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ZOROASTRIAN CONVERSIONS TO THE BAHAI FAITH IN YAZD, IRAN

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ZOROASTRIAN CONVERSIONS TO THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH  
IN YAZD, ÍRÁN

by

Susan Judith Stiles

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## PREFACE

The system of transliteration used in this study is one favored by an earlier generation of Orientalists. In 1923 the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, requested that all Bahá'í literature uniformly adhere to this system to avoid any future confusion. Since then all Bahá'í publications have used it. In order to be consistent with those publications I have adopted it as well. A detailed explanation of the system can be found in the Bahá'í Glossary by Marzieh Gail (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1969).

I wish to express my gratitude to the committee members who contributed to the development of this work. Dr. William Royce, who initially suggested a topic related to non-Muslim conversions to the Bahá'í Faith in Írán, provided his guidance throughout as my thesis advisor. Dr. Richard Eaton assisted me in sharpening much of my thinking and theoretical analysis. Dr. Michael Bonine provided me with several important sources on Yazd and the Zoroastrian community.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the conversion in Yazd, Írán, of Zoroastrians to the Bahá'í Faith in the period extending from the early 1880s to the beginning of the 20th century. This process started soon after the Parsis of India began to send emissaries to their co-religionists in Írán, who were despised and oppressed by the Muslims. Those emissaries initiated a series of social and economic reforms out of which emerged a new mercantile elite within the Zoroastrian community. When religious reform failed to keep pace with social change an ideational vacuum was created among this educated class. The Bahá'í Faith, with its rationality, its tolerance, its appeal to Zoroastrian messianic motifs, and Iranian paradigms of legitimacy, and its association with reforming elements within the Zoroastrian community, succeeded in filling that vacuum for many.

Zoroastrian Bahá'ís continued to associate themselves with the Zoroastrian community long after their conversion and developed many of their own institutions within it. Not until the Zoroastrian community ceased to recognize them as Zoroastrians can they be said to have developed a distinctive identity. As boundaries between the two communities became fixed the incidence of conversion slowed considerably.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This study examines the conversion of Zoroastrians to the Bahá'í Faith in Yazd from the early 1880s until the early decades of the present century. This early appeal to persons of non-Muslim background was essential to the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith as an independent world religion. It involved two processes. First, Bahá'ís had to distinguish themselves from the religious matrix it had come, namely Islám. Further, they had to make a convincing appeal of sufficient universality to attract the hearts and minds of non-Muslims and incline them to embrace the Bahá'í Faith. Also to be examined are the factors which induced members of the Zoroastrian community to become Bahá'ís. I will also consider the effect of such a conversion movement on the Zoroastrian community as a whole. Finally I will examine the processes by which Zoroastrian Bahá'ís, having appealed to the Zoroastrian community began to distinguish themselves as Bahá'ís and develop separate social institutions, and incorporate themselves into the Bahá'í community as a whole.

Other studies on the social aspects of conversion movements have documented the gradualness of this process.<sup>1</sup> Usually the religion

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<sup>1</sup>Such studies can be found in Conversion to Islam, ed. Nehemia LeVizion (Holmes and Meier 1979); Sufis of Bijapur 1300-1700, Richard Eaton (Princeton 1977); The Social Setting of Christian Conversion in South

to which a significant number of persons from a specific group convert is one belonging to what is perceived to be a superior culture with a fully defined and distinctive identity. The groups most likely prone to convert may not be especially downtrodden at the time. On the contrary, it is often the case that their social and economic position has significantly improved. In nearly all cases, however, their self-perception remains decidedly negative. The religion to which they convert is not necessarily the one of the dominant culture, but it is usually perceived as possessing considerable power.

Those minorities inclined to embrace the Bahá'í Faith in Irán were similar to the subjects of other conversion studies inasmuch as the represented groups newly becoming upwardly mobile. They too, found themselves handicapped by negative self-perceptions. However the religion to which they were attracted significantly differed from those of previous studies. Far from being associated with a powerful culture, Bahá'ís were much more persecuted than any of the other minorities. At this time they could not even be said to have possessed any distinctive identity. The importance of this study lies both in the additional insights it offers into the social dynamics of conversion and because it documents the process by which a new religious movement establishes its identity and boundaries.

Most of the sources used in this study were taken from Bahá'í biographies and memoirs written in Persian. These sources are published,

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India, Sundararaj Manickam (Weisebaden: Steiner 1977); Robin Horton in "On the Rationality of Conversion," Africa, Vol. 45, No. 3, Part I, pp. 219-235; No. 4, Part II, pp. 373-399, 1975.

but not widely distributed. I supplemented these sources with oral interviews with Bahá'ís of Zoroastrian background. Some material was drawn from non-Bahá'í secondary sources, but regrettably, I found almost nothing substantial in the way of primary material from non-Bahá'í sources. It should be expected that some of the accounts of events given will be one-sided.

### Yazd

Napier Malcolm, a minister of the Church Missionary Society living in Yazd at the turn of the century, described the town, located in central Persia and surrounded on all sides by desert, an insular and extremely provincial. He saw the Yazdis as possessing considerable depth in their thought but lacking in openness towards foreigners and toleration towards their own minorities.<sup>2</sup> To the present day many Yazdis pride themselves on their taasub<sup>3</sup> or fanaticism.

The other substantial religious minorities of Yazd were the Jews and Zoroastrians. Malcolm estimated the number of Zoroastrians to be about 1400 households<sup>4</sup> while representatives of the Alliance Isrealite Universelle who worked in Yazd in the 1920s and 30s counted 228 Jewish houses.<sup>5</sup> The Jews, who in Yazd did not convert to the

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<sup>2</sup> Napier, Malcolm, Five Years in a Persian Town (New York: Dutton and Co. 1907) pp. 1-42.

<sup>3</sup> Taasub is from Arabic root meaning zealous devotion. It can have positive or negative connotation, but in Bahá'í terminology it is always decidedly negative.

<sup>4</sup> Malcolm, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Goldstein, Interwoven Identities: Religious Communities in Yazd, Iran. Unpublished dissertation, Princeton, 1978, p. 44.

Bahá'í Faith in significant numbers, suffered greater poverty due to their close connection with their failing silk trade. Their movements, however, were much less restricted. Since Zoroaster was not mentioned in the Qur'án, Muslims only reluctantly granted Zoroastrians full status as 'People of the Book.' This appellation signified one religious community which, under Islamic law was regarded as legitimate and entitled to certain rights and a protected status within the Islamic state. In exchange for this non-Muslims paid a special poll tax known as the jiziyah which exempted them from military duty which was required of Muslims. Only Jews and Christians were specifically referred to in the Qur'án as 'People of the Book' but Muslims often found it expedient to include other groups.

In the 19th century the amount of jizayah collected was extortionary and the means utilized to extract it were often humiliating and abusive. The number of Zoroastrians had declined, yet the government refused to lower the collective tax. Those collecting it often demanded even more than what they were entitled to and beat those unable to pay immediately. The Zoroastrians found themselves subject to various other disabilities as well. Malcolm wrote, in 1907:

Up to 1895 no Parsi was allowed to carry an umbrella. Even during the time that I was in Yazd they could not carry one in town. Up to 1895 there was a strong prohibition upon eyeglasses and spectacles; up to 1885 they were prevented from wearing rings; their girdles had to be made of rough canvas, but after 1885 any white material was permitted. Up to 1886 the Parsis were obliged to twist their turbans instead of folding them. . . . Up to 1891 all Zoroastrians had to walk in town, and even in the desert they had to dismount if they met a big Mussulman. . . .

Up to about 1860 Parsis could not engage in trade. They used to hide things in their cellar rooms, and sell them secretly. They can now trade in caravanserais or hostelries,

but not in bazaars, nor may they trade in linen drapery. Up to 1870 they were not permitted to have a school for their children.<sup>6</sup>

The reason Muslims placed many of these restrictions on non-Muslims was the rules of their religion regarding ritual purity. Many categories of objects were regarded as unclean or najes, including unbelievers. This uncleanliness was substantive and could be transferred, especially by moisture. If a Muslim came into direct contact with a polluted object he needed to perform certain ablutions to purify himself. For this reason non-Muslims were clearly identified. In Kirman and Yazd, Zoroastrians were made to dress in dull yellow clothing so they could be immediately identified. Since water carried pollution, Muslims took care not to eat or drink from the same utensils or share the same baths. Similarly, the Zoroastrians were prohibited from selling moist foods or other articles which might carry pollution. Many other restrictions however, simply constituted petty harassment.

#### Islam and Minority Self-identity

The identity of Jews and Zoroastrians and the boundaries which distinguished their communities from others were determined by their relationship over-against the Shi'á Muslims. As Judith Goldstein discovered in her study of the Jews of Yazd, Muslims and minorities "use similar forms from what can be seen as one cultural repertoire to define themselves as different and as mutually exclusive."<sup>7</sup> The cultural repertoire from which their distinctive identity is drawn is largely

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<sup>6</sup>Malcolm, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

<sup>7</sup>Goldstein, op. cit., p. i.

determined by the categories established by the Shí'í majority. Muslims define themselves in terms of community. Minorities, in order to establish legitimacy within the Islámic context formed parallel social organizations. Muslims then were willing to recognize the minorities as similar to the Muslims, not as individuals, but in terms of recognizing the similarities of the internal relationships within each respective community. Boundaries became fixed with the expectation that while economic relationships might exist between individuals of different communities, interpersonal relationships would be limited to one's respective community. Boundaries and group definitions can only be determined in the context of those who are "other."

Goldstein's construct may be more useful in the context of the 19th century than it is at the present time. By the 20th century, the changes introduced with Westernization provided other possibilities for identity formations which were more individual and more secular. As Goldstein points out traditional norms held more force in a provincial city such as Yazd than they did in Tíhrán.<sup>8</sup> I find the construct more useful as well in describing the Jewish and Zoroastrian communities than I do the Armenians. The role of Armenians as intermediaries between Europe and the Muslims would produce a more positive historical experience and self-image. They therefore developed identity independent from Islamic definitions. When Jews from Europe and Parsis from India began sending representatives to assist their respective co-religionists in Írán, those communities, like the Armenians, became

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid. p. 20.

aware of other aspects of religious identity apart from those determined by their relationships with the Muslims. The period under consideration in this study is one in which a transition of perceptions of self-identity is in process.

Among the values which Zoroastrians adopted from the Shí'í Muslims was the attitude they held towards suffering, persecution and oppression. The Shí'á perceived of themselves as dispossessed. They maintained that self-perception despite numerical and ideological dominance in Írán, by continually representing the meaning of their sacred history in terms of the sufferings endured by Muḥammad's descendents, the Imáms at the hands of the oppressive Sunni state. The Shí'á rejected the triumphalism sometimes associated with Sunni Islam and instead regarded persecution in the path of God as an indication of legitimacy. The Jews and Zoroastrians found this motif uniquely suited to their own situation and they came to interpret their own sacred history in similar terms, for if suffering and persecution lent legitimacy to a religion, they were manifestly legitimate. But the Bahá'ís were much more so.

#### Background of the Bahá'í Faith

When Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad arose in the 1840's claiming successively to be the Báb, the Hidden Imám and finally an independent Prophet, the opposition from the 'ulamá was inevitable. Their ire had already been aroused against the intellectual predecessor of the Bábí Movement, the Shaykhí theological school. Founded by Shaykh Aḥmad Ahsá'í (d. 1826), this school challenged the exclusive authority of the

mujtahids to interpret Islámic law. According to Shí'í jurisprudence, all authority ultimately rested with the Qáim or Hidden Imám who lived in occultation until the final Day when he would "fill the world with righteousness after it had been filled with iniquity." The highest ecclesiastical authorities or the mujtahids acted on behalf of the Imám and interpreted Islámic law in accordance with strict scholastic procedures. The Shaykhís held a more dynamic view of the manner in which the Hidden Imám continued to guide the community. Certain individuals might be favored with his direct inspiration which could come in the form of dreams and visions. The Shaykhís opposed the process of routinization of the Imám in favor of a view which saw his continuing, active presence in history and his possible intervention at any time. The Shaykhís directly challenged the basis of the power of the mujtahids who responded accordingly and pronounced them infidels.

The Báb, as Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad is usually known, challenged the clergy even more directly by claiming to be the Hidden Imám, himself. His later claim to prophethood and his followers' repudiation of Muslim law further antagonized the úlamá. For the Muslim Islám was the perfect ultimate religion, never to be superceded. The legitimacy of past religions could be allowed as reflecting partial revelations of God's will, but no provision was made for future revelations. Since Islám was complete, no need existed for subsequent change. Deviancy was accounted for as a deliberate and malicious attempt to undermine Islám from within. Muslim theorists typically assumed that dissenters within the community had ulterior political motives. The dissenters themselves were certainly not divorced from such concerns. They, like other



Muslims, perceived of a wholistic universe in which the ideal state was one which combined temporal and spiritual power. They were therefore committed to ending the perceived disjunction between the two. This was certainly true for the Bábís.

While enmity between Bábís and the Muslim clergy existed from the start, opposition from the state was slower to develop. Far from wishing to antagonize the government, the Báb hoped to persuade the Sháh to embrace his cause and perhaps lend it the same patronage which the Shaykhís had enjoyed from certain Qajars. The Prime Minister, Háji Mírzá Áqásí who also was the spiritual guide to Muhammad Sháh, perceived this as a threat to his position and prevented the Báb from gaining an audience with the Sháh. Instead he imprisoned the Báb in a remote region.

The Báb's writings anticipated the establishment of a theocracy based on his laws. Their implementation, however, awaited the appearance and approval of "Him Whom God Would Make Manifest" whose coming the Báb had foretold. The violence which finally broke out in Nayríz in the south, Zanján to the north, and Mazindaran in northeastern Iran was the product of locally engendered power conflicts, persecutions initiated by the clergy, and the chiliastic fervor of the Bábís themselves. It did not reflect a concerted effort to overthrow the existing government by means of a jihád and replace it with the Bábí theocracy.<sup>9</sup>

These upheavals, which began just before the death of Muhammad Sháh, coincided with Násiri 'd-Dín's accession to the throne. The new

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<sup>9</sup>Denis MacEoin, "The Concept of Jihad in the Bábí and Baha'i Movements" (paper read at the Third Annual Seminar on Bahá'í Studies at the University of Lancaster, April 1979).

The new Prime Minister, Mírzá Taqí Khán, decided that the best way to end these disturbances was to execute the Báb himself. He had this accomplished in Tabríz in 1850. Two years later a handful of Bábís made an ill-fated attempt to assassinate the Sháh in retaliation for the Báb's execution. This incident caused the government to launch a general massacre of Bábís. Their executions were among the first official executions to be carried out publicly. Generally a condemned person was killed privately in prison or in the presence of the Sháh or a governor.<sup>10</sup> European ministers were especially appalled by this latter practice and urged the Sháh to abandon it in favor of public executions such as were carried out in the 'civilized world.' The first persons to be executed in this manner were seven Bábís who were decapitated in 1850. The Bábí victims of the 1852 massacre were tortured to death in public. So brutal were their executions, and so impressive was the courage and fortitude demonstrated by the Bábís, that they attracted attention and sympathy throughout the world.<sup>11</sup> The interest of religious minorities within Írán, who had heretofore ignored the movement was likewise drawn, as we will see later. The only Zoroastrian to become a Bábí was attracted as a result of the persecutions he witnessed in Káshán. Suhrab-i-Pur-Kavus watched as a Bábí was beaten, stripped naked and paraded through the streets.<sup>12</sup> He became a Bábí that very day.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Moojan Momen, ed. The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981) pp. 100-103.

