



organizational and structural developments in the Bahá'í community originated here. Iran has also been important as a source of large numbers of individuals who have migrated to other parts of the world and have played and continue to play an important part in the spread and administration of the religion.

## 1. Geography and history

Iran as an identifiable entity has existed for many centuries. Geographically it consists of high mountains stretching across the north and west with a high plateau occupying the center of the country. The center and east of this plateau is a desert, but with irrigation the west and south of the plateau can be farmed.

The empires of the Medes and Persians were among the greatest of the ancient world. Although those empires were swept away, Iran as a cultural entity remained. The boundary that marks the western edge of present-day Iran forms one of the most significant and enduring cultural boundaries of the world. The ancient civilizations that occupied Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, and North Africa were almost obliterated by the Arab Islamic invasion and that whole area came under Arab cultural domination. Iran, however, although it was among the first countries to fall to the advancing Arab armies, never completely lost its culture and language. Centuries later, the Iranian culture re-established itself and the Persian language re-emerged, now much influenced by Arabic, to become the dominant language of the eastern Islamic world (as far afield as Tajikistan and eastern India, Persian was the lingua franca of the eastern Islamic world until the advent of the British armies). The northern and western boundaries of Iran have, however, been under pressure from invading Turkish tribes and have contracted since ancient times.

Iran reached another peak of influence and culture during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries under the Safavid monarchs. It was they who established Shí'í Islam as the state religion of Iran. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, signs of a decline were clearly evident. This decline became a steep fall during the next century worsened by civil war and invasions.

The Qájár dynasty succeeded in establishing its rule over Iran at the end of the eighteenth century.

While the Safavids had legitimized their rule by claiming descent from the Imáms, the Qájárs, who were a Turkic tribe, could not take that path. They were forced therefore to try to gain the favor of the Shî'í`ulamá in order to obtain their assistance in buttressing their legitimacy and authority. Under the second shah of this dynasty, Fath-`Alí Sháh, a number of threads began to come together that were eventually to result in the emergence of the Bábí and Bahá'í movements. The first of these was the teaching of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í (q.v.). His most radical teaching, and the one that eventually led to his being declared an infidel by some of the Shî'í`ulamá, was the idea that many of the teachings of Islam, such as the resurrection, did not refer to a physical reality but to a spiritual one. Shaykh Ahmad was succeeded in the leadership of what was to become known as the Shaykhí movement (see "Shaykhism") by Sayyid Kázim Rashtí (q.v.), whose classes the Báb attended briefly. During Fath-`Alí Sháh's reign there appears to have been a general heightening of millennialist expectation. The Shî'í teachings hold that the twelfth in the line of Imáms who succeeded the Prophet Muhammad did not die but will re-appear shortly before the Day of Judgment. Numerous individuals appear to have predicted that this was about to happen (see Amanat 89-105).

Against this background of heightened expectation, it is not surprising that the Báb's claim, originating as it did in A.H. 1260/A.D. 1844 exactly a thousand years after the occultation of the Twelfth Imám, created a stir as it gradually became known throughout Iran. The Báb's followers travelled throughout Iran and Iraq spreading the news of his coming and of his claims. Many thousands, especially from among the Shaykhís, accepted the claim, and the Bábí following grew in most parts of Iran.

The Bahá'í community of Iran thus began with the Bábí community and this article will look at a number of themes which describe the growth and workings of the Bábí-Bahá'í community of Iran primarily from 1844 to 1921. It will also briefly survey the main events from 1921 onwards.

## 2. Conversions

The Bábí community began with the first group of eighteen of the Báb's disciples, who were called the "Letters of the Living" (q.v.). However, only seventeen of these were gathered around the Báb in Shiraz in 1844 when he first declared his mission. One, Táhirih (q.v.), was not present, but was accepted into the group by virtue of a letter that she wrote to the Báb. This group of seventeen had come together mainly because, as followers of the Shaykhí movement, they were searching for a new leader after the death of their previous leader, Sayyid Kázim Rashtí. They became convinced of the truth of the Báb's claim through personal contact with him. These seventeen disciples traveled through Iran and spread the Bábí movement primarily through the existing Shaykhí network. They had a good deal of success. Many people were converted while others were sufficiently interested to come to Shiraz and seek out the Báb.

One of the major modes of contact and conversion for the Bábís and later the Bahá'ís appears to have been through social networks. Each individual converted others in his family and then would speak to some among his social contacts. Religious patronage networks also seems to have been of great importance in some areas, especially during the Bábí period. In several instances a leading religious figure was converted and this was followed by the conversion of a substantial number of those who followed him in religious matters. Zanján, Nayríz, and several villages such as Shahríráz are examples of such a phenomenon. Later, during the Bahá'í period, it was harder for such group conversions to occur because of the atmosphere of repression and the hardening of opinion.

Direct meeting with the Báb and later Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá was to prove an important factor in the conversion and confirmation of many individuals. This was true even when the meeting occurred before a claim had been put forward. Some later became Bábís on account of their memory of meeting the Báb in Karbalá before he had advanced any claim; others, having

come to Baghdad and met Bahá'u'lláh before he put forward a claim, would, years later, accept his claim on the strength of that meeting. Many would make lengthy journeys in order to meet with the head of the movement. Such a meeting often convinced those who were wavering on the brink of acceptance, while it confirmed the faith of those who had already been converted.

