

# India Arab Cultural centre of Jamia Millia Islamia: Purpose, Functioning and Achievement

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## ABSTRACT

Indo Arab ties are age old reality which can be traced back to even pre-Islamic era. In the present situation in general, and COVID-19's adverse effect on global society in particular, Indo Arab ties have become more significant for economy and other developments. Culture and education become the focal points in all sorts of ties, therefore the role of India Arab cultural centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi is doing extraordinarily great work towards building up, maintaining and further developing healthy Indo Arab cultural bonds.

**Keywords:** Indo-Arab, economy, culture, education, ties.

## Importance of Indo Arab ties

The significance of the ties between India and the Arab countries is not a secret anymore especially India's relation with the UAE (United Arab Emirates) and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Maximum number of expatriates-employees in these countries belong to India despite religio-cultural differences. The partnership is beyond religion, region, race and cultures. Khan(2021) states that crucial ties between the two countries (India and Saudi Arabia) have gradually developed in the crucial fields such as trade, culture, education, technology, medicine etc.

India Arab Cultural Centre (IACC) of Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) is perhaps first and the rarest of its type in India. The IACC aims to study create, maintain and promote highly valuable ties between India ( the largest democracy with culturally rich heritage) and the Arab world. It caters the need of building relationship among the Arab countries to engage in fruitful literary and cultural interactions in addition to enhance cultural and academic collaboration between the two ancient civilizations: India and the Arab. The centre includes a group of experts in the field of Indo-Arab ties. The centre has a beautiful building

'Imarat Ibn Khaldun' which is dedicated to a famous Arab intellectual and historian who is credited for Indo-Arab cultural synthesis.

This centre employs cross-disciplinary approach which makes its activities quite unique, however the focus remains on Islam, Education, cultures, Islamic studies and related domains. Apart from its basic aims of bringing two cultures together, the centre is substantiating its activities by running two educational programmes under the umbrella of IACC as under:

- 1.M. Phil/ Ph.D. in International Studies-Arab Islamic Culture, and
2. M. A. (International Studies-Arab-Islamic Culture).

The academic programmes and the students within them have been enhanced by innovative cultural and literary interactive exchange programmes. In order to achieve the goal, the centre has a link with numerous cultural organizations, institutions and universities belonging to the Arab world. In order to fulfill the requirement of comparative language, literature, culture and education, the centre aims to translate significantly crucial work of famous Indian and Arab authors in Arabic and Indian languages. The publication of such needed work is initially carried out with the assistance of various Arab organisations and institutions. Besides, the centre also organizes book fairs to display its publications and rare collection of material on Arab history, society, culture and Indo Arab ties.

As mentioned, the centre has a beautiful building with all necessary infrastructures.

Figure.1



(Source: <https://www.jmi.ac.in/iacc>)

There are essential facilities available in the centre for educational, interactive and cultural activities such as a conference hall, conference room, a furnished and well equipped library, film/video archives and ICT enabled class room.

Among other relevant assets Shaikh Al-Sabah Library deserves a special mention. It was established with the support of the State of Kuwait. The library is highly rich which has books in English & Arabic (6000 nos), Journals (5), Films/Documentaries/Musical Albums-50 in addition to Archival Documents- 100 in number.

Figure.2



(Shaikh Al-Sabah Library, IACC, JMI)

The lecture space is also conducive which can accommodate many attendants. It is quite comfortable and technologically equipped. Following is a glimpse of an interactive session with Dr Mushen Bilal from Syria which was held on 14/11/2019.

Figure.3



(source: IACC, JMI)

The centre organized following event in 2009 at/by the centre at JMI. The event is recorded in descending order (latest to the oldest). The information is on the official website.

#### Events organized w.e.f. 2009 by IACC, JMI

According to the sub-section of 'events' of the website of the centre (<https://www.jmi.ac.in/iacc>), the events were organized from August, 13 to Dec, 10, 2009. Following events were successfully conducted:

- Lecture on Resurgent Islam and global jihad ,
  - Panel Discussion on "Arabs and the bollywood"
  - AM Khwaja Memorial Lecture on the occasion of Jamia Talimi Mela
  - Arab film festival + (Screening Schedule)
  - A Panel Discussion on Palestine after Arafat: Current Situation and Future Prospects
  - Talk on Political Scenario in West Asia: Challenges to Indian Foreign Policy, and
  - Panel Discussion on "Arabs and the bollywood"
- The themes covered were of different types. However, all the events were related to the culture, society and educational aspects of Arab world which could enlighten the Indian audience in general and students in particular.

As compared to events organized in 2009, the events in 2010 were much less. Only two activities could possibly organized during 2010:

- Sufi dance & music Organised by India Arab Cultural Centre, and

-a lecture on 'Arab World' after 9/11

In 2011, IACC, JMI organised six events between September-October. Topics covered were:

- Influence of Arabic Language in the Indian Sub-Continent,
- Saudi Traditional Folk Dance and Music Band Performance,
- Novels by Saudi Women Writers between 1950-2010,
- Changing Ideals and Determinants: Foreign Policies of the Arab Gulf States (1975-2010),

-Continuity and Change in India-Kuwait Relations, and

-a 'Photo Exhibition' ( related to 50 Years of Indo-Kuwait relations).

The centre could not organize any event during 2013-14 for unknown reasons.

