



intensified missionary activities of individual believers who attracted people to their cause. The conversion of a nobleman, a landlord, or a learned cleric provided an element of encouragement for large-scale conversion in some localities, while a sympathetic attitude on the part of some officials and religious authorities helped the rapid expansion of the community. A distinguishing feature of the early Babi communities was their eagerness to hold dawn prayers, listen to sermons, and attend study groups to read and discuss the writings of the faith. Meetings with non-believers to discuss religious matters, aimed at attracting them to the faith, and meetings with traveling teachers or passing believers were the most common social activities of the early communities. The strongest Babi communities in the rural areas, in terms of population and stability, were formed in Sangsar near Semnan, Najafabad near Isfahan, and Saysan near Tabriz; however, numerous towns and cities also had large communities. The social life of the early communities was characterized by continuous interaction with the non-Babi populace, which was naturally hostile to the emergence of a new religion. The result, almost everywhere in the entire country, was social and religious conflict; persecution, restriction, banishment, and execution of the Babis.

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The emergence of Baha'-Allah as a religious leader of the Babi community and the proclamation of his claim to be the fulfillment of the Bab's prophecies of the advent of man yozheroh Allah (he whom God will make manifest) attracted the vast majority of the Babis to his call. Some, however, remained Babis, and some followed Sobh-e Azal, half-brother of Baha'-Allah, who claimed the leadership of the Babi community. Through his writings to the individual leading Babis and by sending his devoted followers to various communities, Baha'-Allah gradually increased the number of his followers, who became known as Bahais. During his ministry (1853-92), the Bahai communities grew in size and number, and performance of the duties prescribed in his writings became an essential mark of membership in the community. Communal activities, such as attending the Holy Day meetings, prayer sessions, sermons, and other religious activities increased.

Towards the end of Baha'-Allah's stay in Adrianople (1863-68), a number of religious, theological and social principles were expounded in his writings which found progressive development in the private and collective life of the Bahais. At his passing (1892), he left approximately 50,000 believers scattered in Iran and other Middle Eastern countries (?Abd-al-Baha?, *Majmu'a-ye makatib*, Tehran, 1975, no. 13, photocopied ms., p. 3).

During the ministries of ?Abd-al-Baha? (1892-1921), Baha'-Allah's son and successor, and Shoghi Effendi (1921-57), ?Abd-al-Baha?'s grandson and Guardian of the Faith, the local Bahai communities developed substantially, Bahai laws and ordinances were put into action, Bahai administrative institutions, particularly from the early 1930s, were slowly and steadily established. The institution of the Nineteen Day Feast (Ziafat-e

Nuzdah-ruza), prescribed in the Aqdas, came into full function as a vital pillar in the socio-religious life of the communities, and in various aspects of the faith several other developments, which deserve closer study, took place.

Bahai administration. From the early days of the faith to the closing years of the nineteenth century (1844-97), the religious and social affairs of the communities were conducted through the non-institutionalized consultation and arbitration of the leading Bahais in each locality. The Hands of the Cause of God (Ayadi-e Amr Allah, appointed by Baha'-Allah (?Ala'i, pp. 369-493), were charged with the responsibility of organizing teaching campaigns, protecting the faith and, to a lesser extent, being involved in all the major developments of the communities. At the instructions of 'Abd-al-Baha', they began forming local Bahai councils (Mahfel-e šawr) in Azerbaijan, which gradually extended into other provinces. In 1314/1897, the Council of Tehran was formed and six years later, in 1320/1903, it was officially constituted of four Hands and five others who were chosen by the Hands to serve on it. This was the first local Spiritual Assembly of Tehran which prepared its constitution and held weekly meetings to conduct the affairs of the community (Mazandarani, Zohur al-Haqq, ms., Bahá'í Archives, Haifa, MD16-3, vol. 7, pp. 153-54).