Peripatetic Bábí and Bahá'í propagandists were of major importance throughout the whole of the nineteenth century. They were often persons who had been Muslim `ulamá before their conversion and were therefore knowledgeable. Since learning was highly valued in Iranian society, these individuals (the muballighs, see 7 below) were often appealed to as sources of authority. Some were resident in one community but many would travel from one city to another staying different lengths of time. The Bahá'ís in each locality would bring anyone who had shown any interest in the Bahá'í Faith to meetings with these individuals. This proved a highly successful formula and became more or less institutionalized until such time as there were more educated and informed Bahá'ís and an administrative structure throughout Iran in the middle of the twentieth century.

In more recent times, there has been a greater emphasis on the need for individual Bahá'ís to propagate the Bahá'í Faith and so there has been less tendency to rely on a small corps of knowledgeable individuals. Furthermore, the planning and strategy of the propagation of the religion has become the concern of the administrative institutions and set within the context of plans (q.v.) drawn up by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran. From 1946, all propagation and other activities have been conducted within a framework of successive plans.

### 3. Geographical spread

The Bábí movement spread throughout most of Iran in its initial phase of propagation. Within the first few years, groups were formed in most of the major cities. The spread in the villages was more haphazard. Where a person converted in one of the major cities came from one of the

villages, he might return to his village and spread the new teaching among his family and, after a short time, a considerable community might come into existence in that village. There may however have been no converts in any of the surrounding villages. During the Bábí period, the spread of the religion to the villages occurred principally in Ádharbáyján, Mázandarán, Fárs, Khurásán, and some of the central provinces. It was only during the time of Bahá'u'lláh that the spread to the villages began to occur over a wider area.

The initial spread of the Bábí movement was to the Iranian heartlands--such areas as Mázandarán, Khurásán, central Iran, Fárs, and Yazd. The Turkic population of Ádharbáyján also responded well to the new teaching. There were, however, few converts in some areas such as Hamadán, Kirmánsháh, Gílán, and Kirmán until the start of the Bahá'í period. In the case of Kirmán this was probably because of the presence there of the Shaykhí leader, Hájí Muhammad Karím Khán Kirmání, who effectively blocked all moves to spread the new religion there from its earliest days. In the case of the other areas it would appear to have been more the result of the fact that none of the prominent early Bábís came from these areas and so there was no propagation of the Bábí movement there. Spread to more peripheral areas such as Khúzistán, the Gulf littoral, and Balúchistán did not occur to any appreciable degree until the end of the nineteenth century.

From the 1940s on, under systemic plans, the Bahá'í administrative institutions were established in all parts of Iran, and many smaller towns and villages that had remained closed to the new religion were now opened by the planned movement of Bahá'ís from other parts of the country.

#### 4. Spread among religious and ethnic minorities

Until the 1880s the spread of the Bahá'í Faith had remained largely within the framework of the Iranian Shí'í majority in the Iranian heartlands and the Turkic Shí'ís of Ádharbáyján. A few of the Ahl-i Haqq (Aliyu'lláhís, a Shí'í minority group) had been converted over the years but there had been no conversions of other minority groups. Then in the 1870s and 1880s,

there were some important breakthroughs with the beginnings of the conversions of a large number of Jews (in Hamadán, Kirmánsháh, Khurásán, Káshán, and Tehran) and Zoroastrians (in the Yazd area).

At first, these converts were not fully integrated into the Bahá'í community. They remained within their communities of origin and there was little to tell them apart from other Jews and Zoroastrians. As late as the early years of the twentieth century, separate meetings were being held for the "Jewish Bahá'ís" and "Zoroastrian Bahá'ís" in some cities. But gradually over the years, these converts cut their links with their communities of origin and the Bahá'í community became more integrated.

There was some spread of the religion among the settled tribes from the Bábí period, although it was extremely patchy. Some seventy members of the Afshár tribe settled at Hindiján in Fars were converted, as were some Kurds and others. This pattern was continued into the early Bahá'í period with the conversion of some Lurs who had migrated to Mázandarán, some Kurds in Ádharbáyján and Kurdistán, and a few other groups. There were no conversions among the nomadic tribes until the twentieth century when there began to be a few such among the Búyir Ahmad tribes of the southern Zagros mountains.

With regard to other ethnic minorities in Iran, Bahá'ís were well represented among the Ádharbáyjání Turks but there appear to have been relatively few among the nomadic Turkic tribes, the Kurds of western Iran, the Arabs of Khúzistán, and the Balúchís of the southeast. One reason for this may be that most of these groups are Sunní.

## 5. Persecutions and Migration

The Bábí and Bahá'í communities of Iran have been persecuted from their inception to the present day. The persecution has been, in the worst periods, intense and unrelenting, and even in the best times, it has been an ever-present threat. (On the pattern of persecutions, see the article "Bahá'í History".)

After the more dramatic and violent episodes associated with the Bábí era, there followed a period in which continuous pressure and harrassment were punctuated by frequent outbursts of violence; the 1979 Revolution in Iran has re-created circumstances more akin to the original Bábí period. In the atmosphere of hatred and terror engendered by these persecutions, Bahá'ís lived under enormous pressures, particularly the more prominent ones who were publicly known as Bahá'ís. There was no way in which the Bahá'í movement could operate openly in Iran and therefore no way in which it could publicly state its case. This situation created favorable conditions for the proliferation of every type of rumor and accusation against them.

Bahá'ís whose religious affiliation became known or who chose openly to identify themselves as such were at all times under a great deal of pressure. They and their families were subjected to persistent abuse, dismissal from employment, trade and commercial boycott, and not infrequent beatings and looting of property. In addition to this continuous background level of harrassment, from time to time there would be a major local outburst of persecution during which a number of Bahá'ís would be killed and all the Bahá'ís in that locality threatened and their property looted. The murderers and looters would plead that as apostates from Islam, Bahá'ís could be killed or despoiled with impunity. There are almost no examples of anyone being punished by the authorities for any actions taken against the Bahá'ís, even where murder was involved. A major outburst of persecution would have consequences not only in the locality where it occurred but also in other places where the news would encourage some to try to extort money from the Bahá'ís on the threat of stirring up similar trouble.