In 2015, seven events were organized ( according to the JMI/IACC-website details). Main attractions were:

-Talk on Arabs in East and Central Africa: Presence in Culture and Society,

- Hindustan Meri Nazar Mai,

-Workshop on Researching the Arab/Islamic World: Epistemological and Methodological Issues,

Arab Film Festival,

-Vision of Modern Muslim Selfhood among Students at International Islamic Universities in Asia, and

-Undermining Revolution: U.S. Imperialism in the Arab World, Palestine & Egypt, and Contemporary Egyptian Poet.

Many international speakers and presenters were invited for events in their specialties. As many as 11 events were successfully organized in 2016. Many speakers represented the UK, the US, Afghanistan and Morocco. Topics covered were:

- Islam in India: Politics, Society and Culture, Gulf Migration: distress signals,

- Shifts and Sands: Desert geographies and new Historiographies of the Middle East and Persian Gulf,

- Global Actors from south Asia: World – Making from the 'Margins' of the Islamic World,

- Islam and Radicalism in Afghanistan and its Role in Regional Initiatives,

-Academic Writing & Publishing: Advice from the Editor of the Journal of Arabian Studies,

- Academic Interaction by Prof. Jasim Husain, University of Bahrain,

-Two Scorpions in a Bottle: The Chronicle of the Cold War between Iran and Saudi Arabia that is Ripping West Asia Apart,

- Arab Mujahids in the Bosnian Crisis: Life History of a Hadhrami from Hyderabad,

-Methodological Issues in Understanding the Arab World, and

- Talk on The Questions of Land and Identity in the contemporary Arabic Poetry: "Opposition" by Mahmoud Darwish.

In 2017, a lecture on 'Some Reflections on the limits of Liberalism' was delivered by Prof. Akeel Bilgrami, Columbia University, New York. Later a talk took place on 'Is Arab World losing Strategic Salience?'. A National Seminar was also conducted in the same year on the topic, 'The Idea

of Peace, Humanism and Tolerance in Islam'. Next, a symposium was organized on the theme of Symposium Muslim Perspectives on Interfaith dialogue which was delivered by Prof. Andrew Pierree. Another event focused on 'Study, Research & Fellowship Opportunities in the Netherlands, organised Jointly with The Embassy of the Netherlands. In addition, a 'National Seminar on India and the Arab World: Contextualizing the Present, Past and Future' successfully accomplished the purpose of organizing at IACC.

Following is the list of events held in 2018 at **IACC, JMI**.

-International Conference on Art and Architectural Traditions of India and Iran: Commonality and Diversity,-

- Talk on Contribution of the Royal Mughal Ladies in the field of Architecture

- Talk on India Diaspora in Central Asia Historical Perspective

-International Conference on Arab Spring from Gender Perspective: Gains, Gaps and Challenges Organised by Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies, & India-Arab Cultural Centre

Main attractions of the events organized in 2019 by IACC, JMI were:

-A talk on "War in Syria" 2011-2019

-Extension Lecture on References to Arabic Language & Culture in Iqbal's Poetry,

-National Conference on India, China and the Arab World: Exploring New Dynamics,

-Two-Day Workshop Research Methodology in Cultural Studies' for M.A, MPhil/Ph.D. students, and

-Special Lectures on Construction and Deconstruction of Nations in Central Asia.

In 2020, due to COVID-19, only one programme took place on March, 27 following all health protocols. The topic of the programme was 'Young Scholars' Seminar-2020 on Cross Cultural Interactions: Exploring Arabic themes in Indian Writings'.

In the current year (2021), two events have so far been held:

Two-day National Conference on India and the Arab World: Civilization and Prospects, and

#### Research of the students

According to the official website (<https://www.jmi.ac.in/iacc>), current details of the researches conducted by centre students/scholars are as under:

S. No.	Name of the candidate	Title
1	Rhea Abraham	Dynamics of Political Reforms

		in Saudi Arabia and Qatar: Implications for Indian Foreign Policy
2	Maheep	Women's Empowerment in the GCC States : A Comparative Study of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain
3	Ashia Khan	Changing Nature of Governance in Saudi Arabia: since King Faisal
4	S. M. Khalid	Emerging Patterns of Political Participation in the GCC States: A Case Study of Kuwait
5	Sajid PP	Role of Islamic Microfinance in Bahrain Since 2000
6	Maheep	Women's Empowerment in the GCC States : A Comparative Study of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain

Apart from so many fruitful cultural, academic and research activities, the center is aspiring to achieve many other goals in near future. Some of the conceived plans follow:

Preservation of area related documents has been assumed to be of great importance, therefore, the centre is going to take necessary measures to preserve such documents. It will set up an audio-visual documentation unit to create audio, video, graphic and text files covering various activities and customs falling in the realm of India-Arab cultural relations. In addition, manuscript digitization unit will be established at the centre for digitization of rare manuscripts related to India-Arab cultural ties. Keeping the visual importance in view, film archives will also be created so that proper collection of films, documentaries, video footages can be generated in some Arab countries as per the need. Besides all these, the Arab Information Centre will be functional in near future which may work apart from other tasks, in the

direction of indexing and abstracting of journal articles. Last but not least, Gulf Studies Journal will be started soon to cater the need of publication especially for the centre's scholars and staff. This initiative may prove to be the first initiative of its kind towards starting such a platform concerned with researches related to the Gulf in general and Indo-Gulf research in particular.

### CONCLUSIONS

IACC, JMI has been performing pivotal and crucial role in the study and promotion of Indo Arab ties especially in the domain of culture, education and mutual understanding. It is expected that the centre will bring forth many innovative and fruitful projects and accomplish in near future. Such centres should be opened at other university campuses to enhance Indo- Arab relationship which is need of the hour.

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