

JAMATI SATADA

DAY ONE

Satada Prayers are for the Global Ismaili Jamat

As we begin this first Jamati Satada of 2001, the memories of the destructive earthquake in Gujarat and its impact on our Jamat there are still fresh in our minds. Such catastrophic events bring home to us the significance and relevance of this practice of intensive Jamati prayers in our Tariqah. We must however, also be aware that apart from very visible calamities, our Jamat, which is spread in many countries, may also be affected by more subtle changes. For instance, the onslaught of what Mawlana Hazir Imam describes as “value systems which are not Islamic, which come from outside our world and our faith” could well undermine our identity as Ismaili Muslims. Thus, the congregational additional prayers we offer as a Jamat are to ease our physical, spiritual and intellectual difficulties.

Our giryah zari prayers will be more deeply felt if we keep this wider scope of our prayers in the forefront of our minds. We are indeed seeking Divine help to ease our difficulties, which are not limited to the physical arena, but are also experienced in our spiritual and intellectual lives. Furthermore, by remembering the world-wide constituency of our diverse Jamat in our prayers, we deepen our feelings of unity amongst our spiritual brothers and sisters across the globe.

The Satada write-ups this week will attempt to describe the diversity of our Jamat in the light of Mawlana Hazir Imam’s guidance. On 6th October, 1988, Imam-i zaman made the following mubarak farman at Dar-es-salaam.

Let us recite the Salawat:

“My beloved spiritual children,

As we approach the 21st century, it is quite clear that our world is getting smaller in terms of contacts amongst human beings from various parts of the globe and this is true within the Ummah and it is true within the Jamat. More and more people are in contact with each other from different parts of the world, and it must now be more clear to you than ever before that the Jamat – the Ismaili Jamat around the world – is more diverse, is more widespread, speaks more languages, has more inherited traditions and culture than maybe many of you have suspected.

This is immense diversity, it is diversity of language, it is diversity of place, of a way of living; it is diversity in cultural history, and yet each and every spiritual child – whether he is from Northern Pakistan, whether he is from Afghanistan, whether he is from the Soviet Union or whether he is from China – each of these spiritual children is a murid of the Imam of the time.”

Let us recite the Salawat.

Let us, as the murids of the Imam of the time, and remembering all his other murids, pray:

Ya Mawla, ease all the difficulties of the Jamat everywhere,

Ya Mawla, help us to remember all our spiritual brothers and sisters in our daily prayers,

Ya Mawla, strengthen the unity in the world-wide Jamat,

Ya Mawla, forgive us our shortcomings,

Ya Mawla, bless the Jamat world-wide with your zahiri and batini Nurani Didar.

Ameen,

Hayy zinda.

JAMATI SATADA

DAY TWO

The Syrian Tradition is the Oldest within the Ismaili Frontierless Brotherhood

Syrian Ismailis today are mainly concentrated in two regions: Khawabi and Salamiah. The main town of Salamiah is also known by the same name. They are the oldest section of the Ismaili Jamat, because their existence goes back in history to the times of our early Imams: Mawlana Wafi Ahmad, Mawlana Taqi Muhammad and Mawlana Raziyyuddin Abdullah. This period of our history is known as Dawr al-Satr, which means that in the context of the political situation of the time, our Imams maintained an extremely low profile. However, the activities of propagating Ismaili doctrines were carried out vigorously by Ismaili da`is. Only the chief da`is were in physical contact with the Imam of the time.

Syria became prominent once again during the Fatimid times and later on during the Alamut period, when Sayyidna Rashid al-Din Sinan was in charge of the Ismaili forts in Syria. One of these famous forts, Masyaf is today being restored by Mawlana Hazir Imam's agencies to preserve the historical heritage of the Syrian Jamat.