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that many Bahá'ís chose to migrate. Many of these moves were precipitated by an episode of persecution. Not every area in Iran was equally prone to such episodes. In Ádharbáyján and Khurásán there were, for much of the last half of the nineteenth century, a number of Bahá'ís in high government positions who were able to protect

the Bahá'ís to a certain extent. Tehran, also, was relatively safe, probably because the central government was more able to exert its authority there and because it did not want the foreign ambassadors to witness such outbursts of persecution. In general, then, the migrations that occurred were from areas of intense persecution, such as Isfahan and Yazd, to areas of less persecution, such as Tehran, Ádharbáyján, and Khurásán. Many Bahá'ís migrated from Iran altogether. Some went to the Caucasus and to the Haifa-Akka area, but the largest number went to Ashkhabad (see "Turkmenistan").

As an example of this phenomenon of migration, one may look at Yazd, an area of much persecution. There are a hundred persons named as leading Bahá'ís of Yazd in the time of Bahá'u'lláh (see Table 1 and note under Table 3). Of these, 64 migrated from Yazd; 25 are specifically stated to have moved as a direct result of persecution, and most of the rest probably moved as an indirect result of the persecutions. 14 migrated to the Haifa-Akka area; 22 migrated to Ashkhabad. Migration was however a feature of all parts of the Bahá'í community; and even from a comparatively safe province such as Ádharbáyján, 29 of 145 leading Bahá'ís (20%) listed in Bahá'u'lláh's period of leadership migrated, mostly to Ashkhabad (12), the Caucasus (7) and the Haifa-Akka area (4).

## 6. Communications

For most of their history, the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths have existed with their leadership in exile and prison. Therefore the question of communications between the leadership in exile and the main mass of the believers has always been of critical concern.

From the time that the Báb was imprisoned in the remote mountains of Ádharbáyján until the first decades of the twentieth century, the solution to the problem was much the same: use was made of particular individuals who acted as full-time couriers. These individuals--Sayyáh in the time of the Báb, and ShaykhSalmán, Amínu'l-Bayán, and Hájí Amín in the time of Bahá'u'lláh--would travel among the Bahá'í communities in Iran collecting letters, gifts, and

offerings and take these to wherever the leader of the religion then was (Mákú, Chihríq, Baghdad, Edirne, or Akka). They would then collect the replies to the letters, and go to another place where these were transcribed (Tehran in the time of the Báb, Mosul for much of Bahá'u'lláh's time in Akka, or Akka itself), so that multiple copies of the latest tablets could be made available. They would then proceed to travel throughout Iran where they would distribute these and collect the next batch of letters. Much use for communications was also made of the very extensive flow of individual Bábís and Bahá'ís making the journey to see the leader of the religion. They would also become, in effect, couriers.

## 7. Organizational development

Although there are indications in the writings of the Báb that he intended to set up an organizational network based on a hierarchy of Letters of the Living, Mirrors, etc., it would appear that little came of this, probably due to the persecutions of the Bábís.

During the early days of the Bahá'í community in Iran there was little attempt at organization. In the main, the Bahá'í community in each locality was led by whoever was socially most highly placed. In particular, many of those who had been `ulamá when Muslims became leaders in the Bahá'í community. Holy Days were observed from an early date, while the Nineteen Day Feast (q.v.) became the regular meeting of the community. Meetings were also held for the saying of prayers and the reading of the latest "tablets" arriving from the head of the religion. Meetings were also held for the benefit of potential converts.

When copies of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (q.v.) reached Iran, some of the Bahá'ís of Tehran decided, in about 1294/1877, to set up a House of Justice in that city. As there are no instructions in the book regarding the establishment of this institution, however, they merely called together an ad hoc group of prominent Bahá'ís and called that the Assembly of Consultation (majlis-i-shawr) and the house in which they met the House of Justice. They consulted about the

affairs of the community but they were a self-appointed body and even kept their existence a secret from the main body of the Bahá'ís (presumably for security).

Another development was the evolution of a number of persons who taught the Bahá'í Faith on a full-time basis, either resident in a locality or traveling around the community. These individuals, called muballighs, reached their greatest importance at the end of the nineteenth century.

Sadrú's-Sudúr (q.v.) set up an institute for training muballighs in Tehran in the early twentieth century.

In 1304 /1887 Bahá'u'lláh began to name certain prominent Bahá'ís as Hands of the Cause (q.v.).

The number of Hands of the Cause reached four with the appointment of Mírzá Hasan Adíb (q.v.)

some time after his conversion in about 1889. Others were given the title of Ismu'lláh (Name of

God). Whereas the latter group never evolved into an institution and died out, the former was

continued by `Abdu'l-Bahá and eventually made into an important branch of the Bahá'í administration by Shoghi Effendi.

In 1897 `Abdu'l-Bahá instructed the Hands of the Cause to begin the consultations that resulted

eventually in the setting up in Tehran in 1899 of the Central Spiritual Assembly, consisting of the

four Hands of the Cause and nine who were elected by special electors appointed by the Hands.

From then on the spiritual assemblies became the principle administrative organs of the Bahá'í community.

Already by 1920 a considerable degree of organizational sophistication existed with the Central

Spiritual Assembly in Tihran having committees for education, teachers' training, poor relief,

publishing, international correspondence, hospitality, adjudication of commercial and other

disputes, and for teaching. In 1934 a national spiritual assembly was formed with its headquarters

in Tehran.

