

Khorasan.

One of the possible reasons for the success of the Babi movement (see BABISM i.) in Khorasan was its heterodox background with notable Ismaʿili (see ISMAʿILISM), Shaikhi and Sunni converts, and places where the influence of theologians (ʿolamaʿ) and osuli jurists (mojtaheds) was reduced, and anti-Babi incitement often ignored. Non-Bahai sources report a wider heterodoxy. In 1844, the Jewish Christian missionary, Joseph Wolff (1795-1862), on his way to Bukhara, noticed that many people in Mashhad requested copies of the Bible, and he was invited to an open discussion with a local cleric (A. Amanat, pp. 275-76). Travelogues of Khorasan in the mid-1870s describe non-adherence to strict Islamic laws and non-observance of the traditional fasting rules in Tabas and Bošruya (Eʿtesam-al-Molk, p. 266).

Women played a significant role in the early Babi communities. Molla Mohammad-Hosayn Bošruʿi's sister, Bibi Kucak, held meetings for both sexes in Mashhad, which led to conversions (Arbab, p. 49). His mother and sisters, and Qaʿeni's wife and female relatives, were reportedly knowledgeable in Islamic studies (Foʿadi Bošruʿi, pp. 346-48).

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During the early period of Babism, six of the first eighteen individuals who accepted the Bab's claim and were given the honorific title of Horuf-al-Hayy ("Letters of the Living") were from Khorasan. In addition, a group of Babis in 1848 began a march to Mazandaran from Khorasan, carrying the Black Standard foretold in Islamic traditions (Dabihi-Moqaddam, pp. 39-41). In Hesar and Nameq, after hearing Molla Hosayn's address in the mosque, all the students of Mojtahed Molla Ahmad joined the movement, and in Bošruya about forty people did so. Overall, around a third of those on the march and those killed in the subsequent battle at the shrine of Shaikh Abu ʿAli Fazl Tabarsi were from Khorasan. Some Babis escaped death, including Mirza Mohammad Forugi and Molla Sadeq Moqaddas, whose accounts of the battle at the shrine of Shaikh Tabarsi were included in Nabil-e Aʿzam Zarandi's (q.v.) early chronicle of Babi history. In Mashhad, in particular, and in Bošruya, Babis were persecuted (Baraqi, pp. 192-93). Persecutions intensified following the Bab's execution in 1850 and an unsuccessful attempt on Naser-al-Din Shah's life in 1852 by a very small Babi group.

After the execution of the Bab, the Babis continued their propagation activities when restrictions were lifted. In 1858, Aqa Mohammad Qaʿeni Nabil-e Akbar (q.v.) arrived in Khorasan and succeeded in converting some 150 people in Qaʿenat, some of whom proselytized further (Ayati, pp. 281-82). In Tun (present-day Ferdows, q.v.), a city located south of Mashhad, the descendants of the Sufi master Šah Neʿmat-Allah Wali converted, and the town subsequently became a center for Bahai activities (Foʿadi Bošruʿi, pp.

302-6; Momen, 2015, pp. 206-7). Šoja-al-Dawla, governor of Qucan, and some Sabzavar cavalries and theologians in Nishapur and Sabzavar, also converted to Babism. Mirza Mohammad-Reza Moʻtamen-al-Saltana also converted and rose in local government to become minister of finance and vizier of Khorasan during Naser-al-Din Shah's reign (Foʻadi Bošruʻi, p. 95; Balyuzi, pp. 52-54). This widespread network of support led to a relative tolerance toward Babism in this period (Foʻadi Bošruʻi, pp. 93-94).

In 1866-67, Molla Mohammad Nabil-e Aʻzam Zarandi informed the Babi community of the claim of Bahaʻ-Allah (q.v.), and the vast majority converted to Baháism (q.v.). The foundations were laid by prominent Babism such as Moqaddas and Nabil-e Akbar and by Babism visiting Bahaʻ-Allah in Baghdad. No records of Azali Babism (q.v.) communities in Khorasan exist.

During this period, persecution from regional governors started, including from Hešmat-al-Molk Amir ʻAlam Kan ʻAlam of Qaʻenat, who extorted large amounts of money and land from Baháis (Foʻadi Bošruʻi, p. 372-82). The first Baháí martyr in Khorasan was Haji ʻAbd-al-Majid Nišaburi (Aba Badiʻ) in 1877. His death sentence was instigated by Shaikh Baqer Mojtahed from Isfahan, despite resistance from the governor of Mashhad, Rokn-al-Dawla, the brother of the king, and other officials (Foʻadi Bošruʻi, p. 156; Ešraq Kavari, pp. 687-99).

The Baháí community of Khorasan expanded during Bahaʻ-Allah's lifetime. Prince Haji Šayk-al-Raʻis, grandson of Fath-ʻAli Shah Qajar (q.v., r. 1797-1834), and a prominent figure in the reform movement of Iran, whose mother was a convert, promoted the Baháí movement openly (Foʻadi Bošruʻi, p. 145; Momen, 2015, pp. 128-31).

A notable female Baháí was Ruhaniya Bošruʻi, whose apologetic essays (Resala) impressed some theologians (Foʻadi Bošruʻi, pp. 350-52). Mirza Kanlar Kan Eʻtesam-al-Molk (first secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) records that, in his journey to Khorasan, he travelled to Bošruya to meet with her and noted her erudition around 1876-78 (pp. 252-56). From 1880, in Mashhad and Torbat-e Haydariya, Iranian Jews converted to the Baháí Faith and, by the 1890s, there were sixty such converts in Mashhad (M. Amanat, p. 12).