Following the pattern set in Tehran, local Spiritual Assemblies were gradually formed in other parts of Iran until the 1920s when the principles of Bahai election were slowly adopted in the formation of the Spiritual Assemblies and their legal and administrative roles and rights in conducting the affairs of the communities were established and recognized by believers. Statistical reports for Iran show a significant growth since 1950 in the number of Spiritual Assemblies and localities where Bahais resided; while in that year the number of local Spiritual Assemblies was 280, and that of localities 712, in 1968 the number of Spiritual Assemblies reached 560 and of localities 1,541. In 1979, 679 Spiritual Assemblies and 1,699 localities were reported (Department of Statistics, Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, Statistical Reports).

At the first national convention of the Bahais of Iran, held in Tehran over a period of eight days beginning on April 26, 1934, the first national Spiritual Assembly (mahfel-e ruhani-e melli) of the Bahais of Iran, a milestone in the history of the Bahai community, with its seat in Tehran, was elected (The Bahá'í World 6, pp. 22-23). The social and religious affairs of the national community of the Bahais of Iran, which, prior to 1934 had been directed by the former Central Assembly of Tehran, were transferred to the new body. Following the formation of the national Spiritual Assembly, the by-laws of the national Spiritual Assembly of the United States were translated into Persian and adopted with modifications by the Persian national Spiritual Assembly. Also national committees were appointed to help the national Spiritual Assembly with specific tasks (The Bahá'í World 6, p. 94). The establishment of the Bahai Administrative Order in Iran called for adherence to discipline, and soon it was found that sanctions had to be applied suited to

the offense, from conscious and flagrant disregard of fundamental Bahai precepts and laws to disobedience to the head of the faith.

The first National Plan for the expansion and consolidation of the faith in Iran and adjoining lands came into effect on October 11, 1946 and lasted for 45 months ending on July 9, 1950. The objectives of the plan included the consolidation of all local Bahai communities; the re-establishment of 62 dissolved Spiritual Assemblies; the formation of 22 new groups and the creation of 13 new centers (The Bahá'í World 4, pp. 34-35). Following the first plan, the Persian Bahai community was assigned certain goals and objectives in the Ten Year Crusade (1953-63), the Nine Year Plan (1964-73), the Five Year Plan (1974-79), and the Seven Year Plan (1979-86). The detailed goals and achievements of the community are found in the volumes of Akbar-e amri for the respective periods.

Bahai women. In the early years of the 1930s Bahai women joined the movement of discarding the veil and gradually abandoned the traditional veiling practice. This development opened new fields of service for women and made possible their fuller participation in the social and administrative activities of the communities. A central women's progress committee was formed in 1944 to organize women's activities throughout the country. Some of the fundamental tasks accomplished by this committee and its supportive bodies in various localities included holding the first convention of Anjoman-e Tarraqi-e Neswan (Society for the Advancement of women) in 1947 in Tehran (The Bahá'í World 11, p. 563), following which local and regional conferences, educational gatherings, and regular classes for illiterate women were conducted. As a result of continued effort and educational training, particularly during the Four Year Plan for the Bahai Persian women (1946-50) (The Bahá'í World 12, p. 65), they were enabled to acquire sufficient self-confidence and social recognition to fill elective and appointive offices in the community. Bahai women were elected to membership of the Spiritual Assemblies for the first time in 1954 (Ahang-e Badi? 10/2-3, 1334 Š./1955). By April 1973, illiteracy among Bahai women under the age of 40 was eradicated throughout the country (The Bahá'í World 15, p. 248). In recent years, prior to 1979, the Bahai women of Iran were participating in various fields of Bahai activities. Since 1979 scores of them who played effective roles in both rural and urban Bahai communities were imprisoned and more than twenty have been executed.

