluded.

The second content area that includes announcements of a different context and which are also made in the jamat khana concern the field of 'social' events. This system of announcements

has been elaborated upon in the section on functions of the jamat khana in Chapter IV. It ought to be emphasised, however, that this "necessary" function of the jamat khana is interpreted as a form of service by some of the respondents. They feel that information imparted to the jamat by the communal institutions is part of the whole notion of service.

Finally, a question was asked to the respondents of their interpretation of the concept of service. Two major groups emerged from the analysis of the data. One of them, which comprises 38% of the total, felt that service according to them was a form of sacrifice, given voluntarily. There was no rule that exacted service from them. They conceived of service as selfless devotion, as sacrifice made to the imam because of love for the imam. Therefore, if they served they did so willingly. Thus service would depend on individual commitment. On the other hand, the second group of respondents, 36% in number, understood service as a fundamental obligation for every Ismaili. To serve is an Ismaili way of life, it is Ismailism in everyday reality. One respondent said it was an act of worship. These responses thus equate service with duty, in particular with religious duty. To them a religious way of life is a life spent in service. This therefore explains the willingness of the individual to man the numerous communal institutions as voluntary workers. The third category of respondents, 15% interpreted service as being personally gratifying, because they believe that service rendered to the imam and to the jamat is a source of spiritual strength and upliftment. They consider it a privilege

to be able to serve, and believe that regularity in prayer as well as regularity in service reinforces the spiritual bond between the imam and the Ismaili individuals and helps them to attain spiritual satisfaction and peace of mind. Of the remaining 11%, 5% indicated that their conception of service embraced society at large, and they believed that service should not be confined to the community alone. Thus, to serve humanity was the interpretation given to the concept of service by these respondents. The remaining 5% did not understand the question. The results are classified in table 32.

TABLE 32:

CONCEPT OF SERVICE
INTERPRETED BY RESPONDENTS

	Number	Percentage
Sacrifice	23	38
Obligation	22	36
Spiritual Benefit	9	15
Embraces humanity	4	6
Don't understand	3	5
TOTAL	61	100

It was further found that the use of money in the jamat khana is yet another dimension given to the notion of service. Respondents were asked what the use of money in the jamat khana meant to them. Just over half the number, 56% said that it

signified a form of service rendered to the imam. Out of their personal conviction, as a token of love and devotion for the imam, the money that they used in the jamat khana expressed their desire to give to the imam. It created therefore a sense of satisfaction, of contentment. One respondent interpreted the question as "the modern concept of service which has been translated into monetary terms and made very easy today", and according to this response, it would seem that the notion of sacrifice, of offering, of service to one's religion, has been greatly facilitated today. Although respondents observed as well that a tremendous amount of value is attached to money today, and giving of money was therefore symbolic of genuinely wanting to part with something valuable. Individuals also equated money with service as being part of prayers, and of charity. Twenty-three per cent of the respondents felt that it was an established tradition to use money in the jamat khana. They did so out of habit, because they were accustomed to it. Some of the respondents, 16% of the total, claimed that they did not know what the use of money in the jamat khana meant. Finally, 5% felt that it was unnecessary and unimportant, and deemed it mere formality. Table 33 indicates these results.

TABLE 33:

INTERPRETATION OF USE OF MONEY
IN THE JAMAT KHANA

	Number	Percentage
Service	34	56
Tradition	14	23
Don't know	10	16
Unnecessary	3	5
TOTAL	61	100

Thus the majority indicated that the use of money represented to them a way of serving the imam. In concluding this theme of service, emphasis is given to the conclusion that whether service is interpreted for one's own benefit or for the betterment of the community, whether the motive behind service is an innate desire to give and to serve, or it is understood as a fundamental tenet of the faith, a preponderant majority of respondents believe that service in any form whatsoever is crucial to the Ismaili way of life. It can vary according to the varying levels of individual commitment, but it is necessary. Because of this spirit to serve, because service results frequently in an exchange of favours, social association results, and strengthens the integrative bond. Thus indirectly a consequence of service is cohesion and solidarity between members of a group.

Service to the community is envisaged as an important principle of life. Ismailis are exhorted to emulate lives of personalities like Pir Sadardin,[7] personalities who spent their lives in selfless devotion for the betterment of others. It is maintained that service, like ritual ceremonies, or symbols, is used to translate a need, either individual or social. And religion provides an outlet for this need. It gives expression to the love that the Ismaili has for his imam and that makes practicable the effective functioning of the various institutions of the community. Results evinced from the question on service reveal that significant numbers associate service with the jamat khana. Thus the role of the jamat khana is given yet another perspective, a new dimension. Offering and sacrifice are forms of service, and respondents view this notion as a necessary way of life. It may be concluded that regularity in service involves interaction between people, and this involvement tends to reinforce the idea that regularity of contact between individuals of a common belief system is a force of integration in the community. Furthermore, it is evident that for the majority, service is understood only within the way of life of the community itself, rather than to include other communities, or other people in the country. This reflects yet another, facet of the inward focus of the community. The fact that members of a community reveal an eagerness to render service to make their institutions function effectively, and to help one another illustrates a desire to associate with Ismailis more than with other people and reinforces communal cohesion. The implications of service therefore for strengthening communal solidarity are

varied. Certain general truths in a social system become self-evident, and it would seem that for the Ismailis, the conviction that people ought to render service in some form has become a self-evident reality. A systematic unity of the Ismaili community in Kenya has been constituted by a framework of action in the form of service and a framework of values and sentiments expressed through religious ceremonies, as has been demonstrated in the study.

Footnotes

1. Benn, S-1 "Equality, Moral and Social", Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Vol. III and IV, 1967, p. 40.

2. Chandrat Patrika, No. 2, 12th March, 1967, Nairobi.

3. Benn, loc.cit., 1967, p. 40.

4. Kalam-e-Imam-e Mubin, Part II, 1960; Nairobi, 20th March, 1926, p. 108; 25th March, 1926, p. 121, et passim.

5. Kalam-e-Imam-e Mubin, Part I, 1953, farman No. 61, Sind Hydrabad, 19th February, 1900, p. 167, et passim.

6. Morris, "The Divine Kingship of the Aga Khan", South Western Journal of Anthropology, Vol. XIV, No. 4, 1958, p. 468.

7. Kalam-e-Imam-e Mubin, Part I, Zanzibar, 22nd August, 1905, pp. 277-280; 17th September, 1905, p. 304.

CHAPTER SEVEN

OTHER FINDINGS RELATED TO THE SUBJECT

Nevertheless, the study would be incomplete if two major areas of enquiry that were included in the standardised questionnaire are not briefly examined. During the course of the interviews, questions on social practices - on marriage ceremonies and funeral rites - of the Ismailis, and on communal residences were asked.

Communal Residences

In discussing the methodology that was employed in carrying out the research, it has been indicated that exclusive communal residences in Nairobi were listed for the purpose of random sampling. Once these listings were complete and a 10% sample was made, it was found that out of the total sample of 61, 50 respondents, which is 82% of the total number, are at present resident in the communal flats. This is a preponderant majority and therefore the communal residence as a variable to determine differences in attitudes to the questions on the jamat khana was used, as communal residence could lead to cohesiveness. However, significant variations in responses were not detected when answers of residents were compared with those of non-residents. A few illustrations will reveal this.