<sup>11</sup>See Appendix A.

<sup>12</sup>Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 2 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1977) p. 104.

<sup>13</sup>Abdu'l-Bahá, A Traveler's Narrative (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) p. 21.

The immediate results of this massacre were devastating for the Bábís. The remainder of the leadership was scattered and most of the followers retreated to an underground existence. Meanwhile Írán itself experienced one disastrous calamity after another. Cholerea ravaged several provinces. In 1871-1872 a devastating famine gripped much of the nation. Economically Írán became increasingly dependent on Europe during this period. The silk trade, which had accounted for most of Írán's export trade, was nearly destroyed by disease. Other handicrafts were undermined by cheap textile goods from Europe. Much of Íránian agriculture switched from subsistence farming to cash crops, a development which contributed to the shortage of foodstuffs.

By the mid-70s the Íránian economy began slowly to recover as Íránian merchants made adjustments to the new situation and developed industries for which a market could be found in Europe. Cash crops continued to be cultivated but peasants were now careful to grow enough food to at least satisfy their own needs. An educated mercantile elite became increasingly more powerful and numerous. At the same time Írán recovered from the disasters of 1853-1873, the Bábís likewise began to reemerge, their doctrines reformulated by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Mírzá Husayn 'Alí, known as Bahá'u'lláh, was among those initially arrested in connection with the assassination attempt on the Sháh. Bahá'u'lláh belonged to the prominent family of the Núrís and his brother was employed by the Russian Embassy. Because of his high position the government was unable to execute him in the absence of positive proof of his complicity in the assassination attempt. As it

was he was genuinely shocked by it. He described his experience while in prison:

Day and night while confined in that dungeon, we meditated upon the deeds, the condition and the conduct of the Bábís, wondering what could have led a people so high-minded, so noble, and of such intelligence, to perpetrate such an audacious and outrageous act against the person of His Majesty. This Wronged One thereupon, decided to arise, after His release from prison, and undertake, with the utmost vigor the task of regenerating this people.

One night, in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side: 'Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou are in safety. Erelong will God raise up the treasures of the earth; men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy Name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized him.<sup>14</sup>

The Sháh eventually exiled Bahá'u'lláh to Baghdád where he was later joined by his younger brother Mírzá Yaḥyá, known as Şubḥ-i-Azal. Though Azal was but a teenager at the time of the Báb's execution, the Báb had previously appointed Azal head of the Bábí community until such a time when "He Whom God Would Make Manifest" would appear. Unable to exercise effective leadership over the Bábí community, Azal allowed Bahá'u'lláh to direct most of its affairs. Eventually tensions developed between the two brothers and Bahá'u'lláh decided to withdraw from Baghdád to live in seclusion for awhile in hopes the issue would resolve itself. In his absence the situation became even more chaotic. No less than 27 people arose claiming to be the one promised by the Báb. Some of these claimants repudiated the leadership of Şubḥ-i-Azal while others seemed to believe that there might be several legitimate Manifestations of God or Perfect Men at the same time. Azal may have accepted this view as well. As the community continued to disintegrate, a number of Bábís, including Azal sought out Bahá'u'lláh and requested his return.

<sup>14</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971) pp. 20-21.

Reluctantly, Bahá'u'lláh agreed to do so. But his relations with Azal did not improve. Before he left Baghdád permanently in 1863, Bahá'u'lláh privately declared himself to be "He Whom God Would Make Manifest." Between 1866-1867 Bahá'u'lláh had this proclaimed publicly in the Bábí community throughout Írán. It is indicative of the influence Bahá'u'lláh already possessed among the Bábís, that his claim was almost immediately accepted by the vast majority of them. The ultimate culmination of them was seen to be the establishment of a Bahá'í world order and not simply an ideal Bahá'í state. With the stage now set for the emergence of a new universal religion, the Bahá'í Faith awaited only the actual conversion of those outside the Muslim fold. This process began in significant numbers around 1877 when a number of Jews in Hamadán converted. In Yazd, Zoroastrians began to convert in the early 1880s.

Bahá'u'lláh was exiled and imprisoned in various parts of the Ottoman Empire. In 1892 he passed away near the prison city of Akká, Palestine. His eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá assumed the leadership of the Bahá'í community. The period up until his death in 1921 was one of great expansion for the Bahá'í community. Not only did the religion experience growth amongst Muslims and non-Muslims within Írán, but the faith spread rapidly outside that country and found a sizeable following in America, Europe, Egypt and India. Christian missionaries writing between 1874 and 1876 noted that Bahá'u'lláh was now the leader of the Bábís and that the scope of the religion had now widened in an attempt to appeal to non-Muslims. Dr. Bruce, residing in Ísfahán wrote in a letter dated November 19, 1974:

I am just now reading the latest Bible [sic] of the Baabis. The sect of the Baabis which is now increasing in Persia is that called Baha'i -- their chief is now in prison in Acca; he calls himself The Father and says Bab bore to him the same relation as John the Baptist did to The Son! His book is a collection of Divine revelations (?) addressed to 'The Pope', 'The Queen of London', 'The King of Paris' and other crowned heads.<sup>15</sup> In all his letters to Christians he never alludes to Mohomed but freely quotes the N.T. and says His appearance is the fulfillment of the promise of the Son that he would return.<sup>16</sup>

The above quotation reflects many of the fundamental changes Bahá'u'lláh had made in Bábí doctrine. Not only was he claiming to be the one promised by the Báb, but he declared himself to be the promised one of all religions. He further urged his followers to "consort with the followers of all religions with joy and fragrance." The militarism of the early Bábís was replaced by political pacifism and the Bahá'ís were commanded to avoid all violence and sedition. While still committed to the ultimate goal of a conjunction of temporal and spiritual power, these hopes were safely projected into the distant future.

#### Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism is perhaps the oldest prophetic religion. The ultimate human issue, for its followers is the choice between good and evil. Their central creed is not a statement of theology but a moral code: good thoughts, good words, good deeds.

Mazdean cultic practices appear to predate the Zoroaster and are similar to those of the Rig Veda. Zoroastrians venerate the four elements: earth, water, air and fire. Fire, as the symbol of Divine Truth, provides the center of Zoroastrian ritual life. For this reason

<sup>15</sup>Momen, op. cit., p. 244.

<sup>16</sup>Mary Boyce, Zoroastrians (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1979) pp. 1-2.

outsiders have often dubbed them 'fire-worshippers.' Laymen tend sacred fires in their own homes while priests, known as mobads and dasturs care for those of the fire temples which are located in towns and larger villages. Zoroastrians strictly adhere to standards of ritual purity. For them the dead are highly polluting. Rather than desecrate either the earth or the fire by burning or burying their dead, until recently, Zoroastrians have preferred to leave corpses on bare mountainsides or in towers of silence (dakhma) where they are quickly consumed by vultures or dogs.

Zoroastrians are initiated in the faith of their fathers when they are invested with a sacred cord (kushti') which consists of 72 strands. This cord is ritually tied and untied during their obligatory prayers which are performed five times daily. They are also given a sacred shirt (sadra) which is worn next to the skin at all times. In the past investiture took place when a youth reached 15. Today children are invested at about seven or eight.

Zoroastrians celebrate six seasonal festivals (gahambar) each year. Communal meals are offered at these events and portions of the Avesta read. The last gahambar of the year serves as a memorial to the dead. Zoroastrian scriptures are known collectively as the Avesta.

Zoroastrian eschatology is one of the richest in the world and from it much of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Bahá'í eschatology is drawn. Unfortunately very little is available on it in the English language, and much is conflicting. While most of this eschatology was written after the time of Alexander the Great and some during the Islamic period the earliest Zoroastrian scriptures, the Gathas

themselves definitely allude to 'the end of the world' and foretell its final renovation with a new resurrected humanity. At this time the Lie, the Gathic symbol of evil, will be utterly destroyed. Zoroastrians came to believe that a series of three Sayoshants or Benefactors would appear in intervals of a millenium. All would be born of virgins impregnated by the seed of Zoroaster which has been miraculously preserved in a lake.

While Zoroastrianism was once the principal religion of Irán, it gradually diminished after the Arab invasions. The disintegration of the Islamic Empire into smaller states and the subsequent Mongol invasions further threatened the remnant of that community. Many fled to India and established themselves in Gujarat, while the remainder hovered around Yazd and Kirmán. Sporadic communication existed between the two communities until the fall of the Safavids severed them in 1768 for nearly a century. During that period, the Iránian and Indian communities developed on entirely different levels. The Parsis or Indian Zoroastrians, under protection of the British, became increasingly westernized as they prospered in trade and commerce. The remnant of Zoroastrians in Irán, known derisively as gabrs, were restricted to agriculture and sunk in the deepest poverty; sorely oppressed and culturally stagnant.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE CONVERSION NARRATIVES

In the latter half of the 19th century representatives of the Parsi community in Bombay resumed their communications with the Zoroastrians of Írán. In 1854 the Parsis established "The Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Zoroastrians in Persia" (Anjuman-i-Binayan) for the purpose of alleviating the oppression and poverty to which their Íránian co-religionists were subject. Agents were sent from Bombay who not only raised the Zoroastrians' standard of living and status within Írán, but at the same time disrupted the internal equilibrium of that community. The agents' influence, along with growing trade relations between Yazd and Bombay in which Zoroastrians played a prominent role, led to the emergence of a merchant and professional class similar to what had long existed among Parsis, but had been largely absent among the Zoroastrians of Írán. By fostering rapid economic and social change, the Parsi agents set the stage for potential ideological change as well.

#### Mánakjí Limji Hataria

The first Parsi agent brought the Zoroastrian community into their initial, direct contact with a vehicle of ideological change, the Bahá'í Faith. This first emissary was Mánakjí Limji Hatari, known in Írán as Mánakjí Sáhíb.

Mánakjí traveled to Persia via Baghdad in 1854, where he met Bahá'u'lláh. Correspondence between Mánakjí and Baha'u'llah continued for a number of years. At least one of Bahá'u'lláh's letters to Mánakjí has been translated into English.<sup>1</sup> Mánakjí remained on friendly terms with the Bahá'ís throughout his life, as did subsequent Parsi agents. This had a marked impact on the Zoroastrian community in Írán and favorably affected their attitudes towards Bahá'ís. E. G. Browne observed in 1888:

Their relations to one another are of a much more friendly character than the relations of either of them towards the Muhammadans, the Zoroastrians, as already said, regarding "the virtuous of the seven climes", as their friends, and the Bábís being commanded by Behá to "associate with men of all religions with spirituality and sweet savour", and to regard no man as unclean by reason of his faith. Moreover the Bábís recognise Zoroaster as a prophet . . . and are at some pains to conciliate and win over his followers to their way of thinking, as instanced by the epistles addressed by Behá from Acre to certain of their number; while some few at least of the Zoroastrians are not indisposed to recognise in Behá their expected deliverer, Sháh Bahrám. . . . The marked predilection towards Bábís displayed by Mánakjí, the late Zoroastrian agent at Teheran, at whose instigation the Tárikh-i-Jadíd<sup>2</sup> or "New History" of the Báb's "Manifestation", was written, must also have reacted powerfully on his Zoroastrian brethren.<sup>3</sup>

A resourceful man, Mánakjí quickly made important and influential friends in Írán who greatly respected his intelligence and generosity. He cultivated many friendships within the court and by means of favors and gifts indebted many of them to him (not the least of whom was the Sháh's eldest son Zillu's-Sultán, who later became governor of

<sup>1</sup>See Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix C.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Granville Browne, A Year Amongst the Persians (Cambridge University Press, 1970) pp. 431-432.

those regions where Zoroastrians principally resided). In 1864 Mánakjí returned to India for a short period where he presented the plight of the Iránian Zoroastrians to their sister community in Bombay. He returned in 1865 with additional funds to establish schools for Zoroastrian children on the Western model. The first of these schools opened in Tíhrán with some 40 children. Mánakjí and his wife at first attempted to manage this school with only the assistance of volunteers. However, their knowledge of Persian proved inadequate and other educated Zoroastrians were not available to teach.

Around 1876 Mírzá 'Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, who later became the most erudite Bahá'í scholar of his time, was expelled from his position as a teacher in a religious school in Tíhrán when his conversion was discovered. Mánakjí heard of Mírzá 'Abu'l-Faḍl's predicament and knew of his skill in writing pure Persian without any words with Arabic roots. Being well-disposed towards the Bahá'ís, he asked Mírzá 'Abu'l-Faḍl to teach Persian literature in his new school and serve as Mánakjí's personal secretary as well. Mírzá 'Abu'l-Faḍl accepted the position. Many of his Zoroastrian students became devoted to this former mullá and later were among the earliest Zoroastrian Bahá'ís.<sup>4</sup>

Mánakjí worked tirelessly to improve the conditions of the Zoroastrians. Besides establishing educational institutions, he renovated fire temples and dakhmas, prosecuted those who illegally harassed Zoroastrians, and lobbied for the removal of all legal disabilities. With the help of foreign diplomats, he succeeded in persuading the Shah

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<sup>4</sup>Ruhullah Mehrabkhani, Sharh-i-Ahval-i-Jináb-i-Abu'l Fadl-i-Gulpáygání (Tíhran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 131 B.E.) p. 58.

to repeal the jizyah. Mánakjí began his campaign against the jizyah in 1857 when he paid the tax himself out of the Amelioration Fund in order to protect the Zoroastrian community from unnecessary harassment and humiliation at the hands of unscrupulous tax collectors. The tax was progressively lowered and finally removed altogether in 1882.

Through Mánakjí's efforts, life for Zoroastrians greatly improved. According to Rev. Napier Malcolm, the Zoroastrians themselves credited the Bahá'ís with at least some of the improvement. He himself noted that although the Bahá'í Faith was a semi-secret sect, their open pleas for general religious freedom and toleration had created an atmosphere conducive to the better treatment of minorities.<sup>5</sup>

#### Earliest Converts

The first Zoroastrian to become a Bahá'í was Kay Khusraw Khudádád, a Yazdi who operated a textile store in Káshán and converted there. I do not have the details of his conversion. I mentioned before that several of Mírzá 'Abu'l-Fadl's students became Bahá'ís. The most well-known of these was Ustád Javánmard, whom Bahá'u'lláh entitled Shír-mard or Lion of a Man. Later Ustád Javánmard became the principal of the first Zoroastrian school in Yazd. He remained a prominent member of the Zoroastrian community his entire life despite his conversion. Once he wrote to Bahá'u'lláh asking several questions concerning ritual, relations with those of other religions, eschatological matters, and Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy.

Bahá'u'lláh responded by proclaiming himself to be Shah Bahrám (a title sometimes applied to one of the Saoyshants). He further

<sup>5</sup>Napier Malcolm, Five Years in a Persian Town, p. 52.

maintained that the Judgment Day was present with his own Manifestation. As to his genealogy, Bahá'u'lláh referred Ustád Javánmard to the one previously compiled by Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl.<sup>6</sup> In it, Bahá'u'lláh's descent was traced through to Yazdigird III, last of the Sásánian monarchs. Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy must have been compiled while Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl was working for Mánakjí. As we shall see, it proved of particular significance to Zoroastrian converts.<sup>7</sup>

#### Mullá Bahrám

Mullá Bahrám, whom Bahá'u'lláh entitled Ákhtar-i-Khávarí (Star of the East) was born in the year 1275 A.H. (1858) in the village of Maryamábád, near Yazd. His early education consisted in learning the sacred literature and language of his ancestors. Afterwards he occupied himself with agriculture. Sulaymání reports that Mullá Bahrám continuously studied the holy texts and traditions, paying special attention to the prophesies of the Zoroastrians regarding the coming Saoyshants and promised ones; Hushídar Máh, Hushídar Bumí, Sháh Bahrám Varjárand and Dastur Pashtun, who according to the Zoroastrian scriptures would appear.<sup>8</sup> Convinced that their advent was soon approaching, Mullá Bahrám questioned anyone who arrived at his village, hoping to discover some sign that one of the promised ones had come. Finally a neighbor

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<sup>6</sup>See Appendix D.