The propagation and study of the Bahá'í Faith was backed by the publication of Bahá'í literature.

The Bahá'ís were forbidden by the government to print their books using letterpress. Áqá Bábá Nayrízí, who ran the first Bahá'í primary school (maktab) in Tehran, also reproduced tablets and other material by lithograph. In 1899 Mírzá `Alí Akbar Rawhání Muhibbu's-Sultán began to produce material by jellygraph or mimeograph (see "Calligraphy.6"). Over the years this developed into a large-scale production of books, periodicals, pamphlets, and audio-visual material (see "Literature.6").

## 8. Finances

Not a great deal is yet known about the financial basis of the Bahá'í community of Iran. There was undoubtedly a small nucleus of rich individuals whose donations of money supported much of the activity of the community. These were mainly merchants and included a number of the members of the Báb's family, the Afnáns. It was, for example, Muhammad-Taquí Afnán who financed much of the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár (q.v.) of Ashkhabad.

The Bahá'ís of Iran also sent money to support the leader of the religion in exile in Edirne or Akka. This was formalized as the Huququ'lláh (q.v.). Amínu'l-Bayán and Hájí Amín (q.v.) were appointed as the trustees of the Huququ'lláh and would travel around Iran receiving this money from Bahá'ís and then taking it to `Akká. In later years, Hájí Amín appointed assistants to help him in this work and the money was remitted through merchants such as Mírzá `Alí Haydar Shírváni and Sayyid Nasru'lláh Báqiroff. Hájí Amín's principal assistant was Mírzá Ghulám-Ridá Amín-i-Amín, who succeeded him as the Trustee of the Huququ'lláh in 1928. He in turn was succeeded upon his death in 1938 by Valiyu'lláh Varqá (q.v.).

In 1907 a Bahá'í fund (sandúq-i khayriyyih) was established in Tehran to finance the full-time Bahá'í teachers (muballighs) and for the assistance of Bahá'í education and the support of orphans, the aged and handicapped (Rafati 458). From the early 1920s, Shoghi Effendi encouraged the development of a national Bahá'í fund to finance the Bahá'í administration.

## 9. Social and economic development

From the earliest days of the Bábí and Bahá'í communities, observers noted some differences between them and the Shí'í majority of Iran. The first area in which this was seen was in relation to the greater freedom given to women in the Bahá'í Faith (See comments by various Europeans, BBR 27, 75; Momen, "Christian missionaries", p. 74). While no women in Bahá'í history achieved the same fame in history as Táhirih (q.v.) in the Bábí period, there are many examples of individual women who took an important role in the propagation and social development of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran.

The persecutions necessitated a communal initiative to help the victims. Efforts were also extended to relief during the famines that affected Iran in the nineteenth century. Mutual assistance extended into other areas and was probably largely responsible for the growing wealth and improving social circumstances of the Bahá'í community over the decades.

At the village level also some efforts were made. As early as the 1870s in Mahfurúzak in Mázandarán, for example, Mullá `Ali Ján and his wife, `Alaviyyih Khánum (q.v.), were instrumental in instituting agricultural reforms and a co-operative for selling the cotton they produced. They set up elementary schools for both boys and girls.

The number of such activities increased markedly during the period of `Abdu'l-Bahá's leadership. Bahá'í schools for both boys and girls were set up in many towns and even some villages, and medical facilities were established. With the assistance of a number of American Bahá'ís, these institutions became among the best in Iran and many prominent people who were not Bahá'ís would use them. Bahá'í students (male and female) went to Europe and North America to improve their education.

Education and literacy, especially of women, continued to be of prime concern to the Bahá'í community. After the Bahá'í schools were closed by government order in 1934, the Bahá'ís continued to hold moral education classes (dars-i-akhláq) on Fridays. By 1973

the Bahá'í community was able to report the eradication of illiteracy among Bahá'í women under forty years of age (BW 15:248).

Other social and economic development projects included hospitals and medical clinics; the Nawnahálán Company, formed to encourage children to save (1917); and an institution for Bahá'í orphans (BW 9:120).

Within the Iranian context, the Bahá'í Faith may be seen as one of the major forces towards the "modernization" of the country, particularly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its role in this regard has yet to be properly assessed, but it appears to have exercised a particular appeal to the better educated, and through its own promotion of relative female emancipation, education, and modern medicine significantly contributed towards the socio-economic development of at least one segment of Iranian society. In addition to fully committed adherents it also attracted a wider circle of sympathizers.

#### 10. Social location

It is difficult to make any general statements about the social location of the Bábí- Bahá'í community of Iran. The evidence available suggests that they were and are fairly well distributed among all sections and classes of Iranian urban society. There were also numerous rural Bahá'ís. Many of the latter drifted to the towns for purposes of education and better opportunities.

While the intense persecutions often resulted in some Bahá'ís being made destitute, the emphasis on education in the Bahá'í community meant that overall there was a tendency during the twentieth century for the Bahá'í community in Iran to climb the social scale. Many Bahá'ís became part of the middle classes that emerged in Iran during the twentieth century.

In the main, the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths spread through established social networks. At first, the main network was the existing Shaykhí network throughout Iran. More than 50% of leading Bábís converted before 1264/1848 had been Shaykhís (Smith and Momen, "The Báb Movement", p.

60). Later, other social networks were utilized. In Isfahan the religion spread particularly among the guilded craftsmen (asnáf); in Qazvin, among the merchants (tujjár); in most areas there was spread through the network of `ulamá, except in Zanján, where the pre-eminent Bábí, Mullá Muhammad-`Ali Hujjat, had belonged to the minority Akhbárí school, and thus further spread through the `ulamá network was blocked by the pre-existing hostility of the other `ulamá.