The first of these is the question which sought to determine whether praying together in the jamat khana creates equality or not. The concept of equality has been elaborated upon in chapter VI. Occupation as a variable was used to illustrate how equality was perceived by Ismailis of various occupational categories, and the results were tabulated in table 27, chapter VI. We must now show whether living in close proximity to other Ismailis is an effective determining factor in attitude of residents as compared to that of non-residents. Did residence in an exclusive communal area influence the opinions of individual Ismailis? It was found that both residents and non-residents revealed similarities in responses. Whereas 76% of the residents indicated that congregational prayer in the jamat khana resulted in equality, an equally high majority, 64% of the non-residents responded in the same way. Comparative numbers in both cases, 24% of the residents and 36% of the non-residents said that equality is not necessarily resultant from prayers said together in the jamat khana. Thus, we can see that there are no sharp differences expressed by either the residents or the non-residents. Table 34 shows these results.

TABLE 34:

EQUALITY RESULTING FROM
PRAYERS IN THE JAMAT KHANA
ACCORDING TO RESIDENTS AND NON-RESIDENTS

	Equality		Inequality		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Residents	38	76	12	24	50	100
Non-residents	7	64	4	36	11	100
TOTAL	45	74	16	26	61	100

Almost similar information comes to light from the analysis of the question on the community being closely-knit. Comparative numbers of both residents and non-residents fall in two of the categories of responses. Thirty per cent residents and 36% non-residents said that the cohesion of the community was a result of the jamat khana, whereas 24% of the residents and 18% of the non-residents attributed cohesiveness to both the guidance and authority of the imam as well as to the institution of the jamat khana. A larger number of non-residents, 46%, in contrast to a smaller number of residents, 28%, said that the community was closely-knit because of the imam.
The fourth category of responses reveals a more distinct attitude between Ismaili residents and non-residents. Residents alone, 12% of them felt that the institutions of the community were responsible for creating a cohesive unit of the Ismailis in Kenya. None of the non-residents gave this as a reason for

communal solidarity. Neither did any of the non-residents feel that the community was not very closely integrated. In contrast to the non-residents, of the remaining 6% of the residents, 3% indicated that the community was not close-knit, and 3% did not answer the question at all. Table 35 illustrates these results.

TABLE 35:

INTERPRETATION OF COHESION ACCORDING TO RESIDENTS AND NON-RESIDENTS

	Residents		Non-residents		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Imam	14	28	5	46	19	31
Jamat Khana	15	30	4	36	19	31
Imam + Jamat Khana	12	24	2	18	14	23
Communal structure	6	12	0	0	6	10
Other	3	6	0	0	3	5
TOTAL	50	100	11	100	61	100

It is somewhat surprising that Ismailis residing in exclusive communal flats feel that the community is not very integrated. It would seem that proximity of neighbours of the same ethnic group, sharing a common system of beliefs, is likely to create close contacts and consequently a well-knit group. Yet the foregoing analysis indicates otherwise. Non-residents, who live in separate residences removed from Ismaili neighbours would perhaps be expected to feel more detached from other

members of the community, and therefore feel less closely integrated. In fact, respondents from exclusive communal residences do not think that the community is as closely integrated as the non-resident respondents do. Looking at the overall results, however, we can see that 82% of the residents and 100% of the non-residents attribute the cohesiveness of the community to the imam, or to the jamat khana, and to the imam and the jamat khana together.

Furthermore, responses of the residents and the non-residents to the question on differences between Ismailis and other people reveal essentially similarities in attitudes. We find that 32% of the residents and 46% of the non-residents attribute the difference to the presence of an ever-living imam. Whereas another 32% of the residents said that the institution of the jamat khana was a distinguishing characteristic of the community in Kenya, none of the non-residents attributed the difference to the jamat khana. In contrast, however analysis of the preceding question on communal solidarity indicated that 36% of the non-residents said that the cohesiveness of the community was due to the jamat khana. However, almost equal numbers of both the groups, 24% of the residents and 27% of the non-residents, said that both the imam and the jamat khana contributed towards making the community 'different' from other communities in the country.

A further difference in attitude between residents and non-residents is evident from the following numbers. Whereas only 4% of the residents said that the institutions of the community made it different from other communities, 18% of the non-residents indicated the same. This contrasts once again with the question on cohesion, as none of the non-residents felt that the complex of communal institutions was responsible for a cohesive group. Finally, 10% of the residents and 9% of the non-residents said that the community was no different from any other. These results are illustrated in table 36.

TABLE 36:

RESIDENTS AND NON-RESIDENTS:
PERCEIVED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
ISMAILIS AND NON-ISMAILIS

	Residents		Non-residents		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Imam	16	32	5	46	21	34
Jamat Khana	16	32	0	0	16	27
Imam + jamat khana	11	24	3	27	14	23
Communal structure	2	4	2	18	4	6
No difference	5	10	1	9	6	10
TOTAL	50	100	11	100	61	100

Therefore, except for the column on the jamat khana, there are no significant differences in attitudes between residents and non-residents.

Finally, the question on dependence on other members of the community illustrates that more residents depend on fellow Ismailis than do non-residents. Results classified in table 37, show that 80% of the residents indicated that they would turn to Ismailis for help, 12% said that they were not too certain, and a mere 8% said that they would not depend on their own community members for help. On the other hand, a little more than half, 55% of the non-residents said that they would depend on fellow Ismailis for help, and comparatively bigger numbers, 27% and 18% indicated that it would depend on the kind of need, and that they would not turn to Ismailis for help, respectively. The results are tabulated below (table 37).

TABLE 37:

DEPENDENCE ON ISMAILIS ACCORDING TO RESIDENTS AND NON-RESIDENTS

	Residents		Non-residents		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Would depend on Ismailis	40	80	6	55	46	75
Not certain	6	12	3	27	9	15
Would not depend on Ismailis	4	8	2	18	6	10
TOTAL	50	100	11	100	61	100

We may therefore deduce from these figures that dependence increases with proximity to Ismaili neighbours. These attitudes further reflect the inward focus maintained by a large majority of the respondents, and particularly by the residents. According to Durkheim[1] the more weakened a group is to which the individual belongs, the less he depends on it. Therefore dependence on a group and in particular on those who constitute the same community, is a consequence of the group being strongly united, and self-reliant. A group in which mutual support, both moral and practical, exists is likely to be a more integrated group. Thus dependence of individual Ismailis on fellow members can be viewed as an indicator of cohesion. The greater dependence of the community residents than the non-residents again reveals differential cohesion on an individual level. But it is not adequate to indicate that residence is a stronger indicator of cohesion than the jamat khana.

In concluding this section we can see that from among the four questions analysed, the one on dependence is the only one which reveals any significant differences in attitudes of the residents and the non-residents. We see that residing in an exclusive communal area does not necessarily influence the opinions of the individuals. The concepts of equality and of cohesiveness reveal similar attitudes between Ismaili residents and Ismaili non-residents. However, there do not seem to be any significant variations in the responses, and we can therefore reassert that living in close proximity to members of the

community does not reveal any major differences to necessitate further analysis. Residence is therefore not a major factor in communal cohesion. The conclusions reached in the main work from the analysis of the respondents can thus be accepted as being as representative as possible, having been analysed against variables of age, sex, occupation and even residence.