<sup>7</sup>Siyávash Safídvash, Yádarín, 132 B.E. (1976) pp. 19-23.

<sup>8</sup>Siyávash interpreted these prophesies as follows: Hushídar Bumí was the Báb's first follower, Mullá Husayn. Hushídar Máh refers to the Báb. Sháh Bahrám Varjárand is Bahá'u'lláh, while Dastur Pashtun refers to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Masabih-i-Hidayat, Vol. 8, p. 378.

returned from a trip to town and reported how a Bábí had been killed that day. "What is a Bábí?" asked Mullá Bahrám. The neighbor replied, "They are a people who become yellow in the face from acquiring too much knowledge."<sup>9</sup>

That confusing answer aroused Mullá Bahrám's curiosity. Soon afterwards Mullá Bahrám was hired, along with seven other Zoroastrians skilled in agriculture, to work in Tíhrán on the land of one of the ministers of court. Their supervisor belonged to the 'Ali-Alláhí sect.<sup>10</sup> This man, Hájí Malik endeavored to convert Mullá Bahrám to his own religion, while Mullá Bahrám sought to convince him of the validity of Zoroastrianism. The proofs Mullá Bahrám adduced to support this were the miracles said to be associated with the life of Zoroaster and the persecutions endured by him and his followers. Hájí Malik questioned the reality of those miracles. As to the persecutions, he said, "To be killed in the path of faith is not proof of the truth, for several years ago they killed eighty people of the Bábí sect by the order of Náşri'd-Dín Sháh at the foot of the gallows, yet the falsehood of the Bábí sect is evident."<sup>11</sup>

Mullá Bahrám's interest was further aroused. When he finished his work in Tíhrán, he traveled to Káshán<sup>12</sup> where he worked for

<sup>9</sup> 'Azíz'u'lláh Sulaymání, Masabih-i-Hidayat, Vol. 8, Tíhrán: 1959, p. 379.

<sup>10</sup> 'Alí-Alláhí is a popular designation often given to a number of related Shí'á extremist sects. All of them show strong gnostic influences and are said to regard Ali as the supreme Manifestation of God.

<sup>11</sup> Sulaymání, op. cit., p. 380.

<sup>12</sup> The Bahá'í community of Káshán was surely among the diverse of the time. Hájí Haydar-Alí described it after his visit there sometime after 1892:

Kay-Khusraw-i-Khudádád, the first Zoroastrian Bahá'í. Mullá Bahrám remained unaware of his employer's religious convictions until in 1879 Kay-Khusraw received the disturbing news that two distinguished Bahá'ís of Isfáhán, Hájí Siyyid Muḥammad-Hasan and his brother, Hájí Siyyid Muḥammad-Husayn had been killed at the instigation of the Imám-Jumíh of Isfáhán. Mullá Bahrám noticed his agitation and inquired as to its cause. Though at first reluctant to discuss it, Kay Khusraw finally confided in Mullá Bahrám and told him about the Bahá'í Faith, emphasizing the manner in which it fulfilled the prophesies of the past.

When Mullá Bahrám returned to Yazd, he contacted members of the Bahá'í community there. These Bahá'ís introduced him to the distinguished Bahá'í teacher, Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-Málmírí, who was then in hiding at the home of a certain Bahá'í, Ustád 'Ali-'Askar. Hájí Muhammad Ṭáhir wrote of that meeting:

One day Ustád 'Ali-Askar said to me "There is a Zoroastrian youth by the name of Bahrám who comes to the door periodically to sell beetroot to us. He is a very nice young man. If it meets your approval, I will bring him in to talk with you next time he calls here." I said, 'Very well'. . . . A few days later Jináb-i-Mullá Bahrám came . . . and Ustád 'Ali-Askar brought him to me.

Up to that time [1882 or 3] no one from among the Zoroastrians [in Yazd] had accepted the Faith. Indeed, the Bahá'ís could not imagine that these people would embrace the Faith, because they were not involved in the early history and events associated with the Manifestations of God and were not included in any discussions concerning the Faith. However that

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It was about this time that I first witnessed the effect of the unifying power of the Word of God. During my teaching tour I reached Kashán, where the friends came from many different backgrounds: Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and Muslim. But one could not tell them apart. Their unity was like water and perfume of rose: once mixed it is impossible to distinguish one from the other.

A. Q. Faizí trans. Stories from the Delight of Hearts: The Memoirs of Hájí Mirza Haydar-'Ali (Kalimat Press: Los Angeles 1980) p. 135.

day I spoke about the Faith to Mullá Bahráṁ. He came the next day, and after a few days he acknowledged the truth of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. As a result, his blessed person attained such a state of joy and eagerness that it is difficult to describe. He became restless, and every time he visited us he showed much tenderness and often wept aloud. He then brought with him Jináb-i-Aqá Rustam-i-Khursand who also embraced the Faith after several meetings.<sup>13</sup>

At one point, Hájí Muḥammad-Táhir invited Mullá Bahráṁ and another Zoroastrian, Vafádár Hormuzdiyár, to a meeting at the home of Ustád Aḥmad. The Zoroastrians became rather anxious in the presence of so many turbaned Muslim Bahá'ís, since their own dress clearly distinguished them as Zoroastrians. However, the assemblage rose out of respect for them, showing every courtesy. Hájí Qalandar spoke on Zoroastrian prophecies and demonstrated they, one by one, had been fulfilled by Bahá'u'lláh. In reference to this he read from a letter written by Bahá'u'lláh to Mánakjí in pure Persian. This "Tablet" (lawh) greatly moved Mullá Bahráṁ and confirmed him in his new faith.<sup>14</sup>

#### Siyávash Safídvash

Another prominent Zoroastrian convert was Siyávash Safídvash who was born 1291 A.H. (1874 A.D.) in Yazd. When he was twelve years old he studied under Ustád Javánmard. Siyávash's autobiography does not indicate that the latter taught him anything regarding the Bahá'í Faith however. He does mention hearing that the advent of the Saoyshant was near and of the many signs which had already been fulfilled.

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<sup>13</sup> Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 2 (George Ronald: Oxford 1977) pp. 103-104.

<sup>14</sup> Sulaymání, *op. cit.*, pp. 377-383.



Siyávash's father was a merchant who lived for a time in Ṭihrán. His father often related to his son how he had witnessed the cruel executions of the Bábís in 1852. He vividly described the death of Hájí Sulaymán Khán,<sup>15</sup> in whose flesh were inserted burning candles before he was paraded through the streets to the town gates where his body was cleft in two. Siyávash's father expressed his admiration for the courage displayed by the Bábís and felt a great deal of sympathy towards them.

According to Siyávash himself, he scrupulously adhered to all the obligations of his religion. Conscientiously, he recited the daily obligatory prayers, observed all the fasts, feasts, and dietary laws. Since the dasturs disapproved of the Bahá'ís he avoided all contact with them.<sup>16</sup>

Early in his youth, Siyávash was employed by a Zoroastrian businessman who sent him to work in Káshán. In the year 1891 fierce persecution broke out against Bahá'ís throughout the country.<sup>17</sup> The Bahá'ís of Káshán went into hiding. Some were arrested. Siyávash witnessed the ransacking of Bahá'í homes. He asked his neighbor how it was that Bahá'ís were willing to endure such persecution for their faith without recanting. The neighbor replied that Bahá'ís believed the promised one of all the prophets including Zoroaster had appeared.

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<sup>15</sup>Hájí Sulaymán Khán was a distinguished young Bábí who had succeeded in retrieving the remains of the Báb and his young companion, Muḥammad 'Alí Zunuzí after their execution in Ṭabriz. The authorities believed Hájí Sulaymán Khán to have been the instigator of the attempt to assassinate the Sháh.

<sup>16</sup>Safídvash, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>17</sup>See Appendix E.

Siyávash decided that he must mean the precursor or herald but not Sháh Bahrá́m himself, for those signs, he reckoned, were not yet fulfilled. He vowed to himself however, not to make any judgment regarding the Bahá'ís until he had fully investigated the matter. Once he visited 'Iráq where he met a Bahá'í who presented him with a copy of the Kitáb-i-Íqán.<sup>18</sup> He read the first one or two pages, but when he came upon some quotations from the Qur'án, he immediately returned the book.

In 1895 Siyávash, along with three other Zoroastrians took up business in the Muslim shrine city of Qum selling textiles. Being the only Zoroastrians residing in that city, they found that the Bahá'ís (themselves merchants from out of town) were the only people willing to associate with them. One day the father of Siyávash passed away in Sulṭanábád. There being no Zoroastrians in that town to see to his funeral arrangements, a Jewish Bahá'í took it upon himself to bury him and relayed the news of his death to Siyávash via telegram. Siyávash immediately left for that city to retrieve his father's remains since it was contrary to Zoroastrian law to bury the dead. Siyávash records that his father appeared to him in a dream and pleaded with him not to disinter his body. When he arrived in Sulṭanábád, the Bahá'í who buried his father sought likewise to dissuade him. Nevertheless, in the heat of summer, Siyávash transported his father's remains to a cave on the side of a mountain and left him there.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>The second most important scripture to Bahá'ís, this text by Bahá'u'lláh uses the Bible and the Qur'an to establish the means whereby one may recognize God's Manifestation and the validity of the Bábí Revelation. Written in 1862, this work makes no mention of Zoroaster or Zoroastrian prophecies.

<sup>19</sup>Safídvash, op. cit., pp. 15-17.

Siyávash appreciated the kindness shown by the Jewish Bahá'í who could not have been expected to know the funeral customs of Zoroastrians. When he returned to Qum he softened his attitude towards the Bahá'ís. He accepted materials offered to him by the Bahá'ís, including the Tablet of Seven Questions written on behalf of Ustád Javánmard. Siyávash was most impressed with the genealogy of Bahá'u'lláh. Siyávash had not been willing to accept the Bábí Faith since the Báb was a descendent of Muḥammad. The destruction wrought by the Arab invaders, combined with the present oppressive behavior of Muslims in their dealings with Zoroastrians made him more than a little reluctant to accept anything relating to Islám. But since Bahá'u'lláh was a descendent from Sásánian kings he was in Siyávash's eyes more acceptable. After perusing many of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, he and all three of his Zoroastrian companions embraced the Bahá'í Faith in Qum.<sup>20</sup>

#### Other Narratives

As the account of Siyávash's conversion indicates, the greatest impediment for Zoroastrians in converting to the Bahá'í Faith was the necessity of accepting the prophethood of Muḥammad. One Zoroastrian Bahá'í recounted that before he investigated the Bahá'í Faith, he had always assumed that Bahá'ís could not possibly believe in Muḥammad since Muslims treated them so badly. He therefore felt great sympathy towards Bahá'ís. At one point he witnessed a Bahá'í being torn to pieces by a mob and watched them set fire to the corpse. Afterwards this Zoroastrian became eager to investigate the Bahá'í Faith. To his

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-24.

dismay, he discovered that Bahá'ís did indeed accept the validity of the Islámic revelation. The Bahá'ís urged their Zoroastrian friend not to judge Islám on the basis of the followers of that religion today. Instead, they suggested, let him study the Qur'án for himself to determine if it is the word of God. The Zoroastrian protested that he could not possibly read the Qur'án since it was written in Arabic which he could not read. A Bahá'í who had formerly been one of the Muslim 'ulamá, Mullá 'Abdu'l-Qaní, offered to read it with him. They studied that text together for over two years before this Zoroastrian became a Bahá'í.<sup>21</sup>

The kindness demonstrated by Bahá'ís, in contrast to the Muslim, impressed the Zoroastrians as well. A Zoroastrian youth named Ardishír once visited the home of Mullá 'Abdu'l-Qaní. The host graciously received him, serving him tea with his own hand, and then deliberately ignoring the strictures of najes, drank out of the same glass after him without washing it. Turning to his surprised guest, Mullá 'Abdu'l-Qaní remarked, "You must have heard how, in the days of the advent of the Promised Lord, the lamb and the wolf will drink from the same stream and graze in the same meadow. Do you still doubt that we are living in that Day?"<sup>22</sup>

When one Zoroastrian became a Bahá'í, friends and relatives soon followed. This was true both in the case of Mullá Bahrám and Siyávash, as we shall see later. One Bahá'í related to me the story of

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<sup>21</sup>Gloria Faizi, Fire on the Mountain Top (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1973) pp. 29-31. This book is based entirely on Masabih-i-Hidayat but I do not have the volume which contains this story.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 348-349.

how his uncle, a staunch Zoroastrian converted. He had several Bahá'í relatives whom he visited frequently, but was always careful not to arrive at times when he might be offered food or drink inasmuch as he had heard that Bahá'ís put a drug in the tea they served which made people convert. One day he missed his timing and arrived just as tea was being served. Although panic-stricken, the young man would not risk offending his relatives by refusing the tea. He therefore prayed to Ahura Mazda for protection and drank it. When he saw the tea had no effect, he became quite audacious and began frequenting Bahá'í meetings to prove he could drink all the Bahá'í tea he wanted without converting. Eventually he was influenced by what he heard at those meetings and became a Bahá'í. "So you see," my informant concluded, "It was the Bahá'í tea that converted him."<sup>23</sup>

Another Bahá'í of Zoroastrian background told me his grandmother saw 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a dream. Subsequently she saw 'Abdu'l-Bahá's photograph in the home of a Zoroastrian Bahá'í and this influenced her conversion. Anthropologist Michael Fischer also records several instances of persons being influenced by dreams to convert to the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>24</sup> This was just as true for Bahá'ís of Muslim background as dreams provide a common motif for conversions to any religion within Iran.

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<sup>23</sup>The belief that Bahá'ís drugged peoples' tea to make them convert was fairly common in Iran. Bahá'ís make numerous jokes about it. Christian missionaries have sometimes been accused of this also, cf. Samuel Wilson, Persia: Western Mission (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication 1896) p. 251.

<sup>24</sup>Michael Fischer, "Zoroastrian Iran: Between Myth and Praxis," unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago 1973, pp. 347-348.