Bahai youth. Bahai youth of Iran, too, have played a role in the secular and spiritual destiny of the community throughout its history, but organized activities of youth date back to the establishment of a youth group in Tehran in 1929 which was soon followed by the formation of other youth groups in all the major Bahai centers in the country. In 1949-50, a total of 207 Bahai youth committees (lajna-ye javanan) existed in Iran to organize youth activities which included holding regular classes and conferences to deepen young people's knowledge of the faith; establishing and operating libraries and clubs; conducting literacy classes; teaching in children's education classes; holding exhibitions of fine arts and crafts; and spreading the message of the

faith to non-Bahais. Starting from year 103 Badi<sup>2</sup>/1946, national Bahai youth conventions (kanvenšān-e melli-e javanan) were held in Iran to plan, activate, and coordinate youth activities. A report shows that within a few years between the late 1960s and early 1970s more than 1500 Bahai youth pioneered to home-front goals and more than 100 pioneers settled in foreign goal areas (The Bahá'í World 15, p. 249). The number and efficiency of the local youth committees were increased in the years immediately prior to the 1979 revolution. They were guided and supervised by the National Youth Committee (Lajna-ye Melli-e Javanan) based in Tehran.

Education. An achievement in which dozens of Bahai communities invested their financial and intellectual efforts was the establishment of Bahai schools in tens of cities, towns, and villages to educate Bahai and non-Bahai children. They were closed by order of the government in 1934 (The Bahá'í World 6, pp. 26-30).

An educational, devotional, and recreational institution which originated in America in 1927 and was established in Iran in the summer of 1939 was the Bahai Summer School. The first Persian Summer School, held in Hajiabad, some 40 kilometers northeast of Tehran, consisted of three sessions of ten days in which a total number of 214 Bahais participated (The Bahá'í World 8, p. 78). As circumstances permitted, summer schools were held for many years in various localities in Tehran and other provinces. The permanent seat of the summer schools, run under the aegis of the national Spiritual Assembly, was in Hadiqa, an estate on the slopes of Mount Alborz to the northeast of the capital (see below), which attracted several hundred participants each summer.

Since 1315/1898 Bahai "Character Training Classes" (Kelasha-ye dars-e aklaq) have been conducted in Tehran and other Bahai centers. In recent years a good deal of attention and expertise has been given to the advancement of Bahai child education and a considerable amount of children's literature has been produced in Iran.

Publications. Since the establishment of the Bahai faith in Iran thousands of believers have received letters from its central figures: the Bab, Baha<sup>2</sup>-Allah, and 'Abd-al-Baha<sup>2</sup>. These letters (makatib, alwah), which are scattered among the families of the recipients, form a substantial portion of the Bahai sacred texts, and their collection, preservation, and transcription have always ranked high in the list of responsibilities of local and national Spiritual Assemblies in Iran; thus far, more than thirty volumes of these letters have been published.

One of the achievements of the community was the establishment of the Bahai Publishing Trust in 1959 (The Bahá'í World 12, p. 292). Since 1316/1899, Bahai sacred texts have been hectographed and mimeographed by Mirza 'Ali-Akbar Ruhani (known as Mohebb-al-Soltan) (Mazandarani, 1974, p. 483) and others. Although the restrictive laws of the country prohibited the Bahais from printing their literature by letterpress, through the establishment of the trust, Bahai literature was regularly and

systematically published in typewritten or calligraphic form until 1979 when the trust was closed under the Islamic régime. Between 1959 and 1979, several hundred titles were produced and distributed. The trust was also responsible for the publication of circulars, newsletters, pamphlets, and magazines. In 1975 alone, it produced 181,390 copies of books and pamphlets totaling 31 million pages (The Bahá'í World 16, p. 263). In the early 1970s an audiovisual center was established in Iran which made rapid growth during the few years of its existence. A report shows that in the mid-1970s the center produced 27 cassette programs containing prayers, songs, and speeches amounting to 40,000 copies, and 28 reels of film (ibid.). The Persian Bahai community also published several periodicals. One of the most popular, aiming at the educational and intellectual training of Bahai youth, the *Ahang-e badi'*, was established in Iran in 102 Badi'/1945 as a publication of the Tehran Bahai Youth Committee and then became a national magazine which gained the support of 1,200 subscribers in the early 1950s (The Bahá'í World 12, p. 570). Suspended for five years (112-117 B./1955-60) due to intensified restrictions by the government, *Ahang-e badi'* was published for more than three decades until it was stopped by the onset of the Islamic régime.