Following this period of history, the Syrian Ismailis had very intermittent physical contact with the Imams, who were then in Iran and later on in the Indian sub-continent. This was done through the sending of delegations to the Imam's presence. However, Syrian Ismailis have retained a very strong Ismaili identity in all circumstances. Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*alayhis-salam*) says in his Memoirs: **“In Syria, one such family of representatives has retained an unbroken connection with my family for more than a thousand years.”**

There are many beautiful Jamatkhans in Syria. The mausoleum of Prince Aly Salman Khan is adjacent to the main Jamatkhana of Salamiah. Most Jamatkhans have libraries and the members of the Jamat, young and old show a great interest in Ismaili history and philosophy. The mother tongue of Syrian Ismailis is Arabic, which means that they are very fortunate to have direct access to a substantial literature of the Ismaili Tariqah in that language. The Jamat in Syria also places great emphasis on a literary tradition. There is a

great deal of poetry in Arabic. However, it is a tradition in the Jamat to compose new qasidahs on every important occasion, particularly on Imam Day.

Today we will listen to a recitation of an Arabic qasidah, called “Nahnu abna’ul Imam”, which means “We are the children of the Imam”. The sentiments expressed in this qasidah emphasise the theme of this Satada. The spirit of brotherhood is also reinforced by the recent guidance of Imam-i zaman given in Karachi, Pakistan on 26th October, 2000. Mawlana Hazir Imam said:

Let us recite the Salawat:

“And I say to my spiritual children: keep together this spirit of brotherhood, keep the principles of brotherhood alive in your hearts. And while you keep your traditions alive, make space for others from the Jamat from other parts of the world, so that my Jamat, keeping to its individual traditions, is nonetheless one Jamat, working together for the benefit of all murids, wherever they may be. This is a strong principle which I would like my spiritual children to make theirs, to live by that principle. And insha’llah, in the years ahead, all the Jamats will help each other to improve the quality of their lives.”

Let us recite the Salawat.

Let us pray:

Ya Mawla, inspire the Jamat everywhere with spiritual courage to overcome their difficulties,

Ya Mawla, strengthen the unity in our diverse Jamat,

Ya Mawla, help us to obey your Farmans,

Ya Mawla, bless the Jamat world-wide with your zahiri and batini Nurani Didar.

Ameen,

Hayy zinda.

JAMATI SATADA

DAY THREE

Iran was the Seat of Imamat for Seven Centuries

From the very beginning Ismaili da`wah has existed in Iran. However, the headquarters of Imamat moved to various parts of Iran, following the demise of Mawlana Mustansirbillah in Cairo at the end of the eleventh century. Thus, names such as Alamut, Azerbaijan, Anjudan, Kahak, Kirman and Mahalat are sources of rich historical memories for all Ismailis and particularly the Iranian Ismailis. Their close association with the headquarters of Imamat for such a long period of time has created a strong and resilient tradition. Their affiliation to the family of the Imams is reflected in the fact that Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah refers to Iranian Ismailis as “khalus” which means “maternal uncles”.

In modern times, Ismailis have settled in the north-east of Iran, where one finds whole villages which are predominately Ismaili. The main centre is Meshed, where there is a Jamatkhana distinguished by a façade on which is inscribed the whole of the Ayat an-Nur. Irani Ismailis have a rich and long tradition. A cursory look at the Table of Contents in the collection of Ismaili poetry published by the Institute of Ismaili Studies, called “The Shimmering Light” shows how prolific their literary tradition has been. The outstanding poets included in this collection are Pir Nasir Khusraw, Sayyidna Hasan bin Sabbah, Ra`is Hasan, Nizari Quhistani, `Abd Allah Ansari, Khayrkhwah-i Harati, Khaki Khurasani and Fida`i Khurasani. The devotional poetry of these great Iranian Ismailis is recited in the original Farsi in the Jamatkhanas of Iran. Iranian Ismailis are also fortunate to have access to the great Sufi esoteric literature in Farsi of such mystics as Mawlana Rumi, Hafiz and Fariduddin Attar.