Marriage Ceremonies

The second area of discussion that is related to the subject focuses on the marriage ceremonies and funeral rites of the Ismaili community. At the outset, mention has been made that the jamat khana serves as a centre of social activity as well as a place for prayer, and that the jurisdiction of the mukhi and kamadia is not restricted to religious ceremonies in the jamat khana alone. Ismaili marriages are solemnized only in the jamat khana[2] and funeral rites attendant upon death are performed by the mukhi and kamadia in the jamat khana. Briefly, therefore, we shall show how these ceremonies pertaining to the jamat khana are understood by individuals, and further, how they tend towards making the community tradition-oriented and consequently socially integrated. Malinowski's[3] proposition that adherence to tradition results in cohesion is well demonstrated from results derived by analysing responses to the questions on marriage patterns and funeral ceremonies. It was found that the majority of the respondents feel that traditional customs ought to be preserved because they have always existed, and because they constitute the cultural fabric of the Ismaili society in the country. An examination of some of the questions

will reveal the validity of this notion.

Respondents were asked why marriage customs preceding the actual marriage ceremony in the jamat khana are observed. This question was asked because, according to the Ismaili Constitution, these ceremonies have been made illegal and yet they have been retained in practice by the people. The opinions of the respondents regarding this restriction were therefore sought. A large number, 70%, said that these customs were observed because they were part of the traditional set-up of the community, because of customary adherence over a long period of time. The other 30% said that there was no reason for observing these ceremonies. When further asked whether they would ever do away with any of the ceremonies, 60% of the respondents indicated that they would always retain them, and that they saw no reason for dispensing with these customary practices. Respondents said that they enjoyed observing these ceremonies, and that these traditional customs have become an accepted component of the social system of the community, and must therefore be perpetuated. In the future, therefore, this tendency to retain traditional customs seems likely.

Of the other 40%, 30% said they would discard these customs as they did not have great significance, and 10% said that whereas they would do away with the ceremonies, they would retain the wedding feast. This was because they felt that an occasion like a marriage ought to be celebrated with a feast for friends and relatives. By further seeking to know if in the past

any of the respondents had discarded some of the ceremonies, it was found that only a minority, 28% had done so. Thus, this reveals that there are a number of individuals who do not feel bound either by social pressure or by tradition, or who feel that they must conform to long-established customary practices.

Finally, respondents were asked why these ceremonies, although they have been made illegal by the Ismaili Constitution, have not as yet disappeared in practice. Once again, the majority of respondents, 80% said that it was mere tradition that accounted for the continuation of these customs. There were three major areas of responses under this classification. Respondents maintained that it was basically very difficult to make a break with habits and customs long embedded in society. Secondly, it was "a social necessity", and out of "fear of gossip", customs were observed rather than discarded. Lastly, sentimental attachment to customary practices prevented people from doing away with familiar patterns of life. These ceremonies are believed to be symbolic of good omens and happiness for the newly-weds. Other responses indicated that social customs were confused with religious tradition, and were therefore not discarded easily. Furthermore, a social standard has been set and maintained by the people, and they are unwilling, or even unprepared to accept change in a system familiar to them.

This analysis of responses on the marriage customs points to one essential fact, and that is that Ismailis enjoy observing traditional customs and are somewhat reluctant to part

with them. Patterns of behaviour are followed because of familiarity with that system, because of sentimental attachment to it, and mostly because it has become an established tradition. We may therefore conclude that a profound adherence to traditional customs makes a society tradition-bound. Societies which are basically oriented towards upholding traditional customs and values therefore tend to be close-knit. Change in customary practices is not looked upon too favourably, and a perpetuation of a well-known pattern is considered right and secure. Furthermore, traditional social customs involve a certain number of people, and are rarely practised individually. Marriage customs that precede an Ismaili marriage in the jamat khana thus bring together different people and result in social interaction.

Apart from these customary practices, it is the wedding reception that has caused a considerable amount of controversy in the community. The Constitution of 1962 limits the number of invited guests to two hundred, and these include "family members, relatives and friends".[4] Respondents were asked their opinion on this restriction. The majority, 62% indicated that it was a fair number, 23% said that it was an unfair number, and that the rule should be relaxed, or that no restriction should be imposed. Fifteen per cent felt that two hundred was too many, and the number should be cut down to include the immediate families of the bride and groom alone. From these attitudes, we can infer that in this respect at least, the community is anxious to observe the regulation in the Constitution.

This attitude contrasts sharply with the reluctance shown vis-à-vis the abolition of customary marriage ceremonies. We have shown that whereas these customs have been strictly forbidden, there is little or no evidence that this law is taken into consideration in actual practice. In upholding tradition, legal restrictions have been ignored to a large extent. Nevertheless, it was found that 60% of the respondents felt that the celebration of a marriage by way of a wedding feast was an occasion that created togetherness. The other 31% did not attach any significance to the feast. It ought to be clarified however that the wedding feast is not restricted to Ismailis alone, that one is free to extend invitations to friends from other communities. In this respect therefore, the feast cannot be an important source of communal cohesiveness as participation involves other people as well.

In contrast, the actual marriage ceremony of two Ismailis that is performed in the jamat khana does not permit non-Ismailis to attend the ceremony itself. This characterises the exclusive nature of the Ismaili community. In order to probe into the attitudes of the respondents to this practice, a question was asked, whether according to the respondents, non-Ismailis ought to be allowed in the jamat khana to witness the marriage ceremony. Briefly, the procedure in the jamat khana is of a very simple nature. The marriage is formalised in the presence of the mukhi and kamadia, who officiate at the ceremony. The mukhi reads the formal announcement in English, and the couple, as well as two witnesses, usually the best man of the groom and

the bride's chief maid, sign the marriage forms. Ismaili marriage is deemed null and void without the presence of at least two witnesses.[5] The form states that the bride and the groom are sane of mind, mature of age, and of Ismaili faith.[6] The mukhi then offers prayers for the happiness and prosperity of the bridal couple. Rings are exchanged to mark the occasion and although this is obviously a result of western influence, the rings are not exchanged in the same manner as in the church where the couple exchange the rings themselves. The mukhi slips the ring onto the groom's third finger of the left hand, and similarly, the kamadia on the left hand of the bride. The first mention of rings to mark both the engagement and the marriage of an Ismaili couple is to be found in the Constitution of 1954.[7] Each Ismaili marriage is registered in the marriage register which is kept in all jamat khanas in Nairobi, and a marriage certificate is issued to every couple.

The Ismaili marriage in the jamat khana is therefore not invested with religious sanctity. This was in fact one of the reasons attributed by respondents who felt that non-Ismailis should be allowed to attend the jamat khana ceremony. These respondents numbered 34% and one of them explained that the marriage ceremony in no way interfered with religious ritual as it is always conducted at times distinct from the hours of prayer. Other respondents felt that the marriage was simply a social contract, and offered an opportunity whereby they could reciprocate similar invitations extended by other communities in the country. Another respondent said that the Ismaili marriage

is "a simple and a beautiful ceremony, and we should be proud to let others see it."

The majority of respondents, 66% felt that the jamat khana was meant exclusively for Ismailis and that others should not be allowed to attend the marriage ceremony. Respondents said that they did not object to general participation if the ceremony was held in a public hall or in the cultural centre in Parklands, but not in the jamat khana. Such an attitude emphasises the exclusive nature of the jamat khana which makes possible the internal cohesion of the community. One of them described marriage in India, where she said, the ceremony was conducted at the home of the bride and not in the jamat khana, so that everyone was invited to witness the ceremony. It was consequently a marriage which was celebrated not by the family and community alone, but by the entire village. In contrast, some respondents held that marriage was a religious ceremony and only Ismailis were permitted to witness it. However, the fact that the majority of people, 66% in this instance, feel that the jamat khana is an exclusive Ismaili institution and should be so maintained is indicative of a people who prefer to maintain a communal orientation, an inward focus, and who are strongly inclined towards continuing with established traditions. Looking at the overall results therefore, it would seem that as long as a traditional viewpoint is maintained, the community will tend to remain closely-bound.