Beginning in 1300 Š./1921 the Bahai community published a magazine called *Akbar-e amri*. Containing the holy writings of the Bahai faith, domestic and foreign Bahai news, official announcements of Bahai administrative bodies, and articles on various aspects of the faith, the magazine became a vital means of communication and a register of the main historical events for six decades until its closing in 1980. Starting in 105 B./1948, the Bahai women of Iran published a monthly magazine, called *Tarana-ye omid*, to educate and entertain Bahai families, with special attention to women's affairs. After some years of suspension, it reappeared in 130 B./1973 to function for several more years until 1979 (*Akbar-e amri* 52/11, September, 1973, pp. 332-34).

The year 124 B./1967 witnessed the publication of a magazine for the Bahai children of Iran. Named *Varqa*, the magazine was regularly published each month until 1979 and was supported by subscribers all over the country and abroad. This magazine played a significant role in the educational and intellectual life of Persian Bahai children for more than a decade. After the 1979 revolution, the magazine has continued to be published in India. To these major national periodicals, *Našriya*, a news bulletin of the local Spiritual Assembly of Tehran, should be added. Distributed free of charge to each Bahai family in Tehran every 19 days, *Našriya* functioned for a dozen years and kept its readers informed of the major news and developments in the Bahai community of Tehran.

Endowments and properties. The acquisition, preservation, and maintenance of the places directly associated with the history of the Bahai faith have been among the goals of the community since its early years. The places consisted of houses and sites associated with the principal figures of the faith, burial places of Bahai saints, places where the martyrdoms of believers took place, prisons, fortresses, and defense centers of heroes and renowned Bahais. The

fact that these places were located throughout the country made their care a major undertaking for various committees at local and national levels. The work included the registration, description, and photographing of the sites in addition to their regular maintenance and restoration. In the late 1960s more than 124 holy places belonged to the faith in various localities throughout the country. To this should be added more than 200 national and 452 local endowments consisting of Bahai centers, cemeteries, hostels, and public baths (Department of Statistics, Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, "Persia - Nine Year Plan File," 14 January 1969).

To fulfill a commandment of Bahá'í-Allah to build a House of Worship (Mašreq al-Adkar) the Bahais of Iran acquired 3.58 square kilometers (The Bahá'í World 10, p. 48) of land on the slopes of Mount Alborz, named Hadiqa, in northeast Tehran, for the eventual construction of their first temple. Although the temple has yet to be built, a complex of buildings was erected there to serve as the seat of Bahai summer schools and other social and administrative activities.

Cemeteries. Since the Bahais have always been prohibited from burying their dead in Muslim cemeteries, the acquisition of burial grounds, termed Golestan-e Javid (Eternal garden) in the Persian literature of the faith, has been a major goal of the Bahai communities throughout the country. From the earliest days, Bahai dead have been buried in their own private properties, in plots of land donated by individual Bahais to the community as local endowments, or, where possible, in the community-owned cemeteries obtained by collective financial contributions of individual Bahais. A systematic process of acquiring separate Bahai cemeteries, however, was inaugurated in most Bahai communities in the 1920s and continued in later decades. Prior to the 1979 revolution, most of the principal Bahai centers had their own cemeteries run under the supervision of the local Spiritual Assembly. After the revolution most of them have been destroyed and desecrated.

Economic and social institutions. Through the donations of individual Bahais, the first Bahai fund (Šerkat-e kayriya) was established in Tehran in 1907 to financially support Bahai teachers, facilitate the education of Bahai children, provide sufficient care of Bahai orphans, the aged and handicapped, and be of assistance to students of higher education (Mazandarani, VII, p. 259). In 1917 a Children's Savings Company, which later was registered as Šerkat-e Now-nahalan, was founded in Qazvin. On 23 November 1919 'Abd-al-Bahá' wrote a prayer in which he sought God's blessing for its success and durability (Mazandarani, op. cit., p. 322). He also donated two gold coins of five rubles each to its capital. The company had about 9,000 shareholders with approximately 120 million rials (about \$1,700,000) in assets in 1967, half a century after its establishment (Yadgar-e jašn-e panjahomin sal-e ta'sis-e šerkat-e sahami-e now-nahalan, Tehran, 1967, pp. 1-2).