#### 11. Leadership of the Bahá'í community

There is more information regarding the leadership of the Bábí and Bahá'í movement. It is therefore possible to make an assessment of the geographical and social background of the leading Bábís and Bahá'ís.

In Table 1, the gradual changes in the relative importance of the various Bahá'í communities of Iran can be seen as they emerged from their Bábí past. A number of areas such as Gílán, Kirmánsháh, and Hamadán, which had virtually no community during the Bábí period, had by the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá grown to equal in importance such older communities as Qazvín and Zanján, and even Fárs. The steep rise in importance of Tehran can also be seen; Yazd had also grown much in importance.

In Table 2, the leading Bábís and Bahá'ís are analyzed according to their origins in terms of whether this was urban or rural. Despite the imprecise nature of this analysis, the proportions of leading Bábís and Bahá'ís from each of the categories listed remained remarkably constant. This is all the more interesting in view of the marked rise in the importance of Tehran and the other cities as a focus of migration over the past century. This would seem to indicate that there was a simultaneous equal expansion of the Bahá'í Faith among rural communities.

In Table 3 the occupational background of the leading Bábís and Bahá'ís is examined. Not unexpectedly, with the hardening of attitudes against the new religion among the `ulamá, there is a decrease in the proportion of Bahá'ís from that section of the population. The bazaar, being the

most conservative and religious section of the traditional Iranian city, was also a difficult place for Bahá'ís to exist and this probably accounts for the decline among the guilded retail merchants and skilled urban workers. The number of wholesale merchants (tujjár), on the other hand, increased during this period, partly because they were less subject to the pressures of the bazaar and partly because many Bahá'í tujjár chose to establish themselves outside Iran. Interestingly, despite the high level of persecutions, membership and conversions from among the court, nobility, and high government officials remained at a high level throughout this period.

## 12. Principal events of Bábí and Bahá'í history 1844-1921.

As the Bábí and Bahá'í religions were founded in Iran, the history of these religions in this country is closely bound up with the overall history of the religion itself and with the biographies of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith. Thus much information on the Bábí and Bahá'í history of Iran can be gained from the separate articles on "Bahá'í History" and on each of the central figures (see especially "The Bab", and the early part of the life of "Bahá'u'lláh").

Iran cannot be considered a unitary country in the period when the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths first began. The people of the country regarded themselves as Yazdís or Shírázís much more than they regarded themselves as Iranians. Each of the major cities and provinces of Iran was run by a governor who held a very high degree of authority and thus was to a large extent independent of the central authorities. Because of the long distances and poor communications, the central government was only able to exert a limited influence over what went on in the provinces. Iran became a unitary country only under Ridá Shah, the first of the Pahlavis, who took control of the government in 1921 and acceded to the throne in 1925. In this Encyclopedia, therefore, Bábí and Bahá'í history is surveyed in the provinces individually up to 1921 and in Iran as a whole from 1921 onwards. Therefore for the period 1844-1921, see the following articles:

Ádharbayján

Fárs

Gílán

Isfahan

Káshán and Central Provinces (Sultánábád, Mahallát, and Gulpáygán)

Khamsih (Zanján)

Khurásán

Khúzistán

Kirmán and Sístán

Kirmánsháh, Hamadán, Kurdistán, and Luristán

Mázandarán and Gurgán

Qazvín

Tehran (including Qumm, Simnán, and Dámghán)

Yazd

### 13. Events in Iran 1921-79

The beginning of the Pahlavi dynasty saw an outburst of persecutions in Iran.

In 1926 eight

Bahá'ís were killed at Jahrum, three at Zavárih, and other Bahá'ís were harassed and Bahá'í

properties looted in Nayríz and Marághih (BBR 465-73; BW 2:287; PP 98).

Following the accession of Ridá Shah Pahlavi, there was great hope among the Bahá'ís that a new

era of toleration of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran would arise from the anti-clerical and secularizing

stance of the new shah. At first fulfillment of this hope seemed to be in prospect and there was a

general improvement in the conditions for Bahá'ís. The new regime took measures that limited the

influence of the `ulamá over such areas as education and law. Although the Bahá'í Faith was not

recognized, the Bahá'ís were allowed to do a number of things that had not previously been

possible. Large public meetings were held in the 1920s at which government officials were often

present. The Bahá'ís expanded the number of new schools, modern public baths, libraries, and

cemetries owned and run by the community. Steps were taken to increase the role of women in

the community and to find ways of developing the community socially and economically. National

conventions with elected delegates were held from 1927 on, at first electing the Central Spiritual Assembly, and culminating in 1934 with the election of the first National Spiritual Assembly. A national Bahá'í center, the Hazíratu'l-Quds, was begun in about 1930, and progress was made in identifying and purchasing Bahá'í holy places throughout Iran. The free publication or importation of Bahá'í material was, however, never permitted nor was Bahá'í marriage ever officially recognized.

Whatever benefits there may have been to the Bahá'ís from the new regime were abruptly reversed in 1934 when the government moved to close all of the Bahá'í schools throughout the country as well as forbidding Bahá'í meetings and dismissing Bahá'ís from government employment in several places (BW 6:26-31). Bahá'ís were imprisoned for contracting Bahá'í marriages (BW 8:73-5, 185-188) and on such charges as closing their shops and businesses on Bahá'í holy days (BW7:137; 9:97). The tide of attacks swelled during the 1940s with increasing violence used against the Bahá'ís and decreasing efforts on the part of the authorities to quell the trouble-makers. Events culminated in the murder of three Bahá'ís in Sháhrúd by a mob in 1944. This was followed by a period of several months during which Bahá'ís in almost every part of Iran were attacked, many injured and much property looted.