Let us celebrate the pluralism and diversity of the global Ismaili Jamat in the words of one Iranian Ismaili poet, Fida`i Khurasani, who served the Jamat during the time of our 48th Imam Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatullahi `alayhi*). He writes about the recognition of the Imam of the time, which is the essence of our Tariqah we all share regardless of where we come from or what tradition we belong to. He says:

**“He is always present,
a witness with his followers;**

**but who has seen his beauty
except the blessed?
He who is the cup-bearer of
the fount of paradise,
is aware altogether of
the hearts of his followers,
whether young or old.**

**Like the sun in the sky
he is manifest in the world,
but the blind bat cannot see
his luminous face.”**

To conclude in the mubarak words of Mawlana Hazir Imam at Karachi on the 27th of October, 2000, where he said:

Let us recite the Salawat:

“... and I hope that this sense of a Jamat, which is a global Jamat with many different traditions but where the essence is the same, will bring you strength and happiness from whatever background you come, and from whatever part of the world you come. This is a strong, important message that I would like all my spiritual children in Pakistan and around the world, to think about, because it is a strength of the Jamat to have this pluralism.”

Let us recite the Salawat.

Let us pray:

Ya Mawla, give us the courage to strengthen our unity as a Jamat,

Ya Mawla, inspire us to learn about each others traditions,

Ya Mawla, bless Jamat world-wide with your zahiri and batini Nurani Didar.

Ameen,

Hayy zinda

JAMATI SATADA

DAY FOUR

The Central Asian Tradition has emerged after centuries of isolation

The Ismaili Tariqah had reached the region of Central Asia by the beginning of the Fatimid era of our history in the eighth century. However, the propagation of the faith escalated with the work of Pir Nasir Khusraw and the da`is he sent out all across greater Badakhshan. The da`is who followed him extended their activities as far as the Sinkiang region of China. Pir Nasir was not born an Ismaili. He converted to our faith in Cairo, during a seven year journey of personal search. He writes in his Diwan:

*“When the light of the Imam shone upon my soul, even though
I was black as a pitch-dark night, I became the shining sun;
The Supreme Name is the Imam of the time; through him
Venus-like, I ascended from the earth to the heaven.”*

Pir Nasir’s work of spreading the Ismaili Tariqah was so successful that it provoked opposition and he was compelled to abandon his home in Balkh and take refuge in the desolate valley of Yumgan in Afghanistan. He continued his work from this valley until his death. Mawlana Hazir Imam referring to the emerging Jamats of Central Asia, said in a farman at Surat, India, on 10th November, 1992:

Let us recite the Salawat:

“And remember that these murids come from the same interpretation, but often with a different historical context. And that historical context, the context of Nasir Khusraw, is very important and must not be forgotten.”

Let us recite the Salawat.

The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed spectacular political upheavals in the former Soviet Union leading to its collapse. In terms of our history, for the first time the global Jamat became aware of the presence of a significant number of Ismailis in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Within a short time, we learnt more about our Central Asian spiritual brothers and sisters from the work of Imam institutions and particularly Imam-i zaman’s mubarak farmans. During his visit to India in November, 1992, Mawlana Hazir spoke at every centre about the Ismailis of Central Asia. In Bombay, on 23rd November, 1992, he said:

Let us recite the Salawat:

“These murids have been practising their faith for many decades in extremely difficult circumstances. But they have kept their faith alive. The next years will be a

process of discovery for them and the Jamats around the world as to how they practise, as to what their traditions are, what their cultural history is, and it is important that we should recognise that these Jamats must come forward, they must be encouraged to join with the Jamats in other parts of the world and we must respect their traditions, and their language and their history. ... And those murids must come forward and feel part of the frontierless brotherhood of our Tariqah. And whether they communicate in Tajik or whether they communicate in Pashtu or whether they communicate in Farsi or whether they communicate in Arabic, it does not matter. If the essence of Tariqah is respected then we must be happy to bring them out and encourage them to work with us.”

Let us recite the Salawat.

We have learnt that our Tajiki and Afghani Ismaili brothers and sisters have kept their faith alive through practices such as the recitation of *maduhs* or devotional poetry in their various dialects as well as in Tajik. They have a tradition of khalifas or religious officials who officiate at births, marriages and deaths. During the period of isolation, the khalifas preserved and handed down the traditions. One particular ceremony which exists from the da`wah of Pir Nasir is known as “Chiragh-i Rawshan”. It consists of Qur’anic recitations and zikr accompanied by a sacred musical instrument known as rabab.