In 1940 'Abd-al-Mitaq Mitaqiya, a well-known Bahai of Tehran, built a hospital and donated it to the Bahai community. The hospital rapidly developed

to employ highly respected physicians, and to obtain advanced equipment. It became known as one of the best medical centers in Tehran. In the early 1970s a nursing school, affiliated with the hospital, was inaugurated and the hospital itself opened medical clinics in Boir Ahmad (The Bahá'í World 16, p. 264). In 1940 an institution for Bahai orphans was founded (The Bahá'í World 9, p. 251) which served the community for many years. On a more general level, an achievement of the Bahai communities in Iran was the establishment of modern public baths in most of the major populated towns and villages throughout the country to replace the unhygienic traditional baths. Some of the baths were built and donated to the community by individual Bahais and some were established through the collective financial participation of the members of the community.

Outstanding figures. Among the outstanding individuals in the first century of the faith was Abu'l-Fazl Golpayegani, who accepted the Bahai faith in 1293/1876 and became a distinguished believer, particularly active in the propagation of its principles. He spent several years in prison due to his Bahai activities, then traveled extensively before settling in Egypt, where he died in 1914. Among his works are *Borhan-e lame'*, translated and published as *The Brilliant Proof* (1912), *al-Hojaj al-bahiya*, translated and published as *Miracles and Metaphors* (1981). A selection of his shorter works, entitled *Letters and Essays* (1985), is also available in English. His other works such as *al-Fara'ed*, *Šarh-e Ayat-e Mowarraka*, *Kašf al-geta'*, and a few collections of his shorter works exist in Arabic and Persian.

Mirza Hasan Talaqani, son of Mirza Mohammad-Taqi, known as Adib al-'Olama' and Adib-e Ayadi, was born in Šawwal 1264 (September 1848) in Karkabud near Talaqan. He received his elementary education in that city and traveled to Tehran and Isfahan for further education. The depth and range of his knowledge in Islamic studies, history, and Arabic and Persian literature gained him enough scholarly prestige to be invited to work as one of the co-writers of the *Nama-ye danešvaran*, a voluminous biographical work initiated under 'Aliqoli Mirza E'tezad-al-Saltana. He also participated in the preparation of the *Qamqam-e Zakkar* written by Mo'tamed-al-Dawla Farhad Mirza during 1303-05 (1886-88). Adib was distinguished as a writer, poet, and educator. He passed away on 6 Du'l-qa'da 1337 (4 August 1919) in Tehran.

An outstanding historian of the Bahai faith, Asad-Allah Fazel Mazandarani (d. 1957), is the author of a nine-volume work covering the history of the first Bahai century (1844-1944). The work, volumes three and eight of which have so far been published (in 1943 and 1974-75), records the full biographies of the Bab, Baha'-Allah, and 'Abd-al-Baha', the faith's leading disciples and learned members, poets, martyrs, and other prominent personalities. It covers the history of the persecutions of the Bahais; discusses the internal crises of the faith and, more significantly, contains excerpts from the holy writings and includes documentation and a considerable number of pictures. Other works of Fazel include his dictionary of commonly

used proper terms and titles in Bahai literature, Asrar al-atar, which was published in five volumes (1967-72) of more than 1,600 pages. Fazel's other major work, Amr wa kalq, contains hundreds of selections from the Bahai holy writings grouped under topics related to philosophical, theological, religious, and administrative matters. The work was published in Iran (1954-74) in four volumes. Among the other outstanding figures of the Bahai faith, was 'Aziz-Allah Mesbah (d. 1945), a well-educated writer and poet who served the community as an educator in the Tarbiat school for a quarter of a century, taught in Bahai classes and summer schools, and left poetry and other works. The remarkable achievement of 'Abd-al-Hamid Ešraq Kavari (d. 1972) in writing and compiling more than 40 books and dozens of articles in every major field of Bahai studies also deserves to be mentioned.