A further serious episode occurred in 1949 when, following the death of a woman and her children in Abarquh, her murderers tried to throw the blame onto the Bahá'ís. A large number of Bahá'ís of Yazd and Isfandábád were arrested, including all of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Yazd. After months in prison awaiting trial, the accused were brought to Tehran. A mockery of a trial ensued; four Bahá'ís were sentenced to ten years imprisonment, while the members of the local spiritual assembly were sentenced to three years.

The Bahá'ís of Iran continued to depend for the propagation of the Faith upon a team of officially-appointed teachers, some of whom were resident and some itinerant (see for example list

BW 8:173, 191-3). Most of the propagation work was done by these individuals and they were the sources of authority in each community at first. Gradually, however, the Bahá'í institutions, the local spiritual assemblies, came to represent the source of authority in each locality and classes were established in many areas to enable a wider range of Bahá'ís to undertake the work of propagation. In 1936 Shoghi Effendi ordered that the paying of salaries to full-time teachers of the Faith should cease.

From the 1930s onwards Shoghi Effendi began to encourage the Bahá'ís of Iran to spread the Bahá'í Faith to the surrounding countries in the Middle East. Sustained efforts were therefore made to settle Bahá'ís in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Arabian peninsula. From 1943 onwards, "pioneers" were also sent to areas within Iran where there were no Bahá'ís. Many of these Bahá'í pioneers were forced by the local authorities to return home but some managed to stay.

On 11 October 1946 a Forty-Five Month Plan was inaugurated by the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran. This Plan called for a large increase in the number of Bahá'í communities in Iran and the dispatch of many pioneers to surrounding countries. The goals of the Plan were allocated to each of the twenty provinces and every individual Bahá'í was encouraged to take responsibility for some aspect of the Plan. The result was that the goals of the Plan were exceeded.

After the initial Forty-Five Month Plan finished in 1950, a Four-Year Plan was inaugurated. One of the major objectives of this plan was the elevation of the status of women and, at the end of this Plan, women were for the first time made eligible to be elected to local and national spiritual assemblies.

During the Ten Year Crusade (q.v.) inaugurated by Shoghi Effendi in 1953, Iran was given a large number of goals, particularly in Asia, to which pioneers had to be sent. With the exception of Mongolia, all of these goals were achieved.

The Iranian Bahá'í community was developed greatly in organization and

complexity (see Table

4). By the 1960s there were some 150 national committees. The Tehran Bahá'í community

became increasingly the focal center of the Iranian Bahá'í community. The national

Hazíratu'l-Quds came to house both the national offices, the Tehran Assembly's offices, as well as

a library, a printing facility, a youth club, and a guest house. In Tehran alone there were by 1960

some 3,000 Bahá'ís serving on various administrative bodies and about the same number involved

in the education of Bahá'í youth and children. The growth and vibrancy of the Tehran Bahá'í

community, however, encouraged many Bahá'ís from the less privileged towns and villages to

migrate to Tehran, thus weakening many of these local communities.

Another goal of the Ten Year Crusade was the building of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Tehran. Plans

were proceeding for this when there was a sudden outburst of persecution in 1955.

Shaykh Muhammad Taqí Falsafí, a Tehran mullá, made a vitriolic attack on the Bahá'ís and their

beliefs in his mosque. These speeches were repeated every day and broadcast on the radio,

inciting the populace to attack the Bahá'ís. On 7 May 1955 the

Hazíratu'l-Quds of Tehran was

closed and persecutions of the Bahá'ís erupted in all parts of the country.

The dome of the

Hazíratu'l-Quds was destroyed and the military authorities occupied the National Bahá'í Office for

use as their own headquarters. Bahá'ís were attacked, young women raped and, in Hurmuzak near

Yazd, seven were killed. Bahá'í cemeteries were desecrated and many Bahá'ís lost their jobs. Bahá'í

houses, shops, and businesses were looted and razed to the ground. It was international pressure

orchestrated by Shoghi Effendi and carried out by the Bahá'í communities throughout the world

that eventually caused the persecution to be brought under control by the Pahlavi government.

Plans for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár had to be abandoned and Shoghi Effendi instructed that, as a

direct reply to the clerical enemies of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran, the

Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs of Kampala,

Sydney, and Frankfurt be built instead.

As result of the international campaign launched in 1955, there was some

amelioration of conditions for the Bahá'ís during the 1960s and early 1970s. No official recognition was given to the Bahá'ís, but on the other hand they were not unduly harrassed by officials either.

This period of relative peace came to an end in 1975 when the shah introduced his single political party, the Rastákhíz Party. When the Bahá'ís, in obedience to their strict rule of not becoming involved in partisan politics, refused to join, they were again subjected to harrassment. A short time later the Iranian Revolution erupted.

#### 14. Recent history, 1979 onwards

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Bahá'ís of Iran have been subjected to intense persecution. Every attempt has been made to eradicate the community. Members of the Tablíghát-i-Islámi (Hujjatiyyih), an organization that had been set up specifically as an anti-Bahá'í society, achieved important positions in the revolutionary government and were given a free hand against the Bahá'ís.

In the early days of the Revolution, the offices of the National Spiritual Assembly were raided and membership lists and other information removed. Based on this information large numbers of the leading Bahá'ís of Iran were arrested and many of them were executed. All property held by Bahá'í institutions was confiscated. As this included Bahá'í cemeteries, great problems were created for Bahá'ís whose family members died. Bahá'í children and youth were expelled from schools and universities; Bahá'í government employees were dismissed and ordered to pay back salaries that they had received while employed; other employers were also put under pressure to dismiss Bahá'ís and to refuse them pay or pensions; Bahá'í businesses were boycotted; many Bahá'ís had their property looted and suffered beatings and harrassment.