The greater rationalism exhibited by Bahá'ís often encouraged conversions among the more educated. Fischer gives this account of a more recent conversion:

A Yazdi Zoroastrian now resident in Bombay tells his conversion: He went to Firuz Bahram High School in Teheran and being Zoroastrian attended the religion class for Zoroastrians. One day a Bahai friend asked if he understood what he was memorizing. He replied no, and agreed that he should. When the next day he demanded explanations, he was beaten. The Muslim instructor at the school heard of this and invited him to his Qur'an class promising full explanations there. He went and soon became the number one student in the Qur'an class. For this he was rebuked by the Zoroastrian Anjoman. Then his Bahai friend came and said, "What is this that you have become Muslim? Religion is not a shirt you change everyday, today you are Muslim, tomorrow, Jewish, the next day Christian!" And he explained the Bahai tenet that all religions have the same eternal message, only the civil rules of life must change with the times. When the boy now announced to his mother that he had become a Bahai, she threw him out of the house crying, "You Muslim! From today on the mother's milk I gave you from my breast has run dry!" And so he emigrated to Bombay where his father was living.<sup>25</sup>

#### Analysis

These conversion stories share a number of factors in common. All of the early converts were drawn from the new educated elite which Mánakjí's reforms, growing trade relations with Bombay and the changing conditions within Iran had combined to create. Some were professionals, others merchants, while still others were the more prosperous agriculturalists. Those conversions were catalytic to other conversions among the poorer peasants who associated with the others. Relatives frequently converted soon after the conversions of these key individuals, who formed the leadership of the Zoroastrian Bahá'ís. The earliest converts tended to be much more mobile than other Zoroastrians. They

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 348-349.

had all developed extensive relationships outside their insular Zoroastrian community. At the same time, they are all pictured as deeply religious, struggling heroically to maintain strict orthopraxy in an environment which was now militating against it. Within this context the Bahá'í Faith presented these persons with an alternative way to affirm their religious heritage, remain religious, and yet make appropriate adjustments to the changing circumstances of turn-of-the-century Iran.

In regards to this, the eschatological component provided the bridge between the two communities. As soon as contacts between Zoroastrians and Bahá'ís began, Bahá'ís presented Bahá'u'lláh as the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Zoroastrian texts. By using pure Persian in his correspondence with Zoroastrians, Bahá'u'lláh himself, played down the Islamic background of the faith in favor of its Persian aspects. Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy served the same function. By presenting the Bahá'í Faith as the culmination of all religious traditions, Bahá'ís were able effectively to present their religion to minorities, both as an affirmation of their own past as well as a new possibility for facing the future.

At a time when Western rationalism was affecting the Iranian scene, the general response from all religious communities tended to be reactionary. They strove defensively to adhere all the more stringently to their ancient rules and rituals. The Bahá'ís insistence on independent investigation provided a refreshing alternative to this. At the same time Bahá'ís fed into motifs common to nearly all religions in Iran. Minority reactions to the sufferings and persecutions endured

by Bahá'ís is an example of this. Zoroastrian sympathies were aroused towards the Bahá'ís since they saw them as fellow sufferers. But more importantly, they addressed the perceptions of legitimacy shared by most Íránians, which was derived from Shí'í theology: that persecution and suffering are signs of a true religion. The final factor seems to be the greater kindness and toleration exhibited by Bahá'ís, in an atmosphere where Muslims often took every opportunity to humiliate minorities.



### CHAPTER 3

#### AT THE CONFLUENCE OF RELIGION: RELATIONS OF THE NEW CONVERTS WITHIN THE ZOROASTRIAN COMMUNITY

In 19th century Írán when a Jew, Christian, or Zoroastrian converted to Islám, the change was as dramatic as it was decisive. Physically as well as spiritually, the convert left the community of his ancestors, leaving behind their customs, dress, and name. He would now adopt the lifestyle, laws and residence of the people whose religion he had embraced. In the early days of the Bahá'í Faith, before it had established many distinctive features of its own social life in Írán, and while it was still subject to fierce persecution, such a radical conversion was considered neither necessary, possible nor desirable. Although Bahá'u'lláh had provided in his writings<sup>1</sup> for the necessary laws and social institutions upon which a distinctive community life could be constructed, conditions were not at all favorable to their development, since they could subject the Bahá'ís to more persecution. Then, too, the essential challenge for Bahá'ís at this time was to develop an independent character which would divorce them from Islámic particularism. As such, the emphasis of Bahá'ís when reaching out to minorities was upon the universal aspects of their religion. They

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<sup>1</sup>A summation of the Bahá'í laws established by Bahá'u'lláh can be found in Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: The Universal House of Justice 1973).

sought to affirm as many elements of the other's religion as possible, regarding no religion as essentially wrong. All emanated from the same source and found their culmination in Bahá'u'lláh.

The early converts remained within their ancestral community, often abiding by their customary laws and supporting their social institutions. At the same time, Zoroastrian Bahá'ís sought to convince other Zoroastrians of the truth of the Bahá'í revelation. Meanwhile they freely associated with Bahá'ís of other backgrounds. This chapter examines the period in which Zoroastrian Bahá'ís concerned themselves more with presenting Bahá'í teachings as an affirmation and fulfillment of Zoroastrian religion than with developing a distinctive Bahá'í identity.

The Violation of Group Boundaries:  
Case of Mullá Bahrám

The earliest conflicts between the Zoroastrian community and the early converts were precipitated by those Bahá'ís' repeated violation of ethnic group boundaries in their relations with Bahá'ís of Muslim background. Muslim Bahá'ís and Zoroastrian Bahá'ís frequently invited each other to their homes and entertained them in their respective neighborhoods. Amongst Muslim Bahá'ís this sometimes had to be done secretly at night, but the Zoroastrian Bahá'ís openly received their guests in hopes it would attract the attention of their Zoroastrian neighbors and cause them to inquire about the Bahá'í Faith.

Mullá Bahrám actively engaged in teaching the Bahá'í Faith in this manner, much to the distress of his wife who remained a firm Zoroastrian. One night, so the story goes, Mullá Bahrám dreamed that

two distinguished gentlemen wearing the green turbans of Siyyids, descendants of the prophet Muhammad, came to see him. As they crossed the threshold of his house they announced, "We are Nayyir and Síná." The next day after this dream, the same two men came to Mullá Bahrám's village as he was working out in the fields. These two Bahá'í poets were fleeing from persecution in Işfáhán and hoped to find refuge with Mullá Bahrám until it was safe to move on. When they knocked on his door Mullá Bahrám's wife answered. She took one look at their green turbans and slammed the door saying, "Mullá Bahrám doesn't live here!"

Turning away with a heavy heart, they headed back out of the village, wondering where else they could find shelter. Mullá Bahrám, meanwhile, was heading home from the fields. As he passed the Siyyids, he immediately recognized them as the men in his dream. He approached them and asked, "Are you Nayyir and Síná?" "We are," they said in astonishment, "Are you Mullá Bahrám?" Mullá Bahrám embraced them and welcomed them. When he took them home and discovered what had transpired with his wife, Mullá Bahrám became enraged and sent his wife back to her father's house. Later, friends tried to bring about a reconciliation between Mullá Bahrám and his wife, but Mullá Bahrám would have nothing of it. Finally 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote him a letter in which began "O Bahrám, astronomers say that Bahrám [Mars] is a quarrelsome and hot-tempered star. . . ." This softened Mullá Bahrám somewhat and he agreed to take his wife back. Nevertheless, she remained hostile towards Bahá'ís throughout her life.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>'Azíz'u'lláh Sulaymání, Maşábíh-i-Hidáyat, Vol. 8, pp. 386-387.

The Persecutions of 1891

During the disturbances related to the gruesome execution of seven Bahá'ís in Yazd in 1891,<sup>3</sup> the Zoroastrian Bahá'ís found themselves in a better position to defend other Bahá'ís since the 'ulama were more likely to ignore them. While the bodies of the Bahá'ís were being dragged through the streets, the mob spotted two Zoroastrian Bahá'ís named Nám-dár Mihrabán and Firydun Ardirshír. Not suspecting that they too were Bahá'ís, they forced them to accompany the mob and bury the bodies after they dumped them in a well. Through those two Zoroastrian Bahá'ís, the other Bahá'ís were able to locate the remains that night and provide them with a decent burial.

Soon afterwards, Mullá Ibráhím-i-Masá'íl, a highly respected Bahá'í, was arrested as he attempted to flee from Yazd. His wife went to three Europeans residing in Yazd to request their intervention. Two of these were Dutch merchants while the third was a British captain.<sup>4</sup> Together, these three went to the governor, Jalálu'd-Dawlih and asked

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<sup>3</sup>See Appendix E.

<sup>4</sup>Sulaymání is rather vague as to who these three men were. He refers to all of them as Christians; one named Arthur, the other called Prince Sahib, and the third a military man from England called Captain. Op. cit., pp. 388-389. Records exist of two Dutch merchants who witnessed these events along with a Captain Vaughan of the 7th Bengal Infantry. A telegram from him read:

. . . wired from Yezd on twenty first to Legation that seven Bábís had been executed on the nine-teenth May, but believe Persian wire stopped message. Executions were ordered by Governor. Victims throats cut then stoned to death at intervals in the bazaar. More arrests made yesterday and further executions anticipated. Great uneasiness prevails. Firm Hotz and Co. done no business for last week. Haji Mirza Muhammad Taki, Russian agent, is unsafe, and other leading merchants threatened. Moolah Shaikh Hussan and his son Shaikh Taki are chief instigators of the persecution.

Moojan Momen ed., The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844-1944, pp. 301-302.

for his release. The captain offered secretly to take him out of Yazd. Jalálu'd-Dawlih told them to return the next day after he had time to consult the 'ulamá. According to Bahá'í sources, that night Jalálu'd-Dawlih slew him with his own hands and had him buried out in the desert.<sup>5</sup>

The next day when the Europeans again met with the governor, he assured them that Mullá Ibráhím had already been transferred to Islámábad. Realizing that he must have been killed, Mullá Bahrám together with the Afnáns<sup>6</sup> and the Dutch merchants consulted with Mirzá 'Alí Naqí Khan, head of the telegraph office, as to how best inform the capital of these events. They decided to employ a Zoroastrian carrier named Bahmán Jamshíd to deliver the message to Khwajeh Yusuf, a Christian in Iṣfáhán, who would relay it to Áqá 'Alí Ḥaydar Shirvaní in Tíhrán, who would see the petition reached the Prime Minister (Amínu's-Sultán) and the Sháh. This arrangement was necessary since Jalálu'd-Dawlih had placed spies at the telegraph offices and post stations to prevent news of this from leaking out.

Bahmán Jamshíd was spotted at one of these post stations and arrested. He was held in a room of the post station, but soon broke down the door and grabbed a club saying that, since he was employed by foreigners, he was not subject to their laws and intended to leave immediately and would fight anyone who tried to stop him. The guards backed down and allowed Bahmán Jamshíd to escape. He reached Iṣfáhán

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<sup>5</sup>Sulaymání, *Ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>6</sup>Afnán is a term used by Bahá'ís to refer to any relative of the Báb. Several resided in Yazd having developed extensive commercial interests stretching from Hong Kong to Istanbul.

within 42 hours. Within ten days of the executions, the Sháh dismissed the governor.<sup>7,8</sup>

### Initial Opposition of the Dasturs

The first Zoroastrians to oppose the activities of the Zoroastrian Bahá'ís were predictably, the clergy. They used the persecutions of 1891 as an excuse to bring pressure to bear on them. Dastur Tírándáz, the chief priest, drew up a list of Zoroastrian Bahá'ís and sent it to the headman of Maryamábád where many of them lived. Those listed were summoned to a meeting held in Yazd. When they had gathered the dastur began to abuse them, calling them apostates and threatening to have their leaders executed and the hands and ears of others amputated. Isfandíyár Bahmán, the brother of Mullá Bahrám, asked what crime they were being accused of. At this the dastur became enraged and shouted that he, in particular, had been spotted out in the desert performing the Bahá'í obligatory prayers. Mullá Bahrám pointed out that for them to be justly punished it would have to be established

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<sup>7</sup>The Dutch merchants reported these events via the Dutch Charge d'Affaires to R. J. Kennedy who was the British Charge d'Affaires:

On Monday last, 18th inst., 7 Babis were executed quite unexpectedly. One was hung in the presence of the Prince and six others were killed in different quarters of the town. This is the first time that Babis have been killed here [sic] and their execution has occasioned some tumult. Their bodies were buried at once by the mob under stones. . . . The priest [sic] of the Bábis, Molla Ibrahim, has been arrested and escorted this morning from Taft to Yazd with music. . . . The principal merchants here are Bábis and several amongst them are decidedly more or less in danger. . . . The situation is rather critical and as one is afraid of more serious occurrences there is no question of business.

. . . The Bábis have died like real martyrs without any fear and without saying anything but good about their religion. The Prince only desired that they would speak against

that they had broken a specific law of their religion. The dastur turned to the headman and ordered him to recount the evil deeds he had witnessed from these people. But the headman testified that they had fulfilled all the requirements of their religion. The dastur became angrier still, "May God blacken your face. You are the one who complained about these people. Why are you saying otherwise now?"

The headman stood by his testimony saying, "By the life of my children, I have and have had complete satisfaction and happiness with the doings of these people." One of the Bahá'ís, Shányár Jamshíd shouted back, "Why do you say this in front of us and behind us to the dastur you say the opposite?" By now both sides were shouting. Finally the dastur ordered the headman to wait outside. In his absence, the dastur continued to threaten the Bahá'ís. Finally Mullá Bahrám pointed out the unfaithfulness of the village headman and suggested that since their local leaders were so corrupt, the Bahá'ís were reluctant to contribute to the local fire temple there. Would it not be preferable for

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the Bábi religion; seven refused; two men, however, sons of Mollah Mehti, did so and they were released.

Kennedy wrote a memorandum to Aminu'Sultan on June 2, 1891:

I think it right to tell Y.H. [Your Highness] that I have received reports of greater persecutions of Babis in Yezd. Similar reports have reached other Europeans at Tehran.

Several Babis have been put to death and their bodies mutilated. Others are in danger of their lives, unless they satisfy the Mollahs.

Y.H. knows of course how far these reports are true, and whether the Governor of Yezd is acting properly.

I mention the subject to you, as I am as Y.H. knows a sincere friend and well wisher of Persia, and I should deeply regret if, at any time, anything should be done which may injure the reputation of the Persian Government.

Momen, op. cit., pp. 302-303.

<sup>8</sup>Sulaymání, op. cit., pp. 391-395.

them to contribute this money directly to Dastur Tírándáz so he could expend it on the great fire temple? The dastur became silent. Mullá Bahrám pointed out that had the Bahá'ís wished to embrace a new religion solely in an attempt to escape the rigours of Zoroastrian law, they would surely have converted to Islám. Finally the dastur dismissed them. The next day Mullá Bahrám returned with a purse full of silver coins which he discreetly placed behind a mirror.<sup>9</sup>

Soon afterwards a local Muslim preacher and his attendant, who had been harassing the Bahá'ís of Maryamábád, died suddenly. Rumor spread that Mullá Bahrám had killed him with witchcraft. Both his life and those of other Bahá'ís were now in danger, so he along with a few other educated Bahá'ís escaped to Bombay, settling with the Zoroastrians there and actively teaching their religion. He remained there for a year before returning to Yazd.<sup>10</sup>

#### The Formation of the Anjuman

When Mánakjí died in 1890, the Amelioration Society of India sent out another representative, Kay Khusraw Jí Sahib. The most notable achievement of this agent was to establish the Anjuman-i-Násrí, an elected body of Zoroastrian leaders, principally laymen, who would oversee the activities of the Zoroastrian community. He patterned it after similar societies among the Parsis of India. This body replaced the traditional council of elders in Yazd who held positions based on

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 395-396.

<sup>10</sup>Immigration of Zoroastrians from Yazd to Bombay had become a common occurrence by the end of the 19th century. The Parsis established an inn for those arriving destitute. Yazdi Zoroastrians operated their own fire temple in Bombay as well.



heredity. The dasturs had a separate council which ruled on strictly religious matters. Under the old system, the council of elders oversaw the secular affairs of the community and did not interfere with the Zoroastrian clergy. Greatly concerned over the corruption of the dasturs, Kay Khusraw Ji Sáhib urged this new Anjuman to regulate their activities as well. The Anjuman also came to represent the community in its relations with outsiders and defend its rights when necessary. According to Mullá Bahrám's memoirs, of the 23 members originally elected, the majority were either Bahá'ís or highly sympathetic towards the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>11</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent a letter congratulating the Zoroastrian community on the establishment of this Anjuman.