Funeral Rites

Unlike ceremonies preceding a marriage, funeral rites attendant upon death are accompanied by religious ceremonies. Both the occasions however involve participation, and interaction between those people who come together at such times. The Ismaili Constitution clarifies that the:

> "funeral rites of an Ismaili shall be performed by the Mukhi and/or the Kamadia within whose jurisdiction the death shall have occurred," (8)

and some of these are conducted in the jamat khana. Others take place at the time of the funeral which in Nairobi is conducted in a special hall, the ghusal hall, which is adjacent to the jamat khana in Parklands.

Respondents were therefore asked if funerals held at the ghusal hall in Nairobi, instead of at the homes of the deceased as was the practice in the past, encouraged more participation of members of the community. The large majority, 95%, said that more people attended funerals at the ghusal hall as all Ismaili funerals in Nairobi are held there and as there are no restrictions imposed on who may or may not attend. Most of them also indicated that a feeling of equality and a sense of belonging has been created due to the fact that, regardless of the status of the deceased, a uniform pattern of funeral rites is observed. The remaining 5% said that irrespective of the place where the funeral ceremony was conducted, large

numbers of Ismailis attended. For these individuals therefore, participation at a funeral was not determined by its venue, whether it is the ghusal hall or the home of the deceased.

Another question sought to know what purpose was served by ceremonies observed at a funeral. More than half, 66%, indicated that the soul of the deceased benefited by these ceremonies, 13% said that this practice reflected adherence to customary observances, and 3% felt that the grief of the bereaved family was shared by all those who participated at these ceremonies. The remaining 18% said that they did not know why these ceremonies were observed.

Yet another custom is practised whereby the bereaved family and relatives share a meal together. This is because on the day of the funeral, no food is cooked at the home of the deceased, but is provided by relatives. Respondents gave varying interpretations to this custom. The majority, 53% said that the sharing of a meal promoted togetherness. Sixteen per cent said that the soul of the deceased benefited, and 5% said that it was a traditional practice. A substantial number, 26%, indicated that they did not know what purpose was served by this practice. As the study is not strictly concerned with this aspect of the Ismaili social system, further analysis has not been made.

Finally, respondents were asked if they thought that these ceremonies created a sense of togetherness. A preponderant majority, 82% said that they felt much closer to other

people during these ceremonies, they felt that their grief was shared, and they were thus comforted. The remaining 18% did not think that a feeling of togetherness resulted from these ceremonies, since their loss and their sorrow was individual. Death is an individual crisis, as well as a group crisis, and the two categories of responses reflect this view.

We have briefly discussed some of the "rites de passage" of the Ismaili community because it is maintained that these are related to the subject of the thesis, and hence to the jamat khana, and the functions of the mukhi and kamadia extend to these aspects of an individual's life cycle. It is with the hope that these areas of Ismaili lifestyle will encourage future researchers to make thorough studies on the subject that the foregoing has been included in the thesis. The results obtained however seem to indicate that neither communal residence nor the social customs of the Ismailis are as strong indicators of cohesion as the jamat khana.

Footnotes

1. Durkheim, Suicide, 1952, p. 209.

2. The Constitution 1962, "Personal Law", p. 26-27.

3. Malinowski, Magic, Science and Religion, 1948, p. 40.

4. The Constitution 1962, art. 240; art. 242, p. 27.

5. ibid., art. 228 b, p. 27; see also Anderson, Islamic Law 1954, p. 46; Anderson, "The Ismaili Khojas of East Africa", Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. I, 1964, pp. 21-39.

6. ibid., art. 224, p. 26.

7. The Constitution 1954, rule 5.b, p. 48.

8. The Constitution 1962, art. 353, p. 36.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

The study has examined basically the significance of theory and ritual in the jamat khana as a concentrated and distinctly separate area of religious and social life of the Ismaili community in Kenya. The region of the jamat khana as a site easily distinguished from any other attributes to it a unique position in the community. For the individual Ismaili, it is an institution of importance, and the survey has indicated that every respondent affirmed that the community would lack a centralising place for getting together if the jamat khana was excluded from its formal organisation. Recurring remarks made by respondents during the course of the interviews revealed that they could not envisage a way of life without a jamat khana. Values and sentiments evoked by the jamat khana and symbolised within its precincts enable the Ismaili to give expression to, and understand his religion in a practical form.

INDICATORS OF COHESIVENESS

The jamat khana not only functions as a platform for realising religious beliefs but it also makes feasible very regular interaction and contact between Ismailis of diverse backgrounds We have indicated that reasons for attending jamat khana, the informal atmosphere in the jamat khana once the religious ceremonies are over, and essentially the fact that there are Ismailis who go to the jamat khana everyday

enables these people to establish and maintain contact without much inhibition. Such regular contact and interaction between individuals, is according to Durkheim, a definite reinforcement of social integration.

Communication therefore takes place in the jamat khana on three different levels: the act of worship is the attempt on the part of the worshipper to communicate with his god. Communication is further effected by the common sharing of ceremonies which symbolize values and beliefs of the religious system. Lastly, regularity in attendance enables individuals to communicate with each other in the jamat khana. Communication patterns have been interpreted as being important ways of enhancing participation and creating strong links between people. The variety of activities in the jamat khana, both the religious ceremonies as well as ceremonies like nandi, and the system of announcements involves participation of the members of the congregation. One of the functions of communication is to ensure participation of the members constituting a system as discussed by Eisenstadt, and ineffective communication eventuates in a weakening of social solidarity within that system. Empirical evidence of this study shows that the jamat khana is perceived as an effective and a major media of communication by the respondents. For instance, the question: "Apart from the jamat khana, from where do you get information regarding communal activities?" despite its specific wording, revealed that a large number, 41%, feel that the only source of information is the jamat khana. Thus an underlying emphasis given to the central

position of the jamat khana is evident in this attitude. All these aspects made the jamat khana an important media of communication, and an institution where such interchange is feasible is conducive towards creating a close-knit unit of the Ismaili community.

Cohesion does not result merely because a society has a central belief system, and prescribed religious ceremonies. It has been shown that recognition of these beliefs and values, as well as practical adherence to them is mainly responsible for bringing individuals belonging to such a system close together. The analysis has indicated that a strong attachment to these traditional values has been retained virtually to the exclusion of alien values. We have been able to verify Malinowski's proposition that adherence to traditional values results in cohesiveness. Finally, we have illustrated that such adhesion includes observing prayers together everyday in congregation, regular repetition of religious ceremonies, observance and celebration of communal festivals, as well as adhesion to concepts like service. The results have not detected any significant laxity in the practice of any one of these varied aspects of Ismaili communal life, and we may therefore conclude that as long as this tendency to adhere strongly to traditional values is retained, the community will remain a close-knit one.

Nevertheless, the question arises as to why adherence to tradition has become so pronounced a characteristic of the Ismaili community. It may be due to the fact that the large majority of Ismailis accept the norms that exist in the community. Acceptance may be because they represent some value, because they satisfy some need. Durkheim holds that such acceptance is an integrative force leading to group cohesiveness. Or it may be that traditional values and existence of norms are equated to, or not distinguished from, the fundamental belief in the imam. The office of the imam is intricately linked with the socio-religious organisation of the community. Not only the jamat khana, for instance, but the entire communal complex, embracing all fields of activity, are understood by Ismailis in relation to the imam. Around the "person of the imam" is the community united "in prayer and charitable works."[1] He is the religious authority of the community and also its administrative and secular leader. The fact that ritual activity in the jamat khana has the sanction of the imam, that appointments of religious functionaries as well as councillors are made by the imam, and that all these officials are ultimately responsible to the imam for their actions, as well as guidance of the imam regarding both social and religious matters, creates an integral unity that originates in the institution of imamat. Consequently, it is rather difficult to demarcate the existence of norms as being beyond the domain of religious values. Thus an acceptance of the value-system is envisaged as being part of the lifestyle of the community, having, as its source of inspiration, the imam.