During this Satada week, let us particularly remember our spiritual brothers and sisters of Tajikistan and Afghanistan in our prayers. Tajikistan still suffers from the aftermath of a civil war. The Afghan Ismailis are suffering as a result of being displaced from their homeland and live as refugees, particularly in Pakistan.

Let us pray:

Ya Mawla, ease the difficulties of all Ismailis everywhere,

Ya Mawla, bless us with courage to overcome our difficulties,

Ya Mawla, inspire us to appreciate the diversity in our traditions,

Ya Mawla, bless us with your zahiri and batini Nurani Didar.

Ameen,

Hayy zinda.

JAMATI SATADA

DAY FIVE

Diversity within diversity: The Da`wah in the Indian Sub-continent

The Ismaili Tariqah first reached the Indian sub-continent even before the beginning of the Fatimid era. However, the da`wah gained great impetus with the arrival of Pir Sadruddin from Iran during the time of Mawlana Islam Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*). Pir Sadruddin, Pir Shams and Pir Hassan Kabirdin were the most prominent in converting thousands of Hindus to the Ismaili Tariqah.

The tradition of the Indian sub-continent has, as its main features the establishment of Jamatkhana, the appointment of Mukhi and Kamadias, the use of Ginans and Garbis in the process of conversion and also the introduction of certain practices such as the Ghat Paat ceremony. Mawlana Hazir Imam during his visit to Nairobi on 11th December, 1988 first explained the similarity between Ginans and Qasidahs. In Hyderabad, India on 20th November, 1992 he elaborated on his previous farmans and said:

Let us recite the Salawat:

“The second matter I wish to raise is that you have just recited a very beautiful Qasidah in front of the Imam of the time. And in an earlier farman to the Jamat, I mentioned to you that our Jamat has diversity. But I have mentioned to you also that that diversity is strength and anyone who listens to a Qasidah of this sort or of other Qasidahs that may come from Afghanistan or may come from Tajikistan, and that may be in a different language than Gujarati, or Urdu, or Sindhi, if it is in Tajik, if it is in Farsi, if it is in Arabic, that doesn't matter. It is the expression of the feelings of people of our Tariqah about their belief, about their conviction, about their attitudes to life. This is our strength and I want to underline this because in the years ahead, I will be paying great attention to ensuring that these traditions come forward from all the various Jamats of the world. So that we may all know what are their traditions, what are their practices and sharing these around the world so that all Jamats are identified with our practices, and no Jamat feels that its traditions or its history are not known and admired and accepted by the Jamat world-wide. And therefore I want you to know that I was very happy, very happy to hear this Qasidah

to day and I congratulate the murids who recited the Qasidah. And I am most happy to have noticed that my Jamat at large knows this Qasidah also.”

Let us recite the Salawat.

Cultural and language diversity also exists within the Indian sub-continent Jamat. For instance, the Jamat of the sub-continent is by no means mono-lingual or mono-cultural. There are Ginans in Gujerati, Hindi, Sindhi and Punjabi. The Ismailis of Gujerat and Kutch are known as Khojas from the title “Khwaja” given by Pir Sadruddin, which means the “honoured ones”. The Jamat of Punjab, on the other hand, is known as “Shamsis” because they were mainly converted by Pir Shams. Mawlana Hazir Imam emphasised this tremendous diversity in his recent farmans in Karachi. On 26th October, 2000, he said:

Let us recite the Salawat:

“As I have in front of me a Sindhi Jamat, I will remind you that, when I was much younger and I visited Pakistan, the Sindhis used to tell me jokes about the Punjabis, the Punjabis used to tell me jokes about the Baluch, and the Baluch used to tell me jokes about the Sindhis. What is the moral of this? The moral of the story is that you are one brotherhood and you can laugh and be happy and enjoy your differences. Your differences do not have to be a source of conflict. ...the question that every murid must ask himself or herself is: what is good for the Jamat and what can I do to help the Jamat to improve its quality of life? And those questions do not get divided up as to what can I do for the Sindhi Jamat, or what can I do for the Punjabi Jamat, or what can I do for the Gujerati Jamat. The question is – what can I do for the Jamat? That is the question. So there are differences: cultural, linguistic, historic. We are fortunate to have those differences. But make those differences work for the benefit and the good of all the Jamat.”