Kay Khusraw Ji Sáhib returned to India for a time. In his absence, the dasturs, greatly threatened by his reforms, conspired to dispose of him. According to Bahá'í sources, a moad, Ardishír Khudábandih, poisoned Kay Khusraw after he returned to Írán and killed him. When news of his death reached India, another agent, Ardishír Ji Sáhib, was sent.<sup>12</sup>

During this period Áqá Qhulám Husayn Banánki, a Bahá'í of Muslim background was tortured to death by the order of one of the leading 'ulamá of Yazd, Shaykh Sabzivári. In response to this Mullá Bahrám sent a petition to the Prime Minister, Amínu's-Sultán by way of Siyávash who

<sup>11</sup> Among those listed as members or sympathizers with the Bahá'í Faith who served on the first Anjuman are Ustád Javánmard Shírmard, Khusraw Khudádad, the first Zoroastrian Bahá'í, Mullá Bahrám, Dinyar Bahrám Qalantar, Ustád Karamshahi, Master Khudabaksh who will be discussed later, Rustam Khudámard, Cyrúsh Bahman Núzar, Bahman Jamshíd, Arbáb Gúdarzi-Mehrabán, Khusraw Mehrabán Aliábádí, and Mullá Bahrám Sahíb Tarjumih. Sulaymání, Ibid., pp. 404-406.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

at this time was still in Qum. The Prime Minister ordered Shaykh Sabzivári expelled from Yazd and sent a copy of his order, along with Mullá Bahrám's petition to the wealthy Zoroastrian entrepreneur, Arbáb Jamshíd, thinking no doubt, this would win his favor. Arbáb Jamshíd, however, was disturbed to hear of a Zoroastrian intervening on behalf of a Muslim heretic and thereby possibly endangering the Zoroastrian community. He complained of this action to the Anjuman who pressured Mullá Bahrám into resigning. But the rest of the Bahá'ís remained members in good standing.<sup>13</sup>

Mullá Bahrám again deemed it expedient to leave Yazd for Bombay. His family accompanied him this time. While residing there, numerous discussions took place between him and the Zoroastrians of Bombay. Mullá Bahrám published a pamphlet containing the answers to 52 questions which had arisen in the course of them. This aroused the hostility of some Zoroastrians. A number of them confronted Mullá Bahrám while he was in the market place. Words were exchanged, then they grabbed Mullá Bahrám, tore off his sacred cord, and began to beat him. Police intervened and allowed him to escape. Shortly afterwards Mullá Bahrám returned to Yazd.<sup>14</sup>

#### Defense Before Julálu'd-Dawlih

Jalálu'd-Dawlih eventually succeeded in regaining his position as governor of Yazd. He took great pains this time to befriend the Bahá'ís, especially those he perceived as powerful such as the Afnán

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 407-408.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 409.

family, in whose village Mullá Bahrám was then residing. One day Hájí Siyyid Mahdí Afnán invited the governor and his entourage to his village. Included in the entourage were members of the 'ulamá. After they were fed and entertained Jalálu'd-Dawlih addressed Mullá Bahrám demanding that he answer a number of questions regarding his religion which one of the 'ulamá would present. He warned Mullá Bahrám that he would not tolerate any dissimulation. One of the mullás asked Mullá Bahrám, "By what proof have you accepted the Bahá'í Faith?" Mullá Bahrám answered, "By proof of our own religious books." The mullá asked for further elaboration saying, "For instance, explain how did you recognize your previous prophet and by what reason do you know he is true?" Mullá Bahrám answered, "The proof of the truth of Zoroaster is that this man arose to make his claim and the Zend and the Avesta which contains divine laws were revealed to him. When he arose for the propagation of his religion a group came under the shadow of his word, in the propagation of which pure blood was spilt and luminous souls were sacrificed. Acceptance of such trials and difficulties in the path of religion is proof of its truth. Knowing these things, I was confirmed in the Zoroastrian religion. These same proofs I had accepted for Zoroastrianism I saw demonstrated with my own eyes in this blessed Cause. For holy souls to sacrifice their very lives is the greatest act in the world, and this miracle is higher than all miracles and this reason stronger than all reasons."

Jalálu'd-Dawlih remarked, "These arguments are strong. A human being is not like alfalfa, that when you cut its head it grows again." Another person asked, "It is said that until one becomes a Muslim he

cannot be a Bahá'í. Is this true?" Mullá Bahrám answered, "Yes, I who was a Zoroastrian and became a Bahá'í, acknowledge the Prophet and the Qu'rán as the Book of God." "What then do you say about the other miracles associated with Islám such as the clefting of the moon, the speaking of a lizard, the speaking of stones, and the palm tree which grew on the back of a camel?"

Mullá Bahrám replied, "If these matters be taken literally it would not be in accord with reason. But if the intention be their true meaning, yes I believe them; and since you have asked me to speak freely, may I say that if the moon were actually cleft, it would have been observed by the entire world and recorded by them, especially by foreigners who record every event in history. Yet this event is not mentioned anywhere except in the traditions of Islám. And if the lizard had actually spoken, should they not have put it in a box and showed it to Abú-Jahl<sup>15</sup> and taken it around the world as a proof? They could have done the same had the stones spoken. Likewise with the camel; so it is clear these things didn't happen literally. But they have another meaning. The clefting of the moon is the tearing away of the veil which intervenes between the people and the Word of God. The lizard speaking is the confession of faith pronounced by the polytheists and the savages of the desert whose behavior was like that of animals and lifes like that of lizards. They are likewise compared to stones since they had decayed to a state worse than the mineral kingdom, yet, after professing their faith in God, passed through various degrees of progress

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<sup>15</sup>Abu-Jahl was an implacable enemy of the Prophet Muhammad.

until they became more precious than the jewels of the world. In regards to the palm tree on the back of the camel, by this is meant the banner of Islam which in battle was raised aloft on the back of a camel; and from that date tree were borne the fruits of triumph and victory."<sup>16</sup>

The approach used by Mullá Bahrám is one typical of many Bahá'í discourses. He began by asserting that he found the Bahá'í Faith to be a confirmation of the beliefs he had held prior to becoming a Bahá'í. The proofs he adduces to support this, at least initially, are largely drawn from Shí'í Muslim paradigms. A prophet arises, he makes a claim, reveals a book, and is received by some who are willing to suffer in the path of God. To this is added rationalistic explanations and allegorical interpretations which are particularly Bahá'í.<sup>17</sup>

After this exchange, Jalálu'd-Dawlih and his brother Hurmúz Mírzá went over and searched under Mullá Bahrám's clothing to see if he was wearing the sacred thread, much to the amusement of the gathering. Apparently Mullá Bahrám had ceased to wear it after it had been torn off in Bombay. Hájí Mírzá Maḥmúd Afnán thanked the governor for arranging such a fair dialogue between Muslims and Bahá'ís and the gathering dispersed.

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<sup>16</sup>Sulaymani, op. cit., pp. 412-416.

<sup>17</sup>The missionary Napier Malcolm made these comments in regards to the Bahá'í methodology of interpreting scripture:

The tendency to minimise the miraculous element in religion is not altogether wholesome, and some professing Babis are inclined to a rather crude rationalism, the end of which is difficult to foresee. This tendency is perhaps fostered by the peculiar manner of interpreting the sacred books, a method difficult to describe, as it fluctuates between the wildest flights of metaphor, and the lowest depths of puerile literalism, the balance between the two being decided by a very determined preconception of what ought to be. (Five Years in a Persian Town. New York: Dutton and Co. 1907, pp. 94-95.)

The Massacre of 1903

Jalálu'd-Dawlih became very friendly with Mullá Bahrám and often visited him in his gardens and fields. Seeing his skill in agriculture, Jalálu'd-Dawlih purchased some land and tried to persuade Mullá Bahrám to organize a group of Bahá'ís to settle there and cultivate it for him. Out of deference to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and to attract the Bahá'ís, he named it 'Abbásábád.<sup>18</sup> Mullá Bahrám had no inclination to do this however, as he was already comfortably settled in Mahdíábád. Jalálu'd-Dawlih then requested Hájí Mírzá Mahmúd and Ardishír Jí Sahib to intervene and convince Mullá Bahrám to change his mind. Finally Mullá Bahrám along with several other Bahá'í and Zoroastrian farmers moved to 'Abbásábád and, at great expense, repaired the qanats<sup>19</sup> and cultivated the land.

As harvest time approached in the year 1903, persecutions against Bahá'ís in Yazd reached proportions which had not been seen since 1852.<sup>20</sup> These disturbances were connected with the Constitutional struggles. While this violence was not confined to Yazd or its environs, it was there that it reached horrifying proportions. By the time it had ended 84 Bahá'ís had been killed. The notorious firebrand, Áqá Najafí, a leading 'alim of Isfahán stirred up agitation against the Bahá'ís during the final months of the administration of Amínu's-Sultan. After initiating an orgy of violence in Isfahán, he wrote to the 'ulama of other towns urging them to follow his example. The newly appointed

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<sup>18</sup>'Abdu'l-Bahá is known to non-Bahá'ís in Írán as 'Abbás Effendi.  
'Abdu'l-Bahá is a title bestowed upon him by his father.

<sup>19</sup>Qanats are underground irrigation systems common in Iran.

<sup>20</sup>See Appendix F.

Imam-Jum'ih of Yazd, Siyyid Muḥammad Ibráhím, passed through Iṣfáhán on his return from the Holy Shrines in 'Iráq. He determined to initiate a similar persecution in Yazd as had been perpetrated in Iṣfáhán. Expectant crowds had already gathered to await his arrival. He preached a fiery sermon against the Bahá'ís, after which mobs rampaged through the streets, sacking Bahá'í stores. Two days later the killings started. The governor at first made efforts to restore order, but the crowd turned against him and accused him of complicity with the Bahá'ís. They surrounded his mansion, believing he was providing refuge to Bahá'ís within. Finally the governor himself began to execute Bahá'ís in order to restore credibility with the populace.

The village of 'Abbásábád was now a great embarrassment to the governor, so he sent soldiers out to blockade, evict the tenants, and demand that Mullá Bahrám return his lease. Mullá Bahrám pleaded with the soldiers, saying they had spent all their resources developing the land. Now, before the first harvest they could hardly afford to leave. He submitted a bill to the governor which he would not accept. Mullá Bahrám refused to turn over the lease so the soldiers beat him severely and took the documents by force.

Meanwhile, the bloodthirsty mobs were headed for 'Abbásábád. As they passed through each village the crowd grew larger. When they reached 'Abbásábád, they sent out a messenger to tell the villagers that every man, woman and child was to be out on the streets. Mullá Bahrám ordered the farmers to remain in their houses with their families. He himself, with a handful of other Bahá'ís, went out into the street to meet the mob. There stood two or three thousand men

carrying clubs and shovels and accompanied by about 40 riflemen. At the head of the crowd stood a few mullás. One of them happened to have been an acquaintance of Mullá Bahrám and handled his legal affairs. He looked at Mullá Bahrám for a moment, then suddenly turned around and announced, "You Zoroastrians have chosen to live in accordance to what you are entitled to in the Book and under the Law of the Lord of Creation. No one has the right to harass or dishonour you." Then he turned towards the crowd, "Does anyone have a complaint against these Zoroastrians who live here, especially against Mullá Bahrám who was appointed by the prince to be responsible for 400 workers? If so let him say so. Otherwise, no one has the right to seek revenge or violence."

Everyone remained silent. Finally another cleric, Mullá Murshíd, spoke up, "I have heard that some very poor Muslim workers came by this village having no bread or water. Mullá Bahrám gave them bread, water, and dried fruit so these poor Muslims would not sleep hungry." Slowly the crowd dispersed and the day ended without any violence. The next day a Bahá'í of Muslim background was dragged out of the village and killed. The governor's eviction order still stood but there was no safe place for Bahá'ís to go. It took four petitions to the governor before he would issue documents granting them safe passage. The villagers dispersed quietly to wherever they could. Mullá Bahrám fled to Mahdíábád where he hid for three days. Kay Khusraw Khudádád who initially introduced him to the Bahá'í Faith assisted him in escaping to Káshán. He arrived there and collapsed from the beating



he received. Six months passed before he could proceed to Tíhrán. He arrived there penniless and in rags.<sup>21</sup>

### Analysis

Mullá Bahrám's behavior in Yazd illustrates the manner in which a newly-converted Zoroastrian Bahá'í interacted within the Zoroastrian community as a whole. In the earliest years of his conversion he participated fully in Zoroastrian communal life. At the same time he did not hesitate to violate the unspoken ethnic boundaries by associating freely and openly with those outside the community, namely Bahá'ís of Muslim background. He and his fellow believers endeavored to follow Bahá'í laws whenever possible in individual matters such as the daily obligatory prayer which Bahá'ís do not perform in congregation.

The Zoroastrian community reacted ambiguously to the conversions. The clergy adamantly opposed the activities of the Bahá'ís. More progressive elements such as the merchants and professionals often encouraged them and were willing to appoint Bahá'ís to positions of leadership. But they too were threatened by too flagrant a violation of group boundaries, especially when Zoroastrian Bahá'ís attempted to defend their stricken Muslim co-religionist.

Muslims tended to ignore Zoroastrian converts. Even during the worst persecutions such as the massacre of 1903, the Zoroastrian Bahá'ís were still permitted the measure of protection allowed "People of the Book." Yet Muslim perceptions of these converts were changing and they did not enjoy the same immunity they had in 1891. In the intervening

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<sup>21</sup>Sulaymání, op. cit., pp. 417-424.

years Bahá'ís had begun to distinguish themselves from other Zoroastrians by discarding certain practices such as wearing the sacred thread and locating themselves in separate villages, such as Mahdíábád and Abbásábád.

## CHAPTER 4

### AT THE CONFLUENCE OF RELIGION: ZOROASTRIAN BAHÁ'ÍS IN THE MUSLIM CONTEXT

We have seen that Zoroastrian Bahá'í converts residing in Yazd functioned largely within the milieu of the Zoroastrian community. Even Muslims within Yazd, until after the turn of the century, did not distinguish these converts from other Zoroastrians. Even when their conversion was well known, Zoroastrian Bahá'ís retained their legal status as members of the Zoroastrian community. This chapter will focus on the manner in which Zoroastrian Bahá'ís functioned and were regarded after they left Írán and dealt more directly with the Muslim community at large.

#### Siyávash Safídvash at Qum

It will be remembered from Chapter 2, that Siyávash Safídfash converted to the Bahá'í Faith during the period in which he resided in Qum. After his conversion he went to great lengths to proclaim his new religion to Muslims and Zoroastrians alike. He first went about acquiring a substantial library of Bahá'í texts, many of which he transcribed for other Bahá'ís. He corresponded frequently with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who was then head of the Bahá'í community. He wrote to all his friends and relatives in Yazd, informing them that the Promised One had appeared and providing evidence for this. The chief dastur, when informed of Siyávash's activities, became quite alarmed. Summoning

Siyávash's closest relatives, he made dark threats about what might happen if Siyávash continued to write in this vein. Surely, the dastur suggested, someone had given him something to eat which had bewitched him and caused him to behave in this manner. If he had truly converted, both his life and his property were in great danger. These threats were not to be taken lightly, as this was the year (1896) in which Násirúd-Dín Sháh had been assassinated and Bahá'ís were still suspected of complicity in that act.<sup>1</sup> Siyávash's relatives wrote him and warned of the great danger. Eventually, most of them became Bahá'ís as well.<sup>2</sup>

Though living in a city sacred to the Shí'í Muslims and known for its fanaticism, Siyávash, with reckless audacity sought to promulgate the Bahá'í teachings amongst the Muslims. In this he apparently had some success. Hájí Mírzá Ḥaydar 'Alí, who passed through that city around this time, noted that quite a few of the Bahá'ís there had been converted by the efforts of the Zoroastrians.<sup>3</sup> Before long, Siyávash's activities came to the attention of the 'ulamá. Fiery sermons were preached in the mosques asking how this infidel could be allowed to live in their midst when, having embraced this heretical sect, he was now attempting to mislead good Muslims by distributing Bahá'í texts.