Persian Bahais in international Bahai fields. The Persian Bahai community, as the oldest and wealthiest Bahai community in the world, both culturally and materially, has played a vital role in almost every major accomplishment of the Bahai world community. The earliest Bahai communities in the Middle East, and southern Russia were without exception formed through the pioneering activities of the Persian Bahais. In later periods they traveled and settled in different parts of the world to propagate the faith (The Bahá'í World 13, pp. 291-92). During the Ten Year World Crusade (1953-63) and subsequent global activities, the Persian community contributed substantial manpower and financial support. During 1968-73 alone, as a partial goal of the international Nine Year Plan (1964-73), 3,500 Persian Bahais were relocated in goal areas, both domestic and international, and some five thousand individuals, often using their own resources, served as missionaries abroad (The Bahá'í World 15, p. 247).

When in 1951-53 and again in 1957, Shoghi Effendi proclaimed the appointment of thirty-one Bahais as Hands of the Cause of God, eleven were Persians. In the first election of the Bayt al-'Adl-e A'zam (the Universal House of Justice, April, 1963) three out of nine were Persians. At the present time, twenty-one Persians (out of 72) are members of the continental boards of counselors, supreme bodies responsible for the expansion and protection of the faith (Bahá'í News, no. 657, December, 1985, p. 1), and more than 250 Persians serve as members of 148 national Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world (Department of Statistics, Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, "Annual Election Reports," April, 1986).

Internal crises and external persecutions. It would be impossible to study the Bahai community without taking into consideration the internal crises and external persecutions that have affected the entire Bahai community throughout its history; personal desire to achieve leadership appears to have been the prime source of internal crises, particularly in the periods of transition of authority. The sanctions which are imposed on offenders range from warnings to deprivation of one's right of voting in Bahai elections, and to excommunication in the severest case, which is termed covenant-breaking (naqz-e 'ahd). The authority for punishment, expulsion, and reinstatement is vested in the Center of the Faith (markaz-e mitaq) and its institutions.

Although the internal crises have not caused sectarianism in the community, they have been sufficiently powerful to mobilize the unifying forces of the faith to counter them. The negative effects of the crises, however, are negligible when compared with the destructive consequences of external persecutions.

The history of the Bahai faith in Iran during the past fifteen decades has been one of joy resulting from the faith's progress, and of bitter suffering, resulting from successive waves of persecution. Since its inception, the Bahai community of Iran has longed to spread the message of the faith, to enforce the laws and ordinances prescribed in its holy writings, to establish its religious and administrative institutions, and to function as a free community, loyal to the laws and constitution of the land, whose government would recognize the faith's fundamental right of existence. Against these aspirations, the secular and religious forces of the country not only stood firm, denying its right as a religious community, restricting its basic freedoms, and belittling its teachings and doctrines, but also rose to uproot its very being from the land of its birth. The persecution of the Bahai faith which dates back to the confinement of the Bab and his early followers in Shiraz, has continued uninterruptedly to the present time. Although in the history of the persecution, there are short intervals of relative ease in the general condition of the community, it is, nonetheless, impossible to cite a single year in which one sort of persecution or another did not take place (See bahai faith, vii).

The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 put an end to the organized, systematic activities of the Bahai faith in that country. By order of the new government all Bahai holy places, endowments, and properties were confiscated; Bahai institutions at the national and local levels ceased to function; thousands of Bahais, virtually in each major town and city, were arrested, tortured, and imprisoned, and more than 180 of them were executed. This number does not include dozens of Bahais who have been kidnapped or have disappeared without a trace. Since 1979 thousands of Bahais have been driven from their homeland by these unrelenting persecutions. A good number of them, still homeless, are classified as "refugees" in various countries around the world.

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