Let us recite the Salawat.

Let us pray:

Ya Mawla, inspire us to understand and obey your farmans,

Ya Mawla, forgive all our shortcomings,

Ya Mawla, bless us with your zahiri and batini Nurani Didar.

Ameen,

Hayy zinda.

JAMATI SATADA

DAY SIX

High Mountain Ismaili Communities of Northern Pakistan and China

The Northern Areas of Pakistan, namely Gilgit, Hunza and Chitral, are politically part of Pakistan today. However, their history and traditions are distinct from the Ismaili traditions of the sub-continent. They have been a part of Badakhshan and before the creation of Pakistan, the Ismailis in all these areas were known as the Badakhshan Jamat. The Northern areas are the meeting point of some of the world's highest mountain ranges. Therefore, until the recent past the Ismailis in this area were isolated from the rest of the sub-continent. The Ismaili da`wah in Chitral and surrounding areas, had continued from the time of Pir Nasir Khusraw. In Hunza and Gilgit, in the beginning Buddhism was mainly practised, and was later replaced by Twelver Shi`ism. Some two hundred years ago, Ismaili da`is came from Badakhshan and converted the local king, thus establishing the Ismaili faith in these mountain locked areas.

The practices are very similar to those of Badakhshan and belong to the tradition of Pir Nasir Khusraw. The ceremony of "Chiragh-i Rawshan" is held in great esteem. There are Jamatkhana in every village and settlement and they are the best buildings in the region. There is a vibrant tradition of Qasidahs in the local languages, such as Burushaski, Shina and Wakhi. All the Jamatkhana reverberate with the full voiced recitation of Qasidahs. The children and young people are particularly enthusiastic reciters.

On 10th March, 1940, Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah (*salawatu'llahi `alayhi*) made an historic farman in Farsi through the Radio in Bombay to the Jamats of the Northern Areas. He said: **"I remember all jamats of the Northern Frontiers of India, such as Chitral, Hunza, Gilgit, Badakhshan and all friends and devotees with benediction. Be sure that the light of my love and kindness will reach the whole jamat of Hunza like the sun. Men and women, small and big, young and old, all of you are my spiritual children. I never forget you and will never forget you both in this world and the next. Try to educate your children and strive to learn European languages and the English language. Obey the ruler of the time and be kind to those who are younger and subordinate to you."**

Just as the Irani Ismailis are fondly referred to as “khalus” and the Gujerati Ismailis as “Khojas”, similarly the Ismailis of the Northern Areas are known as “mawlais”, that is, the followers or devotees of the Mawla or the Imam of the time.

Travelling on the famous Karakorum Highway, which links China and Pakistan, one enters the Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region. There are whole villages in the Khotan, Yarqand and Tashkurgan area which are entirely Ismaili. Ismailis in China are known as Tajiks and have much in common with the Tajiki Ismailis of Gorno-Badakhshan, including the tradition of Pir Nasir Khusraw. There are over thirty Jamatkhanas which were built from the 1950’s onwards.

Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah mentions the Jamat of China in his Memoirs, published in 1954 and says: **“With Sinkiang, Kashgar and Yarqand we have no communication at present, since the frontier is closed – but no more firmly against Ismailis than against anyone else – but we know that they are free to follow their religion and that they are firm and devoted Ismailis with a great deal of self-confidence and the feeling that they constitute by far the most important Ismaili community in the whole world.”**

With Mawlana Hazir Imam’s grace, we have surveyed the diverse traditions: historic, cultural and linguistic of the Ismaili Jamats world-wide. We have seen how each unique pattern fits to complete the whole tapestry of the contemporary Ismaili world. In the final write-up tomorrow, we shall discuss Imam-i zaman’s guidance and vision for the diverse global Ismaili Jamat.