As the situation became dangerously tense, Siyávash wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, Amínu's-Sultán who owned the caravanserai

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<sup>1</sup> Initially it was believed that the Sháh's assassin, Mírza Muḥammad-Ridá Kirmáni, was a Bábí. Later he admitted to being a follower of Siyyid Jamálu'd-Dín Afghání. In the meantime Bahá'ís were persecuted and some executed.

✓ <sup>2</sup> Siyávash Safídvash, Yádírín, 132 B.E. (1976), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> A. Q. Faizi trans., Stories from the Delight of Hearts (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press 1980) p. 135.

in which the Zoroastrian Bahá'ís were residing. The letter read in part:

We four Zoroastrians who are living in Qum in the caravan-serai have been the object of jealousy and enmity and for no reason, except they consider us Bahá'ís. The True One knows and witnesses that we have no aim nor will save praising God, following His commands and offering praise and honor to His Royal Highness the Shah-in-Shah.<sup>4</sup>

Four days later they received a reply from Amínu's-Sultán:

You are Zoroastrians and have your own special customs and beliefs which have no relationship with the Baha'i Faith. In no wise does anyone have the right to harass you. You are my tenants as well. Therefore I will order your perfect ease and tranquility. Inform me regarding anyone who, without cause, wishes to trouble you and I will settle it. Show this letter to Áqá Mír Siyyid Ibráhím Khán Mustaufí that he may protect and assist you and that conditions may remain tranquil and calm.<sup>4</sup>

When word of Amínu's-Sultán's response was spread in Qum all harassment ceased to such an extent that servants (apparently Bahá'í) of the sacred shrine were placing literature between pages of the Qur'án where they might be found by interested seekers. Four months later Muẓaffaru'd-Dín Sháh was coronated and Amínu's-Sultán fell out of favor with the court and was banished to Qum. While he was there Siyávash arranged through Árbáb Jamshid to have the Amínu's-Sultán's assets in Tihrán liquidated. For the next two years while Amínu's-Sultán remained in Qum, Siyávash served him in various capacities, much to the amazement of the citizens of Qum. Siyávash took this opportunity to introduce prominent Bahá'í teachers to Amínu's-Sultán and provided him with a substantial amount of literature. In 1898 Amínu's-Sultán returned to the capital and was restored to his former position. For a

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<sup>4</sup> Safídvash, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

number of years afterwards he remained friendly and helpful towards the Bahá'ís.

This incident is an example of the manner in which hikmat or wisdom was often exercised amongst Bahá'ís at this time. This term which has acquired a technical meaning denotes the caution sometimes required in dealing with non-believers. Similar to the Shi'í concept of taqiyah, Bahá'ís as in this case, usually stopped just short of actual denial, but gave a definitely misleading impression. The principal, as elucidated by Bahá'u'lláh stated:

In this Day, We can neither approve the conduct to the fearful that seeketh to dissembl his faith, nor sanction the behavior of the avowed believer that clamorously asserteth his allegiance to this Cause. Both should observe the dictates of wisdom, and strive dilligently to serve the best interests of the Faith.<sup>5</sup>

In his autobiography, Siyávash makes the curious statement that part of his motivation in writing the Prime Minister was to introduce the subject of the Bahá'í Faith. From Amínu's-Sultán's subsequent relations with Siyávash and other Bahá'ís, he probably was not misled by the letter. What Siyávash was seeking, and what the Prime Minister granted him, was legal status as a Zoroastrian since a Bahá'í had none. Amínu's-Sultán was well aware of the beliefs of the Bahá'ís even before this incident as well as their position in regards to political involvement. During the Tobacco Regie he indicated to Frank C. Lascelles:

. . . that the Babis are divided into two branches, one of which, the Baha'is, are inoffensive, and abstain from any interference in the affairs of State; whereas the other branch, known

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<sup>5</sup>Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1970) p. 139.

as the Azelis, seek for the destruction of all existing institutions, and are similar to the Nihilists in Russia.<sup>6</sup>

Around 1900 Amínu's-Sultán accompanied the Sháh on one of his tours of Europe. Since the Bahá'ís of Qum were now deprived of their protector, the 'ulamá resumed their attacks. They confiscated Bahá'í books and called for Siyávash's execution. Siyávash states that the opposition was not aroused by his being a Bahá'í, since as a Zoroastrian he was already regarded as an infidel. Rather it was his aggressive proselytizing among Muslims which excited their ire. Finally Siyávash was forced to sign a document agreeing not to distribute any more literature. The governor requested that he leave Qum for a time and remain in Tíhrán until the return of Amínu's-Sultán.<sup>7</sup>

#### Árbáb Jamshíd

The wealthy Zoroastrian entrepreneur, Árbáb Jamshíd, rose from modest beginnings as an illiterate textile worker in Yazd to become one of the wealthiest men in Írán. Though never a Bahá'í, his close association with converts to that religion lent much to the prestige of the Bahá'í Faith amongst Zoroastrians just as Mánakjí's association had a few decades earlier. Árbáb Jamshíd's trading house, Jamshídian, had branches in Shíráz, Yazd, Kirmán, Baghdád, Bombay, Calcutta and Paris. He himself operated out of Tíhrán where he had made a considerable

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<sup>6</sup>Moojan Momen, The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844-1944, p. 358.

<sup>7</sup>Safídvash, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>8</sup>Árbáb literally means landlord but it is used as a common title of respect among Zoroastrians. Zoroastrian Bahá'ís as well are sometimes referred to by this appellation.

profit in land speculation. His most significant business operations were as a sarráf<sup>9</sup> or traditional financier, an activity which brought a number of government officials under obligation to him. Later he served as the Zoroastrian representative to the First Majlis or parliament of Iran. Though some opposed Zoroastrian representation, Árbáb Jamshíd secured his position by bribing Siyyid "Abdu'llah Bihbahaní. Árbáb Jamshíd encouraged other Zoroastrians to move to Tihrán and work for him. If they were literate they were employed as clerks, otherwise they worked as agriculturalists on his extensive land holdings. Árbáb Jamshíd just as eagerly hired Bahá'ís of Zoroastrian background.

When Siyávash, after having fled from Qum, arrived in Tihrán, Árbáb Jamshíd received him graciously, fully aware of the circumstances behind his flight. Offering him every assistance, he expressed the

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<sup>9</sup>Most merchants were highly regarded in Írán for their integrity. Sarráfs were especially so. Gobineau described them in 1859:

. . . But in Persia merchants are, perhaps, the most respectable part of the population. They are regarded as being honest. Since they do not take unnecessary risks, and as merchants who have inherited a more or less substantial fortune which they will transmit to their sons, they are devoid of worldly ambition and above many forms of intrigue. They need public esteem and carefully cultivate it. As a result, this witty, skeptical, mocking, and distrustful people does not hesitate to entrust merchants with its money for investment; in this respect, merchants play the same part as European credit institutions. They therefore hold most of the capital in Persia, which gives them great importance in the eyes of the government, which is always harassed by financial obligations and which would not know what to do if they were not there to help out. The government borrows from them, but as the merchants lend funds which do not belong to them and for which they are responsible, they can advance money only on sound security; hence they often take over monopolies, or assignments or the revenues of certain provinces or precious stones or similar assets (cited in Charles Isaawi, Economic History of Iran, 1971, p. 36).

The above aptly describes the manner in which Árbáb Jamshíd operated and the reputation he held.



hope that Siyávash would choose to accept employment with him rather than return to Qum. Siyávash was disinclined to do this, since he preferred to return to his own textile business in Qum as soon as the situation settled. The governor of Qum, alarmed at the prospect of his return, wrote Árbáb Jamshíd and asked him to convince Siyávash to remain. Still, Siyávash would not be dissuaded until finally he received a letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahá urging him to remain in Tihrán at the service of Árbáb Jamshíd.<sup>10</sup>

The 1903 Bahá'í massacre in Yazd occurred while Siyávash was employed by Árbáb Jamshíd. Rumor reached Siyávash that Mullá Bahrám was among those killed. Though grieved over his death, Siyávash says that he was filled with joy that a Zoroastrian Bahá'í had attained the honor of martyrdom. Mullá Bahrám, as was mentioned in the last chapter, arrived in Tihrán, destitute but alive. Árbáb Jamshíd, who provided refuge to many of the victims fleeing the violence, asked Siyávash to present Mullá Bahrám to him. Mullá Bahrám, however, remembering his run-in with Árbáb Jamshíd some years ago in the incident which led to his expulsion from the Anjuman,<sup>11</sup> was quite reluctant to go. Having no alternative, he finally agreed and was received with open arms by Árbáb Jamshíd, who expressed his condolences saying, "Forget the past grief and be not afraid for the future, for in this house you will find food, bed and clothing."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Safídvash, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> See pages 40-42 of Chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> 'Azíz'u'lláh Sulaymání, Masábih-i-Hidáyat, Vol. 8, p. 425.

Mullá Bahrám joined Siyávash in assisting Árbáb Jamshíd in his business affairs. During the 14 years they worked for him, 'Abdu'l-Bahá corresponded with them frequently and urged them to serve Árbáb Jamshíd faithfully and praised this man's character. Knowing the extreme zealousness of Siyávash and of his desire to achieve martyrdom, 'Abdu'l-Bahá changed his name to Safídvash, so that unlike the hero Siyávash of the classic epic Shahname, Siyavash Safidvash would not meet an untimely death. Instead he was to regard service to Árbáb Jamshíd as service to 'Abdu'l-Baha.<sup>13</sup>

During the reign of Muḥammad 'Alí Sháh,<sup>14</sup> Jalálu'd-Dawlih again fell out of favor with the court as a result of his activities in the Constitutional struggle. Amír Bahadur Jang, one of the strong men of the court, told Árbáb Jamshíd that he should collect immediately on the considerable debt owed him by Jalálu'd-Dawlih. Accordingly, Árbáb Jamshíd rode out to the mansion of the prince accompanied by Mullá Bahrám and another armed servant. He stood outside the house and demanded that the money be brought out to him. Jalálu'd-Dawlih pleaded with him to come in and finally Árbáb Jamshíd agreed and entered the house with Mullá Bahrám, carrying a rifle with ammunition. Jalálu'd-Dawlih asked Mullá Bahrám to retire elsewhere but Árbáb Jamshíd would not allow it. They talked for a time then then finally left. The following day, Mullá Bahrám was directed to return to the house of Jalálu'd-Dawlih to deliver an envelope from Árbáb Jamshíd.

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<sup>13</sup>Safidvash, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>14</sup>Muḥammad 'Alí Sháh reigned from 1907-1909. This autocrat showed determined opposition to the Constitution and the Majlis, which he had bombarded. Eventually he was forced to abdicate.

Jalálu'd-Dawlih welcomed him in and conversed with him over four hours on religion and world affairs. As Mullá Bahrám arose to leave, however, Jalálu'd-Dawlih accused him of being responsible for all the difficulties into which he had fallen.

Eventually the government decided to try Jalálu'd-Dawlih on charges of corruption and oppression. Although a number of people had filed complaints against him, Jalálu'd-Dawlih was most concerned about the testimony which might be given against him by the Bahá'í victims of the disturbances in Yazd. This was especially so since Bahá'ís in America and Europe had widely disseminated news of the massacre in newspapers throughout the West and thereby embarrassed the court. But even more so he was fearful of Mullá Bahrám since he had found such a strong supporter in Árbáb Jamshíd. For this reason, Jalálu'd-Dawlih approached a number of prestigious Bahá'ís and asked them to persuade Mullá Bahrám not to testify at the upcoming trial. The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tíhrán<sup>15</sup> consulted on the matter and decided that the Bahá'ís could not afford to antagonize the family of Zillu's-Sultán<sup>16</sup> since they might rise to power again. Jalálu'd-Dawlih through Hájí Mírzá Maḥmud Afnán, promised to make reparations to Mullá Bahrám if the latter withdrew his complaint. In accordance with the advice of the Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly, Mullá Bahrám did not attend the trial.

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<sup>15</sup>See page 63 of Chapter 5.

<sup>16</sup>Zillu's-Sultán was the father of Jalálu'd-Dawlih. The eldest surviving son of Násiru'd-Dín Sháh, he was ineligible for the succession to the throne because his mother was not of royal blood. At one time he held the governorship of most of southern Írán. Jalálu'd-Dawlih ruled some of these provinces in his name, including Yazd. Bahá'ís hold Zillu's-Sultán and Jalálu'd-Dawlih responsible for the killing of numerous believers.

Jalálu'd-Dawlih failed to abide by his agreement with Mullá Bahrám. Therefore Mullá Bahrám wrote to Hájí Mírzá Mahmud Afnán seeking his intercession. The letter was forwarded to 'Abdu'l-Bahá who sent a letter through the Afnán to Jalálu'd-Dawlih threatening the latter with a great calamity if he did not fulfill his pledge. This had, at least partly, the desired effect, for Jalálu'd-Dawlih gave Mullá Bahrám some of what he owed. In the end the bulk of Jalálu'd-Dawlih's property was lost to Árbáb Jamshíd, including the village of 'Abbasábád. For a time Jalálu'd-Dawlih was exiled to Europe.<sup>17</sup>

Mullá Bahrám often appraised property for Árbáb Jamshíd. At one time Árbáb Jamshíd was appointed mediator in a dispute over a piece of property which was to be used to settle a debt. The owner of the property met Mullá Bahrám as he was in the process of appraising that property. He offered Mullá Bahrám a check six times the size of Mullá Bahrám's monthly salary in hopes the appraisal would cover his debts. Mullá Bahrám politely returned the check, suggesting they discuss it after the work was completed. Mullá Bahrám appraised the property well above what the owner had expected. Consequently, he presented Mullá Bahrám with an even larger sum. Mullá Bahrám returned this check as well, saying he had performed the task as an employee of Árbáb Jamshíd from whom he received an adequate salary.

Sometime later Mullá Bahrám's cousin was arrested in Yazd after the Anjuman had complained to the governor that he had buried his child according to Baha'í law. Mullá Bahrám went to the man whose property he

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<sup>17</sup>Sulaymání, op. cit., p. 431.

had appraised since he was a court official and might intercede. He arrived dressed, as was still his custom, in the yellow garb of a Zoroastrian. When one of the guests of this official spotted him, he insulted Mullá Bahrám and called to one of the guards to "throw the dog out." But the official welcomed him and insisted he take the seat of honor. Since the official remained standing the guests felt obligated to do likewise. Then the official said, "Mullá Bahrám, as a person who will not accept money should be worshipped. I am therefore among those under your will."