Group cohesion consequently results from a way of life which is realised and expressed in the jamat khana, as much from a pattern of behaviour, a system of beliefs and traditional practices formulated in the jamat khana, as from upholding concepts like service and equality, and sharing fundamental values. This is practicable because opportunities of rendering service, to give an example, are given to every individual, irrespective of his age, sex or occupation. The different dimensions given to the concept of service have been enumerated in the study, and it has been shown that to every Ismaili, the idea of service has some kind of meaning, that it is accepted as a way of life, and it appeals strongly to the emotional nature of the individual. The notion of service has been interpreted according to the individual's degree of commitment and devotion, and his willingness to serve. Service involves participation and interaction, and we have demonstrated how these aspects lead to, and enhance integration. It is of significance to this study that it was fundamentally the jamat khana that was conceived of as being the place where interpretation to service in a multitude of ways could be given practical expression to by the respondents. The idea of service therefore is not abstract or vague, but a mode of action of an explicit communal orientation, an expression of life that seeks to make it meaningful and worthwhile. Communal activity is therefore focused on the jamat khana whether it be a pattern of religious rites and ceremonies or merely an urge to serve.

INDIVIDUAL VARIATIONS IN COMMITMENT

The study has represented a large number of Ismailis of different age and occupation groups, and the results have been demonstrated with the use of specific variables such as age, sex, length of residence in Nairobi, and profession of the respondents. As a result, varying trends in attitude, and differences in interpretation have come to light from the analysis. Also, some of the results reveal remarkable similarities between the responses of one variable compared with another. Both similarities and dissimilarities in responses have been possible because the majority of the questions were open-ended and respondents were not restricted in any way by a selected number of answers.

The results of the survey cannot be supplemented by documentary evidence as none exists on the subject of the thesis. Therefore, it would not be irrelevant to recapitulate some of the major conclusions that have been reached. We have been able to determine without much doubt the role of the jamat khana as a central institution for the social and the religious life of the Ismaili community in Kenya. Important numbers perceive the jamat khana for the purpose of prayers as well as for social interaction. Basically, therefore, communal solidarity is reinforced in two ways. The discussion now proceeds to summarise how this is achieved.

Religious Activity

Firstly, togetherness is created in the jamat khana by the regular prayers in congregation, the repeated ceremonies and daily ritual. This religious activity is not merely a pattern of meaning, but it is a form of interaction as well. The ceremonies do signify something for the Ismailis, they further involve participation of the congregation, as the beliefs that are expressed and symbolized as ritual practices emphasise what all Ismailis have in common rather than their differences.

The survey has further revealed a variation in the knowledge of religious ceremonies and festivals. Du'a for example which was ranked as the most important of all daily ceremonies by 79% of the respondents was also the most well-known ceremony. The handshake at the end of the du'a was interpreted as signifying togetherness and equality by some of the respondents. In contrast to the du'a, it has been shown that a ceremony like ghatpat was given several interpretations and was a ceremony that was not understood by 30% of the respondents, whereas 23% said that the purpose of the ghatpat ceremony was to enhance cohesion. An open-ended question like the one on the ghatpat ceremony reveals that respondents themselves perceive as important the cohesive function of ritual ceremonies. As observed by Alpert:

> "Ceremony brings people together and thus serves to reaffirm their common bonds and to enhance and reinforce social solidarity." (2)

However, difference in interpretation of ceremonies may be attributed to the fact that levels of commitment of individuals differ.

Further variation in individual commitment is evident from responses to the religious festivals. For 77% of the respondents, religious occasions are days which encourage closer associations between Ismailis in the jamat khana. Yet, for those who did not think so, the main reason seemed to be that it was due to too large a congregation and hence too impersonal an atmosphere. For the female respondents in this category, a religious festival was more of an occasion to dress up than one which was conducive for creating cohesion. A variation in responses was possible to detect because the question was an open-ended one, as was the question on the significance of the annual luncheon to celebrate Imamat day. Thus it is significant that a preponderant number, 81%, feel that togetherness is a result of sharing a feast. Moreover, the exchange of gifts on such occasions which involves a form of interaction reinforces ties between people, for, "to give and receive gifts is to involve oneself in a network of mutual indebtedness, and so to increase mutual social cohesion and solidarity."[3] Although a good majority, 74% said that they do exchange gifts on religious festivals, like the occasion of Idd. The attitudes

of the respondents on the whole revealed that they did not attribute too much significance to festivities outside the jamat khana on such important days. The ceremony in the jamat khana sufficed for such celebrations, and the focal position of the jamat khana is once again made prominent.

Nevertheless, classification of almost every question indicated that a minority of respondents differed from the rest in their attitudes. These people, for instance, attached little or no significance to certain ceremonies and festivals. They either did not consider them important or they believe these to be merely custo ary practices. One observation that needs to be mentioned is that 26% of the respondents felt that equality was not created in the jamat khana as a result of congregational prayer. These small percentages of people cannot be ignored as they constitute an important variation in attitude, in commitment, and in interpretation. They reveal a consciousness of social and economic differences, for example, which affect their attitudes. But because conformity and acceptance are indicated by a large majority of the group, it would seem that these hold together and maintain the cohesion of the group.

Social Activity

The second important way in which communal integration is reinforced is due to the jamat khana as a major centre of social activity. We have illustrated that it is the institution in the community which is given priority par excellence over any other communal institution. Frequently, the jamat khana is the

only institution in an Ismaili settlement, whether it is merely an unobtrusive site or an imposing building. It sheltered the newly-arrived migrant to Kenya, it provided him with food and it made feasible contact and communication between Ismailis. Temporary cohesion resulted because of the associations made in the jamat khana, and we have shown that communal affinity realised in the jamat khana played an important role in helping Ismaili migrants to settle in a new land. Thus, through the jamat khana associations were effected as well as were changes in the pattern of community relations. Today, this becomes particularly evident from interaction involved in a ceremony like nandi, as well as practical involvement of individuals who maintain communal exclusiveness through the notion of service. Via all these aspects, we have been able to show dependence of Ismailis on other Ismailis in varying degrees.

One variable that reveals this dependence quite explicitly is the length of residence in Nairobi of the respondents. Respondents who had spent less than five years in Nairobi revealed more dependence on the jamat khana, than long-term residents did. These respondents felt that their need of the jamat khana was constant, and for 83% of them, the need increased in times of stress. As none of the other residents who had lived for different periods of time revealed such a distinct attitude, it may be explained that new residents in a place are less integrated into the society than those who have lived for longer periods of time in that society. Thus, their dependence is greater than that of other people. Generally also, "religious worship and

church going...increase in times of war and crisis"[4] and the results evinced from the survey seem to concur with this view.