The Iranian government claimed that no one was punished on account of religion and that anyone suffering must have committed other offences. Numerous documents exist, however, that demonstrate that these measures were taken solely because the victims were

Bahá'ís and frequently the offer was made in writing to reverse such measures if the person would convert to Islam. The Bahá'í institutions were formally declared illegal in August 1983, whereupon they were disbanded and remain so.

An intense effort was made by the other Bahá'í communities of the world to mitigate these persecutions. Representations were made directly to the Iranian government. When these failed, other national governments and international organizations such as the European Community and the United Nations were approached. These efforts culminated in the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1985 of a resolution on human rights in Iran, in which the Bahá'ís were specifically named, and the appointment of a special representative to monitor the situation.

Since about 1985 the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran has ameliorated to the extent that few executions have occurred and most Bahá'í prisoners have been released. Some unofficial relaxation of some of the other measures taken against the Bahá'ís has also occurred. But overall the Bahá'ís of Iran remain unable to exercise full human rights and the Bahá'í administrative institutions remain disbanded.

#### 15. The contribution of Iranian Bahá'ís

Since Iranians were the majority of the earliest people to enter the religion and the Iranian Bahá'í community was until recent decades overwhelmingly the largest Bahá'í community, it is inevitable that Iranians have played a major role in the development of the religion. Even as recently as 1954, Iranian Bahá'ís constituted 94% of the world Bahá'í population; with the recent growth of the Bahá'í Faith, this proportion has now dropped dramatically to 6-7% (Smith and Momen, "The Bahá'í Faith," 72). Almost all of the leading Bábís as well as Bahá'ís in the time of Bahá'u'lláh were Iranians. During the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, there was considerable worldwide spread of the religion but Iranians remained very important. Twenty-one of the fifty Hands of the

Cause appointed were Iranians.

Although it is more difficult for Iranians than for Europeans and North Americans to obtain visas and residency rights in other countries, the Iranian Bahá'ís have provided a large proportion of the pioneers that have settled in all parts of the world up to the present day. They were particularly important in founding the Bahá'í communities in the Middle East and North Africa and in building up the numbers of Bahá'ís in Europe to allow the institutions of the Bahá'í Faith to be established. Even today, several European Bahá'í communities have appreciable proportions of Iranians (up to 40%).

See also: Individual provinces as listed in section 12 above. Much information can also be found in the biographies of the prominent Iranian Bábís and Bahá'ís in this Encyclopedia, for a partial list of these see "Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh". "Literature.6"; "Poetry.2"; "Opposition and Persecution"

#### Moojan Momen Bibliography

The most detailed examination of the Iranian Bahá'í community is to be found in Fádil Mázandarání, Zuhúr al-Haqq. A number of general histories of the Bahá'í Faith also exist which cover events in Iran. Notable among these are Mírzá Husayn Hamadání, Ta'ríkh-i Jadíd (trans. E. G. Browne); `Abdu'l-Bahá, Traveller's Narrative (trans. E.G. Browne); Ávárih, Kavákibu'd-Durriyyih; and manuscript histories such as Hájí Mu'ínu's-Saltanih's history. See also article V. Rafati "Bahai Faith V. The Bahai Communities of Iran" in EIR 3:454-460. A number of histories of local Bahá'í communities in Iran have been written but exist only in manuscript form. Details of these can be found in the bibliography for the entry of each province.

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A list of the persecutions affecting the Bahá'í community of Iran from 1844 to 1978 appears in

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18:249-336.

#### TABLE ONE: LEADING BÁBÍS AND BAHÁ'ÍS BY PROVINCE (1844-1921)

Ministry  
of the Báb  
Ministry  
of  
Bahá'u'lláh  
Ministry of  
`Abdu'l-Bahá

1844-1853

1853-1892

1893-1921

Tot

%

Tot

%

Tot

%

Khurásán (& Bastám &

Qá'inát)

38

13.5

112

13.6

144

12.7

Mázandarán &

Gurgán/Astarábád

23

8.2

19

2.3

51

4.5

Gílán

0

0

32

3.9

78

6.9

Ádharbáyján

46

16.3

145

17.5

114

10.1

Qazvín &

Khamsih/Zanján

47

16.7

49

5.9

45

4.0

Tehran, Simnán &

Dámghán

21

7.4

113

13.7

204

18.0

Kashán & Central

Provinces (Sultánábád,

Mahallát and Gulpáygán)

27

9.6

89

10.8

83

7.3

Isfahan

24

8.5

82

9.9

75

6.6

Kirmánsháh, Hamadán

Kurdistán, & Luristán

3

1.1

29

3.5

78

6.9

Fárs

39

13.8

37

4.5

70

6.2

Yazd

12

4.3

100

12.1

157

13.9

Kirmán & Sístán

2

0.7

14

1.7

31

2.7

Khúzistán

0

0

4

0.1

1

0.1

Totals

282

825

1131

TABLE TWO: RURAL/URBAN ORIGINS OF LEADING BÁBÍS AND BAHÁ'ÍS OF IRAN  
(1844-1921)

Ministry

of the

Báb

1844-1853

Ministry

of

Bahá'u'lláh

1853-1892

Ministry of

`Abdu'l-Bahá 1893-1921

Tot

%

Tot

%

Tot

%

Large towns

(>22,000)

109

38.6

349

44.1

463

40.9

Medium towns

(7,000-22,000)