Greatly embarrassed, Mullá Bahrám rose and begged his host to sit down so that he might present his petition. After he related his difficulty, the official sent for his secretary and dictated a harshly worded telegram to be sent to the governor of Yazd demanding his release. Mullá Bahrám feared that such an offensive communication would arouse greater animosity so he asked permission to rewrite the telegram in a less offensive manner. This was done, and as a result of these efforts his cousin was released and the Anjuman reprimanded.<sup>18</sup>

According to Siyávash Safídvash, Árbáb Jamshíd eventually went bankrupt as a result of the attempts on the part of foreign bankers to discredit him. Several times they had spread rumors regarding his financial position in hopes people would withdraw their money in a panic.<sup>19</sup> At times government officials had to intervent to prevent this. Apparently the company was over-extended. In 1914 the Russian ruble was drastically devalued. Árbáb Jamshíd, who had invested a

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<sup>18</sup>Sulaymání, op. cit., p. 435.

<sup>19</sup>Safídvash, op. cit., p. 44.

great deal of money in this currency, found he could not sustain the loss. Unable to make his commitments to the Discount and Loan Bank and the Imperial Bank, Árbáb Jamshíd went bankrupt in 1915. He took refuge from his creditors with Riḏá Khán<sup>20</sup> who appointed a commission to dispose of Árbáb Jamshíd's affairs. Siyavash traveled extensively throughout the country and to India to liquidate the property of Árbáb Jamshíd. Árbáb Jamshíd never regained his former position, however he retained some of his real estate which was left to his children. Years later, when property values in Tihrán skyrocketed, the family again became quite wealthy. Mullá Bahrá́m served Árbáb Jamshíd until the bankruptcy, after which he remained in Tihrán, employed in agriculture. When he died in 1930 he was buried in the Bahá'í cemetery there.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Riḏá Khán, later known as Riḏá Sháh founded the Pahlavi Dynasty. While he effectively ruled the country at this time, he had not yet decided to crown himself Sháh.

<sup>21</sup>Sulaymání, op. cit., p. 435.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE EMERGENCE OF A DISTINCTIVE IDENTITY

Bahá'ís began developing separate social institutions in Írán during the early years of the Pahlavi regime which coincided with the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi's assumption of leadership of the Bahá'í Community in 1921. Some of these changes were initiated during the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They began with the formation of administrative bodies, known as Spiritual Assemblies, which consulted on the affairs of the community. The first Local Spiritual Assembly was established in Tíhrán in 1899 as an elected body composed of eleven members. Similar institutions developed throughout Írán and in the West as well. Bahá'ís in both within and outside of Írán continued to affiliate themselves with the religious community of their forefathers as long as they were accepted there. The particular tensions existing within the Zoroastrian Community of Yazd allowed Bahá'ís to do this much longer than was generally possible elsewhere. Separate Zoroastrian Bahá'í institutions developed alongside the traditional Zoroastrian ones, but were nonetheless considered Zoroastrian. Even when Bahá'ís found it necessary to make radical departures from Zoroastrian custom they succeeded in justifying it in Zoroastrian terms and sought support for them among other factions of the Zoroastrian Community. In so doing they initiated changes which markedly altered the character of the entire Zoroastrian Community.

### Initial Challenges to the Zoroastrian Clergy

Many years before Mullá Bahrám left for Tihrán his daughter died. Mullá Bahrám tried to take her corpse to the dakhma to be left exposed. The Zoroastrian clergy prevented his doing so by saying that since he was no longer a Zoroastrian he could not expect to be permitted access to their institutions. For two days the body remained at home until finally one of the more prestigious Zoroastrian laymen, Dínyár Kalántar, interceded on his behalf and forced the dasturs to perform the necessary rituals. As was the custom, Mullá Bahrám paid the dasturs in the presence of the assemblage which numbered about 400. The payment greatly exceeded what was usually given. Dínyár Kalántar protested, "Mullá Bahrám, what are you doing? Why are you giving so much? You are setting an example which will hurt the poor, for these dasturs are all very greedy. They will make you a precedent and demand from every poverty-stricken widow the same fee."

The room grew silent as all waited for Mullá Bahrám's response. The grief-stricken father answered, "Only a part of what I gave is the fee to which they are entitled. The rest is a gift in return for their letting me keep my poor daughter at home until I found consolation." His listeners were deeply affected by this speech. One of the dasturs regretted his actions and later became a Bahá'í.<sup>1</sup>

When Siyávash returned to Yazd around 1915, he experienced similar difficulties with the clergy. Siyávash had been researching Zoroastrian prophecies which he might relate to the Bahá'í Faith. In

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<sup>1</sup> Azíz'u'lláh Sulaymání, Masábih-i-Hidáyat, Vol. 8, pp. 397-399. Tihrán 1959.



the course of his studies he noticed some differences in the translations of Avestan texts he was using. In later translations, he noted, all references to prophecies regarding the coming of the Promised One had been omitted. Believing this omission to be deliberate, Siyávash began publishing pamphlets to that effect which were distributed amongst the Zoroastrian communities of Yazd, Tíhrán, Kirmán, Shíráz, Káshán, Bombay and Poona. The pamphlets, which I have not seen, consisted of:

1. Selections from the Avesta mentioning the differences between the various texts.
2. Selections from Guldast-i-Chuman regarding prophecies of the coming Manifestation.
3. Selections from the Dinkart.
4. Quotations from the Zoroastrian saints regarding the Manifestation.
5. The Chapter of Chetran from the Avesta according to memory.
6. Questions from the followers of the Good Religion regarding the Blessed Cause and the answers.
7. The beliefs of the author and nine questions from the dasturs and 'ulamá of religion.<sup>2</sup>

The publication of these pamphlets created such a stir that when Siyávash returned to Yazd, the dasturs posted a warning throughout Yazd and its environs, to all Zoroastrians, on pain of expulsion, not to associate with Siyávash lest he mislead the ignorant. A number of Zoroastrian Baha'is responded to this notice by writing a letter which

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<sup>2</sup>Siyávash Safídvash, Yadírin, 132 B.E. (1976) pp. 91-93.

argued that, since, as the notice claimed, the ignorant were so easily misled, it was necessary for all persons to become informed and investigate all matters fully for themselves so that no ignorance would remain.<sup>3</sup>

Soon afterwards Siyávash attempted to hold a gahambar or memorial feast in honor of his late father. He sent out invitations to attend along with the customary tray of fruit to the requisite nine mobads. The tray of fruit was refused, so Siyávash wrote to the chief priest, Dastur-i-Dasturan Námđár for advice as to what to do. Dastur Námđár responded by saying that since Siyávash was an avowed Bahá'í he was not entitled to the services of the Zoroastrian clergy. Siyávash therefore made arrangements to hold the ceremony without the assistance of the mobads. This action greatly agitated the clergy, who began preaching against Siyávash in their fire-temples. Fearful for his safety, Siyávash notified the governor and the chief of police. The latter called in the dasturs and prohibited any further rallies against the Bahá'ís. The Anjuman-i-Naşri of both Yazd and Tihran finally had to intercede, although Siyávash does not mention in what manner.<sup>4</sup>

#### Marriage Dispute

After this incident, Siyávash knew he could not expect the dasturs to officiate at the marriage of his brother Mihrabán Tashakur. In Siyávash's view this "worked for the good of the Bahá'í Community because it allowed them to distinguish themselves, acquire independence

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 97-98.

and released them from the shackles of past religions."<sup>5</sup> He considered it 'wise' (hikmat), however, to approach the problem through the proper channels so that the Bahá'ís would be immune from criticism for their subsequent actions. They wrote to Dastur Námádár and asked him clearly to state his position on the performance of marriage ceremonies for Zoroastrian Bahá'ís. When after two or three requests, no reply was received, the Baha'is asked for a decision from the Anjuman. After much debate, the Anjuman decided to send a delegation to the dasturs to negotiate for the marriage. Among those sent were Ustád Javánmard Shírmard, a Bahá'í and Ustád Master Khudábaksh, president of the Anjuman, who was highly sympathetic towards Bahá'ís. The delegation failed to reach compromise with the dasturs who adamantly refused to perform the ceremony. When the delegation issued its report, the Anjuman ruled that the marriage could be performed by a layman familiar with Avestan since their scriptures did not explicitly state that it must be performed by a dastur.

Over 100 respected Zoroastrians attended the marriage ceremony including several members of the Anjuman. Before the actual ceremony was performed, a letter from the Parsi agent, Ardishír Jí Sáhíb was read urging unity and reconciliation between all Zoroastrians. Then an announcement prepared by the groom was read:

Dear Brothers:

Be aware that the dasturs, particularly Dastur Námádár, have refused to officiate this marriage contract despite the advice of Anjuman and its respected leaders. Since nowhere in the Avesta does it say that a person, without the assistance of a

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

dastur, cannot be married according to Zoroastrian law, any Zoroastrian layman may perform the ceremony. Therefore today with joy and happiness, the marriage of Mihraban and Furangis, daughter of Hushang will be officiated by Fírúz Tirandaz. My hope is that in the future all of the Zoroastrian laymen will henceforth be aware of their own religion in order that all affairs and matters may be taken into their own hands and done by them.<sup>6</sup>

Aside from the absence of the dasturs, the Bahá'ís were careful to perform the ceremony in accordance with Zoroastrian custom. No mention is made of using Bahá'í formula for marriage as ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas by Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>7</sup> Before performing the ceremony, Fírúz Tirandaz approached one of the mujtahids, Mír Muḥammad 'Alí Labkhandagi in order to forestall any complaints the dasturs might make to the authorities. He asked the mujtahid to issue a fitwa stating what the obligation of a Zoroastrian would be if the dasturs refused to sign a marriage contract. The mujtahid stated that such a marriage could then be performed in the presence of two witnesses.

The dasturs, unaware of Fírúz Tirandaz's prior contact, went to the same mujtahid after the ceremony and complained that this man, who had become a Bábí, was now performing marriage ceremonies contrary to the laws of their religion and was interfering in the affairs of the dasturs. They asked him to issue a fitwa for his execution. The mujtahid responded, that in his opinion, both Bahá'ís and dasturs were equally kafir. The dasturs' action came to the attention of the Anjuman, who were incensed that dasturs would seek an execution order against a

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<sup>6</sup>Safídvash, op. cit., pp. 105-106.

<sup>7</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, The Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Universal House of Justice 1973) pp. 39-40.

Zoroastrian from a mujtahid, and thus perhaps, set a dangerous precedent. They summoned the dasturs and demanded an explanation. The dasturs denied having done so. The Anjuman contacted the mujtahid who confirmed the story and said they had accused Fírúz Tirandaz of being a Bábí.<sup>8</sup>

This incident posed a serious threat to the position of the dasturs since, by denying their ritual necessity, the Anjuman had challenged the very basis of their priestly power. Thus the situation was indicative, not only of the tensions existing between the Bahá'í converts and the traditional Zoroastrians but of those existing between the orthodox clergy and the secular reformers as represented by the Anjuman. This latter group not only showed sympathy towards Bahá'ís, but Bahá'ís played an important role in making up and shaping this group. Nevertheless, the support of this group for the Bahá'ís was never unqualified. At times they sided with the dasturs, usually when the relationships Zoroastrian Bahá'ís had created with those outside the Zoroastrian community seemed to threaten the integrity of that community. When the activities of Zoroastrian Bahá'ís appeared aimed at the reformation of the Zoroastrian community, they were readily accepted by the lay leadership. When their loyalties tended towards the Bahá'í community as a whole, all Zoroastrians might perceive them as a threat.

The dasturs agreed to perform the next gahambar held by Zoroastrian Bahá'ís. During the feast, one of the mobads became abusive and encouraged the children present to curse the Bahá'í Faith. A complaint was issued to both Dastur Námdár and the local government

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<sup>8</sup> Safídvash, op. cit., pp. 106-107.

officials. Finally, the priest sent a messenger to offer his apologies. Siyávash accepted the apology on behalf of the Bahá'ís and sent the messenger back with copies of the Bahá'í writings. He also sent Dastur Námár a number of Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá written on the subject of the elimination of prejudice. For awhile after this, the situation remained calm and Bahá'ís were able to hold separate meetings, feasts, and children's classes undisturbed.<sup>9</sup>

#### Funeral Dispute

As tensions between the Anjuman and the clergy had allowed Zoroastrian Bahá'ís to perform their own marriage ceremonies, they also permitted the Bahá'ís to acquire their own cemetery. When the mother of Siyávash suffered a stroke, a mobad came to call on her. Taking Siyávash aside, he threatened him saying, "You Bahá'ís have yourselves performed your own marriages and thus interfered in the work of the dasturs. What will you do if your mother dies and they don't let her into the dakhma?" Siyávash's mother overheard the conversation. Despite her illness and pain she shouted back at the mobad that she would have nothing to do with either dakhmas or dasturs. When she died she intended to be buried according to Bahá'í law and would not forgive her children if they did anything else.

As it was she lived an additional 23 years. But the Bahá'ís now realized that since the dasturs had been unable to achieve their purpose by withholding their services to Bahá'ís at gahambars and marriages, they would try again, as they had with Mullá Bahrám, to prevent the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid. pp. 108-109.

Bahá'ís from having access to the dakhmas. The Zoroastrian Bahá'ís consulted together and decided to form a vaqf or religious foundation in order to establish their own cemetery. This cemetery was given the same name as was applied to Bahá'í cemeteries throughout Írán, Gulistán-i-Jávid or Eternal Garden. The Zoroastrian Bahá'ís received a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá applauding their efforts to end what he termed the noxious practice of leaving dead bodies exposed to vultures and scavengers. He urged them, however, to proceed with the utmost caution and not provide the dasturs with any excuse to create further disturbances.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, the Bahá'ís wrote to the great dastur of Kirman, Kay-Khusraw-i-Rustam and asked his opinion on the matters under dispute. This is a part of his response:

Q: If a Zoroastrian layman has a gahambar and a dastur is not available or refuses to come, may this duty still be performed?

A: Any Zoroastrian layman who can read the Avesta may perform the ceremonies.

Q: Regarding marriage, if a mobad is not available or refuses to come, what is the Mazdean law?

A: In my opinion, if a mobad is not available or refuses to come, any Zoroastrian who reads Zend may read the prayers of blessing in the presence of the faithful and thereby fulfill the conditions and requirements. In order to join two parties, the basic requirement is the presence of two witnesses.

Q: What was the custom of the dakhma at the time of Zoroastor and the status of burial?

A: As determined by the Holy Text, the status of burial in the time of this great personage was as follows: According to the Dinkart, the body was left in a stone crypt far from human habitation. The dakhma was made of stone, chalk, clay and mud, far from any settlement that the body may be meat for the vultures. But in ancient times it was preferrable to make a crypt out of a single stone in the hills and close off the top. This is clearly not contrary to the Good Religion. Many such crypts were the burial places of kings. As I understand it, usually the dakhma included the poor and as much as

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid. p. 121.

possible limited the contamination of the land and water supply. It is not opposed to religion to bury the dead in a place surrounded by stone, with the top closed providing it is far from any habitation.<sup>11</sup>

Siyávash states in autobiography that the Bahá'ís sought this opinion from the dastur of Kirmán to forestall any opposition which might arise. He considered it important as well, to establish that Bahá'ís did not believe it was right to treat the God's religion as something to be manipulated according to one's own desires. Therefore, the Bahá'ís sought to prove they were acting in accordance with Zoroastrian law.<sup>12</sup> Apparently the Bahá'ís had not made sufficient inroads into the Zoroastrian community of Kirmán to pose any threat to the priesthood there. Hence the dastur demonstrated no antagonism towards the Bahá'ís (if in fact, he knew them to be so). In appealing to an outside authority, the Bahá'ís were once again undermining the dasturs of Yazd. From the letter it would appear that the dastur of Kirmán was unusually liberal in his thinking and had broadly based education. In all likelihood, he was chosen for that reason.