ATTITUDES ON COHESIVENESS

How did the respondents themselves react to this notion that the community is a close-knit one? Their views on the subject were sought, and a direct question was asked to them worded: "Do you think the community is a close-knit one?" Almost all of them, 95% answered in the affirmative, 3% said that it was not close-knit, and no answer was obtained from 2% of the respondents. They were further asked the cause, or the reason for the cohesiveness of the community. Responses reveal an intricate association between the jamat khana and the imam. Eighty-five per cent of them indicated that communal cohesion was due to the imam, the jamat khana, or both the imam and the jamat khana. Further classification shows that 31% said that the close nature of the community was due to the imam being an ever-present guide and authority. An equal number answered that it was the jamat khana that was responsible for the close-knit community, and 23% of the respondents combined the two causes, saying that the community was closely-knit because of both the imam and the institution of the jamat khana.

It has been stated at the beginning of the study that the imam is the raison d'être for the very existence of the Ismaili community, and that there could not have been a jamat khana, or an Ismaili community without there first being an imam.

The "divine kingship" of the imam is "changeless and acknowledged as a supreme value"[5] by the Ismailis, and in acknowledging him as an infallible authority, in adhering to a way of life mainly outlined by the imam, springs the unity and the cohesiveness of the Ismaili community. Those respondents who said that the cohesion was due to the jamat khana basically gave three explanations: Most of them indicated that unlike any other community in the country, Ismailis alone gathered in the jamat khana everyday of the year for prayers. Others said that the jamat khana was the only institution where they could meet other Ismailis regularly. These responses emphasise the frequency of contact that we have shown is a variable of cohesiveness and that is feasible in the jamat khana. Some of them said that the jamat khana created a sense of belonging, of communal affinity, and hence togetherness.

The remaining 10% of the respondents who feel that the community is closely-knit attributed its cohesiveness to its "well-organised and self-sufficient" institutions. According to these respondents, socio-economic institutions of the Ismailis, the schools, hospitals, clubs and housing schemes have contributed to the community's social solidarity. One of them held that the constitution and the laws of the community bind it close together. Of the remaining 5% who do not think that the community is cohesive, 2% did not answer the question, and 3% said that not adequate interest was shown by members of the community for the welfare of their fellow brethren. The results are tabulated below in table 38.

TABLE 38: REASONS FOR COHESIVENESS

	Number	Percentage
Imam	19	31
Jamat Khana	19	31
Imam and Jamat Khana	14	23
Communal Structure	6	10
Other	3	5
TOTAL	61	100

From the foregoing discussion, it becomes evident that Ismailis do not really disassociate the imam from the jamat khana, or vice versa. The distinction, no doubt, is a very fine one, and it is significant that for the majority of the respondents, the jamat khana is the institution in the community that is given priority. We have already demonstrated that the jamat khana as a socio-religious institution is the hub of Ismaili communal life. This has been made feasible by the empirical evidence obtained from the analysis of data. Results evinced from an examination of daily religious ceremonies, from acts of worship like individual prayer at the takht, from attitudes to concepts like equality and service have contributed to the conclusion that the role of the jamat khana as a force of cohesiveness cannot be underestimated.

Identical responses to the question on the community being close-knit were revealed when the respondents were asked if, according to them, they felt whether Ismailis were any different from other communities in the country, or not. Thirty-four per cent of them indicated that having a living imam to guide the community in every sphere of activity makes the Ismailis different from other people. One respondent said that "prophethood is common to all religions but an everliving imam is unique to the Ismailis alone." Yet another person indicated that the basic religious belief in the imam and the communal unity that springs from the imam made the Ismailis different from others. The second classification of responses shows that 27% said that the difference was due to the institution of the jamat khana, where Ismailis meet everyday unlike any other people in the country. Some of the respondents said that the jamat khana and the regular congregational prayers created communal togetherness that was not evident in any other community. Respondents who attributed the difference to both the imam and the jamat khana numbered 23%. These people said that both the religious and the social traditions of the Ismailis made them different from others. Ismaili lifestyle is different because of the imam whose presence is felt in everyday life, and because of the jamat khana where the socio-religious activity of the community distinguishes it from any other institution, both in the community itself, as well as outside it.

Six per cent said that the voluntary structure of the community was responsible for it being different. These respondents explained that the organisation of the community rests on the concept of service, and that all the institutions of the community are manned by individuals who are voluntary workers. Some of the responses indicated that all human beings are the same but the "well-organised, internal government that the Ismaili community has functions on a voluntary basis and answers to all the needs of its members" makes it different from other societies. One informant described the community as a "welfare state" and said that the entire communal complex made it distinct from any other community. The remaining 10% said that there is no difference at all between Ismailis and other people, that all human beings are the same everywhere. One respondent said that the Ismaili religion did not make the community any different, another said that the Ismailis are no different from other sects of Shia Muslims. Five per cent did not elaborate further, and 3% said that they did not know why Ismailis were no different from other people. Table 39 indicates a breakdown of these responses:

TABLE 39: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ISMAILIS AND OTHERS

	Number	Percentage
Imam	21	34
Jamat Khana	16	27
Imam and Jamat Khana	14	23
Communal Structure	4	6
No difference	6	10
TOTAL	61	100

It ought to be clarified that the word 'different' in this context has been used in its broadest sense, to indicate dissimilarities, or characteristics that may be distinguishing marks in the Ismaili system. Responses indicate that it is in this context that the question seems to have been understood by the respondents. It is evident from the responses of the majority that basically, Ismailis do not think of the imam, the jamat khana, and the structure of the community as separate, distinct entities, having no relation one with the other. The distinction has been made for the purpose of the study to reinforce the idea that the Ismaili pattern of life is not envisaged without guidance from the imam, nor without its realization in the jamat khana. It may therefore be concluded that the imam and the jamat khana that contribute towards making the community different from other communities have given to it a distinct identity in the country.

Another variable tested for communal cohesion was a question which sought to know to what extent Ismailis depend on other Ismailis for help and advice. Dependence on fellow Ismailis would reveal a communal orientation, an inward focus, whereas little or no dependence on other Ismailis would reflect a more diffuse group of people. The majority of them, 75% answered in the affirmative, indicating that they would certainly turn to Ismailis in times of need. Fifteen per cent said that they would be inclined to turn to Ismailis first, but that it would depend on the kind of need, on the gravity of the situation. One respondent said that if it concerned a matter strictly related to religion and to the community, then he would refer it to an Ismaili, if it was a personal matter, it would depend on other factors. Yet another respondent said that if he travelled to a new place, he would always look up Ismailis there and inquire if a jamat khana was in existence in that place. Thus these responses reflect a desire to associate with members of the community, as well as an awareness that they may look beyond the community for help. The remaining 10% said that they would not necessarily depend on Ismailis alone. One of the respondents felt that it was a question of personal relationship, another said that any friend would be willing to help, and 5% indicated that Ismailis were not always helpful, and that they would not necessarily turn to their fellow Ismailis in times of need.

From the responses of the majority, therefore, we may conclude that to a large extent, Ismailis are dependent on members

of their own community for help and advice. It is held that dependence on one's own people tends to make that community a more self-reliant one, and that it reflects a tendency to remain close together, whether it is for the purpose of religious matters, or for social and personal ones. Table 40 illustrates these results.