Let us pray,

Ya Mawla, help us to appreciate and celebrate our diversity,
Ya Mawla, give us the spiritual strength to obey your farmans,
Ya Mawla, bless us with zahiri and batini Nurani Didar.
Ameen,
Hayy zinda.

JAMATI SATADA

DAY SEVEN

“Diversity is Strength”

During the Satada Week we have heard about the diversity of the Ismaili Jamat around the world today. We can use the analogy of a beautiful mosaic where each piece is distinctive, but contributes to creating a marvellous complete picture. The different pieces are held together by a strong glue. What holds the Ismaili global Jamat together? The answer is that we all recognise the same Imam of the time. Allegiance, obedience and devotion to the Imam of the time are the adhesive which holds the mosaic of the different Ismaili linguistic, cultural and historic traditions together. Whether we recite Ginans, Qasidahs or Maduhs, the content always expresses love for the Imam. We all believe in an esoteric tariqah in which emphasis is placed on the role of the intellect and on leading a life of balance between the material and the spiritual. We may express ourselves in different languages and live in different parts of the world, but love for the Imam and the Ismaili greeting “Ya Ali Madad” are like keys which open the hearts of Ismailis the world over.

In the Ismaili context diversity is strength, because keeping our individual traditions, we are nevertheless one Jamat following the guidance of the Imam of the time. In accordance with his farmans and directions we work together for the benefit of all Ismailis wherever they may be. We strive to help each other to improve the quality of our lives and to work for the benefit of the societies amongst whom we live. Since these principles are very close to our hearts, we perhaps take them for granted. A quick look at the contemporary world around us will convince us how fortunate we are. Many parts of our world are torn apart by ethnic violence and hatred. As a diverse but united community that respects differences we can set an example to those communities where the opposite situation prevails. It is for this reason that Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah stipulated in his Platinum Jubilee message of 12th December, 1953: **“It is my hope that my Spiritual Children, the Ismailis, will, by the example of their own higher enlightenment and helpful co-operative movements amongst themselves, set to the world an example of better fraternity and brotherhood which alone can free men from the fear and dangers of moral and mental discord which leads to disaster for all.”**

In the extensive guidance which Mawlana Hazir Imam blessed us with particularly during his visit to Pakistan last year, we can identify some clear principles on which he wishes us to base our attitudes towards our diverse global Jamat. He wishes us to build unity through acceptance of difference and knowledge of what that difference represents. In his farman in Nairobi in 1988, he had spoken about how a Tariqah such as ours can benefit from the creativity, the wisdom, the knowledge of people from more and more parts of the world. Building strength and unity on the basis of diversity, Mawlana Hazir Imam wishes us to progress to a position where we can as a global brotherhood of Ismailis respond to the needs of any Jamat in any part of the world.

On 23rd October, 2000, he said at the Darkhana in Karachi:

Let us recite the Salawat:

“These principles of generosity, of help, of helping others, they also go across frontiers, which means the Jamats from various parts of the world can assist the Jamats from Afghanistan, but the Jamat from Afghanistan also has qualities, and it can make those qualities available to other Jamats from its knowledge, its traditions, its inherited historic memory. So it is important to me that our Jamats should be genuinely, genuinely a world-wide brotherhood. That is the meaning of belonging to our tariqah in Islam. That is an immense strength. We must consider that pluralism in our Jamat is a magnificent blessing from Allah, and we must make pluralism work for the benefit of the Jamat world-wide, drawing knowledge, imagination, creative thought, from all sources, wherever it may come from, to the benefit of the Jamat.”

Let us recite the Salawat.

To conclude our theme for the Satada Week, let us remember Mawlana Hazir Imam’s Silver Jubilee message to the Ismaili community globally. He said: **“Build upon prayer and brotherhood for they are timeless and it is only the life of the soul which is eternal.”**

Let us pray:

Ya Mawla, help us to understand the wisdom in your guidance,

Ya Mawla, help us to enhance and celebrate the diversity of our Jamat,

Ya Mawla, help us to strengthen the unity in the global Jamat,

Ya Mawla, bless us with your zahiri and batini Nurani Didar.

Ameen,

Hayy zinda.