Under the leadership of ʻAbd-al-Bahaʻ (q.v.), there was some dissension in the community of Kuf, in southern Khorasan, due to the influence of his brother Mirza Mohammad-ʻAli, which was unsuccessful (Foʻadi Bošruʻi, pp. 79-80). Bursts of heavy persecution ensued, especially after the assassination of Naser-al-Din Shah in 1896, as people suspected Baháis (based on the previous Babi attempt). In Torbat-e Haydariya, five innocent Baháis were imprisoned and killed by a mob on their release. This shocked foreign officials, who were concerned that steps were not taken to identify and punish the perpetrators (Momen, 1981, pp. 405-17). In Nameq and Hesar, Baháis were attacked, imprisoned, and some killed, including women, children, and the elderly. Local clergy mostly instigated this and continued to do so until the end of the Qajar period (Foʻadi Bošruʻi, pp. 261-62).

The response to this persecution changed from quiet acceptance to lobbying for protection after the murder of Haji Mohammad Tork (also known as Tabrizi)

in 1898. He was dragged from his house, tortured, and burned to death on the main street of Mashhad. The British minister in Tehran at the time, Charles Hardinge (q.v.), wrote to the prime minister Mirza ?Ali Khan Amin-al-Dawla (q.v.), questioning him about this public act and the lenient punishment of the murderers (Momen, 1981, pp. 406-17). In Bošruya, Bahais were heavily persecuted, and the house of Molla Mohammad-Hosayn Bošru?i was destroyed. In 1915, when Shaikh ?Ali-Akbar Qucani was killed and the nineteen-year-old Mašiyat-Allah tortured to death, local Bahais sent a formal protest to Ahmad Shah Qajar (q.v., r. 1909-25), the Majles, government ministers, and the local governors (Fo?adi Bošru?i, pp. 159-65). The continued persecution led to an exodus to Ashkabad and surrounding Russian-held territories from 1900 to the 1920s (Fo?adi Bošru?i, p. 355).

After realizing that the government was reluctant to persecute Bahais, the clergy used indirect methods. They instigated a campaign of labeling Bahais as enemies of Islam, and accused them of political crimes and espionage, particularly during the Constitutional Revolution (q.v.). Later confiscation of properties and assets of Babis on spurious grounds was common (Fo?adi Bošru?i, pp. 137-38).

Baha?-Allah allowed Bahai institutions to be established in Khorasan before other provinces in Iran. The first administrative body, Mahfel-e Ruhani (q.v.), “Spiritual Assembly” of Khorasan was elected in Mashhad in 1905. It met five nights a week and regularly communicated with local Bahais. These meetings were first held in Babiya until a permanent Bahai center was purchased in Sar Ab. In 1907, Percy Sykes (q.v.) reported that there were 200 Bahais in Mashhad (Momen, 1981, p. 418). By 1927, there were 30 local assemblies and 65 localities registered.

The Bahais of Khorasan made some notable contributions to the wider society. Many schools were established. In Mashhad, Mohammad-?Ali Toršizi, known as “Modir,” set up the first modern-style educational institution with 100 students in 1913. However, it was forced to close in 1914 when students were attacked by members of a neighboring theological college. Toršizi opened another school the following year called Hemmat, with student numbers reaching 400. It led to other schools opening in Torbat-e Haydariya, Toršiz, Darragaz (q.v.), Qucan and Marv. Despite having Bahai teachers, some of these were not formally Bahai schools but rather were based on a modern curriculum (Fo?adi Bošru?i, pp. 140-41). Toward the end of Mozaffar-al-Din Shah’s reign, Toršizi and two others purchased a printing press and from 1906-9 published two newspapers, Bešarat (q.v.) and Tus in Mashhad (Fo?adi Bošru?i, p. 141). In 1925, one of the leading Bahais of Mashhad, Mirza ?Ali Khan Golkani brought out a Sal-nama-ye Baha?ian dar Korasan (“Yearbook of the Bahais of Khorasan”). It continued for three years and later changed into a magazine call Badi? (Fo?adi Bošru?i, p. 218; Momen, 2015, pp. 144-45). Našriya Erz-e Ka was another magazine published locally until the 1970s.

During 1922-24, anti-Bahai activities increased, which coincided with the formation of the Hojjatiya (q.v.) in Mashhad, after Sayyed ?Abbas ?Alawi, a colleague of its founder, had converted to Bahaism. There was a range of

persecutions, including insulting an effigy of 'Abd-al-Baha' in Mashhad, widespread attacks on individuals, and a plan for a pogrom. Bahai petitions were refused by the postal office in Mashhad (Fo'adi Bošru'i, pp. 189-90, 207).

During the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-41), Bahai communities were treated in a similar way to other religious minorities (Vahman, p. 44).

However, in 1934, branches of Tarbiat and other Bahai-run schools were closed by order of the government. During the reign of Mohammad-Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1941-79), Bahais enjoyed many religious freedoms but lacked some civil rights and the right to marry according to Bahai law. There was a brief period of persecution in 1955, following radio broadcasts by Hojjat-al Eslam Falsafi (Vahman, pp. 136-37).

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, conditions for Bahais in Khorasan, as in other parts of Iran, have worsened. Bahais' civil rights have been restricted; their institutions disbanded; some Bahais dismissed from their employment; Bahai properties confiscated, looted, or burned; pensions for Bahais stopped; admission of Bahais to universities denied; and some Bahais have emigrated to other countries. There remains a Bahai community in most towns and cities of Khorasan, but the overall size and distribution is not known.

Minou Foadi

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