TABLE 40: DEPENDENCE ON FELLOW ISMAILIS

	Number	Percentage
Would depend on Ismailis	46	75
Not certain	9	15
Would not depend on Ismailis	6	10
TOTAL	61	100

Therefore we can see that the Ismailis as a minority group in Kenya appear to be basically communal-oriented people, who prefer to interact with one another and who depend very much on their own resources rather than on external sources. One example that illustrates this idea rather vividly is the ceremony of nandi (see chapter V). It is via the ceremony of nandi that the role of the jamat khana as a cohesive factor within the community is given an added dimension. This particular ceremony has served to satisfy a wide range of people in the community. We have shown that Ismaili migrants to Kenya who sought shelter in the jamat khana further found that they

could obtain a ready meal by buying nandi. Over the years, the practice of nandi has continued, and today, it is viewed by respondents somewhat differently. The group of migrants has given way to a new class of people in the community - that of working mothers and university students. Access to cooked food made available in the jamat khana fulfils a need, and serves a purpose. A ceremony, it is held, continues to be observed because it serves some purpose, because it is found to be satisfying. Such a ceremony, as in the case of nandi, may not be invested with a great deal of sanctity, but it is nevertheless important because it serves a specific purpose. That of nandi provides food for different kinds of people and if one of the reasons for going to jamat khana is in the hope of getting nandi, then the functions of the jamat khana as being both social as well as religious become even more pronounced. Moreover, it is the face-to-face interaction, and communication evident in the ceremony of nandi that leads to further establishment of social contact with other Ismailis. This is of particular significance to the study, for it is held that interaction and communication are aspects that tend towards social integration.

Thus the experience of sharing with others common ceremonies involves interaction, and it is this frequent interaction that is viewed as a force of cohesion rather than of conflict or disintegration, for the latter is rather unlikely in a place of worship such as the Ismaili jamat khana in Kenya. It is unlikely because, although the notion that frequency of

contact can result in conflict is not ignored here, nevertheless it is held that daily contact in the jamat khana that is brought about by prayer in congregation, by the shared experience from common ceremonies and rituals, and by the fact that the jamat khana does not restrict any Ismaili from going to it, imply that individuals professing a common belief system are able to give expression to their beliefs and values by regularly going to the jamat khana. It is obvious that if this regular contact resulted in conflict and violence the jamat khana would not open its doors everyday nor would individuals have any reason or motive for adhering to a system that had as its major attraction conflict, rather than peace and quiet in a place of worship. It ought to be clarified however that a degree of conflict, of competition, is likely to be present in a system but it is held that its cause is not the jamat khana, and further that if this was the case, then the empirical evidence that has been analysed reinforces the idea that the jamat khana is essentially a force of integration in the Ismaili community.

The study has examined the proximate aims of certain practices in the jamat khana, as well as beliefs which seem to be most obviously associated with these practices. Furthermore, it has formulated the attitudes of individual Ismailis who perform these rituals and ceremonies, in order to determine whether these practices have some deeper motivation, some aspects other than those which present themselves to the more superficial, the more obvious view. Questions on the takht for example illustrate this quite explicitly. To the observer, an

individual seen bowed in prayer, before a throne-like structure with the photograph of the imam in the jamat khana may seem to be a form of idol-worship, or may even seem incomprehensible. But the study has revealed specific attitudes to this practice. Personality characteristics and sentimental attachment come to light and account for individual behaviour. This, it is felt, is far more significant and gives more depth and meaning to the study than merely an exposition of certain practices would have. Or again, the seating arrangement in the jamat khana may strike one as hierarchical and hence unequal, because, as illustrated in the study, leaders of the community sit apart from the rest of the jamat. However, analysis of attitudes revealed that praying together in the jamat khana diminished the importance of special seating positions, that the social status of certain individuals do not seem to affect the majority of the jamat. For, according to these people, in the eyes of God each and every Ismaili is equal, and equality is reinforced by virtue of the fact that Ismailis of diverse backgrounds, educational qualifications, economic and social standing, come together for the purpose of prayer in the jamat khana. The fact that the jamat khana and the belief system of the Ismaili community makes this feasible minimizes a distinction like separate seating positions. For, it is far more important in the context of this study, for people adhering to a particular system to come together regularly and to enhance communal togetherness, than not to meet at all because of the status of communal leaders, for instance.

It would therefore seem that adherence to the jamat khana and to its regular activities, belief in the imam as a supreme authority and a force of benevolence, override obvious differences that may be indicative of clash or conflict in the community. To this fundamental belief in the imam and to the fact that the belief system of the Ismailis finds its expression in the jamat khana are attributed the unifying forces of the community that have resisted disruptive influences. These basic beliefs have been the protective forces of the community, and have ensured that there has not been a breakdown of communal solidarity. The study has illustrated that the Ismaili framework of beliefs and values expressed via religious ceremonies in the jamat khana, as well as the framework of action realized through the concept of service in the jamat khana find their source of being and of inspiration in the imam. If threats to the fabric of the Ismaili socio-religious system have been endured, if truth to tradition has been maintained, it is primarily because of this fundamental belief in the imam. Finally, it is maintained that the changing economic, social and political conditions of the country have not diminished the importance of the jamat khana for the Ismailis and that the jamat khana has remained the centre of the community in the country, both ideally and practically, as its visible symbol of religious, social and cultural identity, as well as its source of cohesiveness.

Footnotes

1. Morris, Indians in Uganda, 1968, p. 83.

2. Alpert, "Durkheim's Functional Theory of Ritual" in Nisbet, Makers of Modern Social Science, 1965, p. 138.

3. Beattie, Other Cultures, 1964, p. 201.

4. ibid., p. 259-260.

5. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan, 1948, p. 3; see also Morris, "The Divine Kingship of the Aga Khan", 1958, p. 472.

GLOSSARY OF SELECTED ISMAILI TERMINOLOGY USED IN THE STUDY

Keeping in mind that these concepts can be interpreted in several ways, the definitions offered here are strictly in the context of the study, with the view to facilitate the task of the non-Ismaili reader.

ab-e-safa	-	water of purity
batin	-	esoteric
chaanta	-	ceremony for forgiveness of sins
da'i	-	the summoner, one who preaches - in common usage, missionary.
dawa	-	mission, preaching
du'a	-	Ismaili prayer.
farman	-	directive, guidance from the imam.
ginan	-	religious hymn
ibadat	-	meditation
idd	-	Muslim festivals of sacrifice, and of end of fasting of month of Ramadhan.
ilm	-	knowledge
imam	-	spiritual and temporal leader

imamat - institution of spiritual leadership.

Imamat day - day when imam accedes to the seat of imamat.

iman - faith

Ithna-Ashari - Shia sect that believes in 12 imams.

jamat - congregation

jamat khana - house of worship, in the context, a socio-religious institution.

kamadia - religious functionnary in the jamat khana.

khidmat - service

Lail-at-al-Qadr - Night of Power, the night when Prophet Muhammad is believed to have received the first revelation from God through the Archangel Gabriel.

mukhi - religious functionnary in the jamat khana.

mu'min - believer, follower of the imam.

Navroz - Persian New Year

nass - formal designation of imam.

nubuwwat - Prophethood.

nur - light

pir - literally old man; in the study.

- title believed to have been given by the imam to those who converted Hindus to Ismailism, and composed the ginans.

satr	-	period of occultation
shahid	-	martyr
shia	-	party; Muslim sect which accepted Ali as the first imam.
Sunni	-	Muslim sect who adhere to the traditions of the Prophet.
takht	-	throne
talika	-	communiqué, message from imam.
taqiya	-	dissimulation of religious belief.
tawhid	-	oneness of God
zahir	-	exoteric.

APPENDIX A

PROCEDURE ADOPTED FOR RANKING RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS (CHAPTER V)

For each festival, numbers 1-6 indicate the ranking system. The number indicated by a respondent was marked accordingly. Then the total number in each rank from all the given responses was multiplied by that rank number so that if 13 respondents indicated 2, the total in that column was 26. Each rank was thus multiplied and the totals of each added up to make a grand total. The festival with the lowest number was therefore the first in the order of importance, and the one with the highest number was the last in the order of importance. Table A shows the total system in detail of the ranking of religious festivals. The religious ceremonies were similarly ranked.