67

23.8

140

17.7

239

21.1

Small towns

(2,000-7,000)

37

13.1

67

8.5

82

7.3

Villages (

64

22.7

228

28.8

342

30.2

Tribesmen

5

1.8

8

1.0

5

0.4

Total

282

792

1131

TABLE THREE: LEADING BÁBÍS AND BAHÁ'ÍS OF IRAN BY OCCUPATION (1844-1921)

Ministry

of the Báb

1844-1853

Ministry of

Bahá'u'lláh

1853-1892

Ministry

of

`Abdu'l-Bahá

1893-1921

No

%

No

%

No

%

1a - Major `ulama

18

7.2  
23  
3.7  
16  
2.2

1b - Minor `ulama

120  
47.8  
133  
21.5  
113  
15.7

1c - Sufi darvishes

2  
0.8  
16  
2.5  
13  
1.8

2a - Nobility and high  
government officials

23  
9.2  
64  
5.8  
106  
14.7

2b - Minor government  
officials

7  
2.8  
33  
5.3  
34  
4.7

3 - Wholesale  
merchants (tujjar)

34  
13.6  
115  
18.6  
145  
20.1

4 - Retail merchants

9

3.6

48

7.8

55

7.6

5 - Skilled urban

workers

20

8.0

145

23.5

110

15.3

6 - Unskilled urban

workers

0

0

18

2.6

0

0

7 - Peasant and rural

workers

13

5.2

13

2.1

16

2.2

8 - Tribal peoples

5

2.0

9

1.5

13

1.8

9 - Modern professional

0

0

0

0

89

12.4

10 - Full-time Bahá'í

teachers

0

0

0

0

10

1.4

TOTAL

251

618

720

Notes on the above tables: The source for the leading Bahá'ís of each period has been the respective volumes of Fadil Mázandarání, Zuhúr al-Haqq. Provinces are delineated according to the traditional 19th century pattern; see Persia, Geographical Handbook Series B.R. 525, Naval Intelligence Division, British Government, 1945, p. 8 and end map. For the purposes of these tables, Kashan has been put together with Mahallát, Sultánábád, and Gulpaygán; Kirmánsháh and Hamadan includes Burújird, Maláyir, Luristán, and Ardilán. Tehran province extends as far south as Qumm and includes Simnán and Dámghán. The list of towns given by Thompson in Parliamentary Papers, vol. 69 for 1867-68. pp. 507-15 (reprinted in C. Issawi, Economic History of Iran, London, 1971, p. 28) has been used for the large and medium-sized towns. Additional information has been gathered, particularly with respect to small towns and villages, from Gazetteer of Persia published by the General Staff of British India, 1914.

Occupations

1a - Major `ulamá: mujtahids, Imám-Jum`ihs and any `ulamá who are stated to have had religious leadership in a given area or held a honorific title such as Amínu'l-`Ulamá

1a - Minor `ulamá: those with the prefix of mullá before their name but with no indication that they were of any particular prominence; religious students (tulláb); rawdih-kháns;

1c - Sufi darvishes

- 2a - Nobility, members of the royal court, Qájár princes, governors, high government officials and military commanders of rank of sartíp and above; major land-owners and factory-owners (sáhib-kár)
- 2b - Minor government officials; secretaries, couriers, and soldiers
- 3 - Wholesale merchants (tujjár) and financiers (sarráf)
- 4 - Retail merchants: usually guilded: shop-keepers, petty commodity producers, and agents for tujjár.
- 5 - Skilled urban workers: Guilded craftsmen (asnáf) usually ustád (master craftsman), and traditional service workers (eg tabíb, doctor)
- 6 - Unskilled urban workers: laborers and those in apprenticeship to an ustád
- 7 - Peasant and rural workers
- 8 - Tribal peoples
- 9 - Modern professionals: doctors, dentists and teachers (if trained in modern as distinct from traditional methods)
- 10 - Bahá'í teachers: full-time muballighs

TABLE FOUR: GROWTH OF BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS

1928

1936

1946

1954

1963

Loc

Loc

LSAs

Loc

LSAs

Loc

LSAs

Locs

Khurásán (&

Bastám & Qá'inát)

96

114

26

88

26  
66  
44  
116

Mázandarán &  
Gurgan/Astarábád

21  
26  
24  
46  
28  
36  
62  
118

Gílán

8  
12  
9  
29  
12  
25  
25  
65

Ádharbáyján

33  
56  
39  
64  
36  
71  
54  
112

Qazvín &  
Khamsih/Zanján

13  
14  
9  
23  
9  
16  
9  
17

Tehran, Simnán &  
Dámghán

22  
45  
29  
100  
42  
105  
99  
248

Káshán & Central  
Provinces  
(Sultánábád/Arák,  
Mahallát, &  
Gulpáygán)

23  
27  
20  
41  
16  
39  
19  
51

Isfahan

14  
60  
30  
72  
25  
63  
42  
108

Kirmansháh,  
Hamadán  
Kurdistán &  
Luristán

26  
37  
23  
57  
18  
32  
26  
79

Fárs

20  
55

35  
60  
40  
78  
59  
171

Yazd

45  
62  
27  
48  
22  
35  
30  
71

Kirmán & Sistán

19  
29  
14  
48  
16  
33  
23  
55

Khúzistán

6  
23  
6  
18  
17  
30  
29  
60

Totals

346  
560  
291  
694  
307  
629  
521  
1271

Key: Loc = Localities where Bahá'ís reside; LSAs = Local Spiritual Assemblies  
Sources: BW 2:187-90; 6:521-4; 10:574-8; 12:744-53; 13:1019-1020

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