TABLE A: SYSTEM OF RANKING RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Rank	Imamat Day		Lail-at-al Qadr		Imam's Birthday		Navroz		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	30	50	20	33	2	3	2	3	1	2
2	13	21	9	15	15	25	9	15	3	4
3	8	13	10	16	11	18	9	15	8	13
4	4	6	9	15	11	18	15	25	9	15
5	0	0	1	1	8	13	11	17	25	41
6	6	10	12	20	14	23	15	25	15	25
TOTAL	61	100	61	100	61	100	61	100	61	100
TOTAL	132		181		233		252		282	
	1st		2nd		3rd		4th		5th	

Numbers in rank 6 refer to those respondents who did not distinguish between the different festivals, and rated all the festivals as equal.

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

DEPARTMENT OF
PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

ORAL INTERVIEW

Ya ali madad. I am a student in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi. I am writing a thesis on the Ismailis of Kenya, with particular reference to the role of the Jamat Khana in the development of the community in Kenya. You are one of the Ismailis selected to assist with the study. I would like to assure you that all information will be treated as confidential, and shall be most grateful for your cooperation.

QUESTIONNAIRE CODE _____

1. NAME _____

2. AGE _____

3. SEX: M. F. 4. Occupation _____

5. LENGTH OF RESIDENCE IN NAIROBI _____

6.a. PLACE OF BIRTH _____

b. IF BORN IN INDIA,

A. YEAR OF EMIGRATION _____

B. MOTIVE FOR EMIGRATION _____

_____

7. What, in your opinion, is the function of the Jamat Khana?

_____

_____

8. Do you think a Jamat Khana must be established where Ismailis reside?

If so, why? _____

If not, why? _____

9. Some people feel that the Jamat Khana is just a place for prayer.

How do you feel about this? Do you SA A I D SD

10. People attend Jamat Khana for a variety of reasons. Could you tell me how often you go to Jamat Khana for the following reasons:

a. Because it is generally held that praying together with the rest of the community is more beneficial than praying alone. O S N AO

b. Because one can meet one's friends O S N AO

c. Because one can make contacts meet new people O S N AO

d. Because of all these reasons O S N AO

11. Do you think in the 40's or 50's for e.g. people attended Jamat Khana for the same reasons?
If not, what do you think has brought about the change?

_____

_____

12. Which particular ceremony in the Jamat Khana strikes you as most significant and why? State the order of importance.

a. Dua _____

b. Reading of Farmans _____

c. Talika _____

d. Ginan _____

e. Chaanta _____

f. any other _____

13. What purpose do you think is served by

a. Nandi _____

b. Ghatpat _____

14. What does the Takht mean to you?

_____

b. When you go to Jamat Khana, do you go to the Takht R O S N AO

15. Which religious festival do you consider the most important, and why?

a. Imamat Day _____

b. Khusiali of Imam's Birthday _____

c. Navroz _____

d. Idd _____

e. Lail-at-al Qadr _____

f. Any other _____

16. Some people undertake special preparations to celebrate these festivals. Do you

a. Invite friends/relatives for meals on these occasions? If so, indicate which occasion in particular

_____

b. Give gifts on these occasions. If so, please specify

_____

c. Any other _____

17. Do you feel closer to the rest of the community on such an occasion compared to any ordinary day? If so, could you explain why?

_____

If not, please explain _____

18. What do you think is the significance of the annual Sunday luncheon to celebrate Imamat Day?

_____

19. Does praying together in the Jamat Khana create equality? If so, how _____

_____

20. Does the individual Ismaili who may not be involved in any one of the communal institutions have an opportunity of serving the Imam and the Jamat? If so, in what way

_____

If not, please explain _____

_____

21. How do you feel about the volunteers who help maintain discipline in the Jamat Khana?

_____

22. How do you feel about the special sitting position of the title-holders and the councillors in the Jamat Khana?

_____

23. Names of people who send food offerings, mehmanis, to the Imam are read in the Jamat Khana. How do you feel about this?

a. Should the practice continue, and why _____

_____

b. Should it be discontinued, and why _____

_____

24. How do you feel about announcements regarding social events in the Jamat Khana?

_____

25. What does the concept of service to the Imam and to the Jamat mean to you?

_____

26. Does the Jamat Khana in your opinion, really bring together all categories of people?

If so, how? _____

If not, please explain _____

27. I would now like to talk about some of the social practices. Do you think a marriage in the family is an occasion which brings you closer to the rest of the community?

If so, how _____

28. What do you feel is the main reason for observing the following ceremonies to celebrate a marriage:

a. Mandwa: Mendi, Pithi, Sapatia _____

b. Paherammi: Dej _____

c. Ghadi _____

d. Wedding Feast _____

e. Any other _____

29. If you were to have the marriage ceremony in your family, would you dispense with any of these ceremonies and why?

_____

30. Have you ever dispensed with any of these ceremonies in the past?

_____

31. Are there any of these that you feel a marriage would be imcomplete without? If so, please explain.

_____

32. Why do you think that these ceremonies, although they have constitutionally been made illegal, have been retained in practice by the people?

_____

33. How do you feel about the rule of having 200 guests for a wedding reception?

a. It is a fair number _____

b. It is too limited _____

c. If answer is B, suggest alternative _____

34. Do you think non-Ismailis should be allowed to attend an Ismaili marriage ceremony in the Jamat Khana?

If so, why? _____

If not, specify _____

35. What purpose do you think is served by some of the ceremonies attendant upon death, for example:

a. Samar _____

b. Ziarat _____

c. Bhati _____

d. Any other _____

36. Do you think a sense of togetherness is created by these ceremonies?

_____

37. Do you think the funeral held at the ghusal hall encourages jamati participation as compared to funerals held at home in the past?

_____

38. Do you feel more in need of a Jamat Khana in times of stress, and of crisis rather than under normal circumstances?

_____

39. Are you likely to turn to an Ismaili in times of need, and in difficult circumstances, for advice and assurance?

_____

40. Do you think the community is a close-knit one?

_____

b. What, do you think, has brought about this closeness?

_____

41. Does the Jamat Khana act as a link of communication with:

a. The Imam _____

b. Other jamats elsewhere in the world _____

42. Apart from the Jamat Khana, from where do you get information regarding communal activities?

_____

43. We use money in the Jamat Khana. What do you think, it means for:

a. Everyday purposes _____

b. Enrolling in different mijlases _____

44. Are we any different from other people? If so, what do you think we share in common that makes us different?

_____

QUESTIONS FOR THOSE LIVING IN ISMAILI RESIDENCES

45. Does living in an Ismaili neighbourhood such as this, bring you more in contact with other members of the community, than if you were in a different area of residence?

_____

46. Does it help you to keep more in touch with communal events e.g. marriage, death, or any other event? If so, please specify

_____

47. Did you select to live in an Ismaili housing scheme such as this for any of the following reasons:

a. Proximity to Jamat Khana _____

b. Transport to Jamat Khana easily available from Ismaili neighbours _____

c. You prefer living close to other members of the community _____

d. Any other _____

48. Given a choice of residence, would you

a. Continue living in an Ismaili housing scheme, and why

_____

b. Move to another area of residence, and why

_____

49. Do you derive any benefit by living in an Ismaili neighbourhood that you would not get elsewhere? If yes, what in particular?

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND CO-OPERATION

_____ _____

A

_____ MOOD

W.O.

_____ _____

OBSERVATIONS _____

_____

INTERPRETATION _____

_____

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