The Anjuman vigorously supported the decision of this dastur, much to the dismay of the priests in Yazd. The dasturs began to hold rallies at the fire temples again and wrote tracts refuting his position in regards to burial. A member of the Anjuman responded to those tracts:

If none but a dastur can perform religious ceremonies, all the Zoroastrians of Tihrán are doomed to hell and their children are illegitimate, for their ceremonies in Tihrán are performed

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-114.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 112.



by Ardishir Rustam Kuchabih. The same is true for the Zoroastrians of London, China and America. It it be argued that this is allowed out of necessity and emergency; the same would hold true in a situation in which the dastur opposes it. . . . In any case the guardianship of the dakhma rests with Anjuman . . . .<sup>13</sup>

Further to consolidate their position, the Bahá'ís obtained a document stating the position taken by one of the dasturs of India. This statement was originally made in English, but one of the Baha'is translated it into Persian to distribute around Yazd. The author, Jiyun Jí Madí, stated that while he was in Europe in 1889 he became acquainted with the principles of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>14</sup> From what he had studied of it, he believed one could easily be both a Bahá'í and a Zoroastrian just as one could be a Sufi or a Freemason and still be a Zoroastrian. As far as he could tell, the Bahá'í Faith was not a religion but a philosophy which encouraged greater freedom for men and women and discouraged religious fanaticism and ignorance. Therefore, as long as a Bahá'í wore the sadri and kushti and followed the teachings and laws of Zoroaster, he was to be considered a Zoroastrian. The dastur noted that some Bahá'ís had discarded these customs, but such persons were neither good Bahá'ís nor good Zoroastrians. As to their beliefs about prophesies concerning the Saoyshants and Sháh Bahrám, the Bahá'ís were clearly confused since the Báb could not possibly be one of those, and none of their leaders was conceived in a lake as the Sayoshants would be. Nevertheless, their error here was certainly not

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid. p. 115.

<sup>14</sup>He must have heard of it from non-Bahá'ís as the religion had not yet spread to Europe.

serious enough to exclude them from the community.<sup>15</sup> While Siyávash states this document was not indicative of the actual views held by Bahá'ís of the time, they nonetheless were willing to utilize the statement in their disputes with the dasturs of Yazd.<sup>16</sup>

Isfandiýár Gushtásp donated the land for the cemetery, which consisted of a walled garden located not far from the dakhma. The Bahá'ís made crypts out of six stones which were placed on all sides. In the ground, they imbedded chalk. Ustád Javánmard drafted the vaqf document which was taken to the mujtahid, Labkhandagi. The mujtahid changed the wording and instead issued the document in terms which were quite offensive. In some ways it was indicative of relations between Muslims and minorities in Yazd at the time:

It is the custom of the Zoroastrian sect not to bury their dead, be they men or women, young or old, nor do they cover their faces even if she be a woman. Rather it is given to a stranger to be placed in a remote place or a dakhma or on a stone, exposed to the sun and moon and all the elements, to become meat for vultures who eat what is unclean and et al. Anyone with a little insight and understanding would feel the greatest revulsion and surprise at this custom, although history shows that in the past they were not always this way and did not always despise their dead in this manner. Now, little by little, this group has come to understand the offensiveness of this behavior and are embarrassed by it compared to the good rules of the Muslims. Long ago they adopted the vaqf and oftentimes they likewise seek the assistance of Muslims for their marriage ceremonies. It is now their intention to do the same in regards to burial. Therefore, in obedience to Islám, Isfandiýár Ibn Gushtásp Ibn Sirúsh Qásimábádí, in my presence, by his own free will, in a true Islámic manner, has established this vaqf. . . .<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>See Appendix G.

<sup>16</sup>Safídvash, op. cit., pp. 124-125.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. pp. 118-119.

A copy of this document was forwarded to Tīhrán and confirmed by the 'ulamá there while another copy remained in the files of the Gulistán-i-Javíd Foundation. Meanwhile the dasturs took steps to stir up agitation against the cemetery among the surrounding villages. Finally the dasturs decided to tear down the cemetery walls themselves and then desecrate the gravesites. The Bahá'ís discovered their plan and asked the Anjuman to request that the government post a guard to protect the site. The government sent several horsemen to guard the cemetery during the day, but after they left at night the dasturs came under the pretense that they were reading scriptures at the dakhma. They broke into the cemetery and destroyed the gravestones. When the Bahá'ís discovered the damage the next day, they reported the incident to the Anjuman. The dasturs insisted they had nothing to do with it. Fírúz Tirandaz went to the surrounding villages and questioned the peasants. The villagers told him that the dasturs themselves had vandalized the cemetery. In this case the Anjuman, in order to downplay the incident, asked Isfandiyyár Gushtasp to drop all charges and paid him for the damages.<sup>18</sup>

Other incidents of vandalism occurred. At one point four mobads set the cemetery gate on fire and desecrated the graves. This time the government tried to intervene but the priests along with a more conservative faction of the Anjuman succeeded in obtaining amnesty for those accused. Another time the dasturs again sought to obtain an execution order from the 'ulamá against the Bahá'ís for establishing their own cemetery, but the previous action of the Bahá'ís in obtaining a vaqf

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. p. 122.

document forestalled that attempt. The dasturs laid plans for more extreme measures.

### The Assassination of Ustád Máster Khudábaksh

Deeply concerned over the rapidly deteriorating situation existing within the Zoroastrian community of Yazd, Ardishír Jí Sáhí, the Parsi agent came from Tihrán to Yazd to effect a reconciliation. He called for a meeting of the entire Zoroastrian community, including the Zoroastrian Bahá'ís. In a passionate speech, he urged both groups to maintain their unity with one another. He mentioned that he had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá two years before and extolled his character and knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

Still, the tension steadily worsened. The dasturs and conservative elements of the community began to aim their attack directly at liberal members of the Anjuman who strongly sympathized with the Bahá'ís. Foremost among these was Ustád Máster Khudábaksh, president of the Anjuman. Khudábaksh, though born in Yazd, had emigrated with his family to Bombay during the famine of 1870-1871. He received his education from the Parsis and then returned to Yazd to teach at the Zoroastrian school, Dabirestan Kay Khusrawví. Regarded as the leader of the liberal faction of Zoroastrian laymen, he opposed the ritual sacrifices, supported calendar changes,<sup>20</sup> and favored limitations on the power of the clergy. A society, Majma-i-Hazshinás wa Haqquy-i-Yazd, was formed to

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>The ritual calendars followed by the Zoroastrians of Írán and India were discovered to be a month apart in the 18th century. Further research determined both were incorrect so a new seasonal calendar was devised which excited much opposition both in Írán and India.

oppose these reforms as well as the activities of the Bahá'ís. The society commissioned an assassin, Fereydún Rustam Kirmání, to kill both Máster Khudábaksh and Fírúz Tirandaz. Fereydún Rustam came to the door of Fírúz Tirandaz disguised as a telegram man. Fírúz opened the door, then suddenly became suspicious and closed it. Fereydún Rustam riddled the door with bullets and then fled the scene. Fírúz Tirandaz suffered no injuries. The next day Fereydún Rustam shot Khudábaksh through the head as he was headed for the school. The Majma sent a threatening letter 18 days later to Ustád Kayomarz,<sup>21</sup> Khudábaksh's co-worker, who had excited their opposition by offering free education to the poor. Kayomarz fled to Bombay. The assassin was eventually arrested. Rustam Dastur and Árbáb Kay Khusraw intervened on his behalf and arranged for him to be allowed to escape. The Zoroastrians later constructed a memorial containing a burning lamp at the site of Máster Khudábaksh's assassination.<sup>22</sup> The Bahá'ís themselves regarded Máster Khudábaksh as a martyr and believed his sympathy towards the Bahá'ís was the major reason he was assassinated. 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent a letter to the Zoroastrian Bahá'ís according him the station of a Bahá'í martyr despite the fact it was recognized he was never a Bahá'í. His descendants became Bahá'ís.<sup>23</sup>

The assassination proved a serious miscalculation on the part of the conservatives, for while they may have succeeded in terrorizing

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<sup>21</sup>Ustád Kayomarz was a student of Ustád Javanmard.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid. pp. 127-129.

<sup>23</sup>Michael Fischer, "Zoroastrian Iran: Between Myth and Praxis." Unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago, 1973, pp. 108-109.

some of liberal faction of the Zoroastrian community, they irreparably undermined the moral credibility of the Zoroastrian clergy. From this point on the power and authority of the priesthood disintegrated rapidly and the Anjuman assumed almost complete leadership of the Zoroastrian community.

The Integration of Zoroastrian Bahá'ís with  
the Larger Bahá'í Community

As the Zoroastrian Bahá'ís began to develop separate institutions, the instances of Zoroastrian conversions lessened considerably and soon became isolated incidents. During the 1920s and 30s Zoroastrian Bahá'í institutions began to merge with those of the larger Bahá'í community of Yazd. The bulk of Bahá'í administrative institutions developed under the leadership of the Western-educated grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, who headed the Bahá'í community from 1921-1958. Since the Bahá'í Faith was never officially recognized in Írán, some of the functions of those institutions were carried out by means of private companies. Siyávash assisted in the establishment of one such company, Sharkat-i-Parsian, which operated both in Írán and Bombay. For 60 years communications between the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Írán were relayed through that company which also administered the financial affairs of the community.<sup>24</sup>

In 1925 an Egyptian court annulled the marriages of three Bahá'í men with Muslim wives on the grounds they were now apostates. The verdict read:

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<sup>24</sup> Safídvash, op. cit., pp. 127-128.

The Bahá'í Faith is a new religion, entirely independent, with beliefs, principles and laws of its own, which differ from, and are utterly in conflict with the beliefs, principles and laws of Islám. No Bahá'í therefore, can be regarded a Muslim or vice-versa, even as no Buddhist, Brahmin, or Christian can be regarded a Muslim or vice-versa.<sup>25</sup>

Shoghi Effendi seized upon this decision as an opportunity to urge the Bahá'í community towards greater independence. As in the case of the Zoroastrian community, the move towards distinctive identity in social institutions and community relations in the Bahá'í Faith was forced by its opponents yet welcomed by the Bahá'ís. Shoghi Effendi wrote of the significance of Egyptian court decision and the reaction of the Bahá'í community (which he determined):

This declaration of portentous significance . . . once and for all, silences those detractors, including Christian ecclesiastics in the West, who have in the past stigmatized that Faith as a cult, as a Bábí sect and an offshoot of Islám or represented it as a synthesis of religions- such a declaration was acclaimed by all communities in the East and in the West as the first Charter of the emancipation of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh from the fetters of Islámic orthodoxy, the first historic step taken . . . on the road leading to its ultimate and world-wide recognition.<sup>26</sup>

Shoghi Effendi had the decision translated into several languages and circulated in Baha'i communities throughout the world, where it was used as evidence to secure official recognition from authorities of the independent nature of the Bahá'í Faith. In Egypt Bahá'ís were granted full legal status as a separate community and were allowed to establish their own religious courts to determine matters of personal status. Similar gains were made in obtaining recognition in America, India and Palestine.

<sup>25</sup>Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By (Bahá'í Publishing Committee, Wilmette 1944) p. 365.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. p. 366.

Shoghi Effendi urged the Bahá'ís in Írán to resist, from now on, any attempt to have them classified as Muslim, Christian, Jew or Zoroastrian and not to refer any matters of personal status to their courts. They were also forbidden to accept any ecclesiastical post associated with those religions. Most of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas were now enforced, including those relating to marriage, divorce, inheritance, burial, and the prohibition of opium and alcohol. Birth and marriage certificates were issued under the seal of Bahá'í Assemblies, and common burial grounds were established throughout the country, many of them through Siyávash Safídvash. The marriages performed by Bahá'í institutions had no government recognition, which often created difficulties for the Bahá'ís. The Bahá'ís refused to be registered under the name of another religion on their government documents. Finally the civil authorities removed all references to religion on the passports issued to Íránian subjects and gave tacit permission for Bahá'ís in some instances to leave the religious columns blank on other documents.<sup>27</sup>

During the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the American Bahá'í community sent teachers to Tíhrán to establish a Bahá'í school system in Írán. Some of the children of Riqá Sháh received their elementary education at these schools.<sup>28</sup> The government closed these schools in 1934 after the Bahá'ís observed one of their holy days which was unauthorized by the state. For a time many of the Bahá'í children enrolled in the private schools in preference to those of the state. The Zoroastrian

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 369-371.

<sup>28</sup> Amin Banani, The Modernization of Iran, 1921-1941 (Stanford University Press 1961) pp. 96-97.



schools were especially favored, as they were operated on a British model. By law, all students were required to take an hour of religious instruction each day. A Bahá'í informant who attended the Zoroastrian school in Tihrán told me that during this period a Muslim teacher was brought in to teach the Muslim students; the Zoroastrian students had separate Zoroastrian classes and the Armenians played on the soccer field. Bahá'ís, even those of Zoroastrian background were forced to attend the Qur'anic classes. Another informant who went to a school not run by the Zoroastrians told me he was forced to attend the Zoroastrian classes and was punished severely when he insisted he was a Bahá'í.

In 1938 Shoghi Effendi, in a letter to the American Bahá'í community, urged Bahá'ís to give preferential treatment to minorities on their administrative bodies and strive diligently for the elimination of prejudice.<sup>29</sup> While in the American context this referred specifically to racial prejudice, when portions of this letter were translated and distributed in Írán they were applied to those Bahá'ís of Zoroastrian, Christian or Jewish descent. Intermarriage was officially encouraged although it was still somewhat rare. From my interviews I gained the impression that the families of Bahá'ís of minority background were more inclined to resist such marriages than those of Muslim background. The Bahá'í law requiring parental consent to a marriage probably slowed a process which might have otherwise proceeded more rapidly. Intermarriages are more common in Tihrán than in the provincial cities and become quite common when Bahá'ís emigrate from Írán.

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<sup>29</sup>Shoghi Effendi, Advent of Divine Justice (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1971) pp. 28-34.

There are no restrictions on marriages with non-Bahá'ís, but they are not encouraged. When I interviewed older Iránian Bahá'ís who had recently emigrated to the United States they told me they preferred that their children would marry an Iránian Bahá'í but it did not matter to them what their background was. They recognized this might not be possible in the United States so they were willing to accept an American Bahá'í. Most said they would not consent to a marriage with a non-Bahá'í.

Name changes indicate some of the changes which have occurred within the Bahá'í community of Irán and their success in assimilating minorities. Both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá bestowed titles on a number of Bahá'ís which later became the families' surname. The giving of these names did not necessarily coincide with the conversion itself. A prominent Bahá'í might have several such titles bestowed on him in his lifetime. The names were generally not such as would readily distinguish them from the community to which they came. All the Zoroastrian converts seen in this study were given titles of pure Persian origin. Over the years the surnames derived from these titles became recognized as Bahá'í names. Other surnames might be derived from words denoting key concepts in the Bahá'í Faith. First names might likewise be taken from such key words but it was also common to give children the names of important heroes and martyrs of their religion. In this manner Bahá'ís of Zoroastrian background might acquire names of Arabic origin such as Vahíd or Nabil. In some cases Bahá'ís of Zoroastrian background were deliberately given names of Arabic derivation having no particular significance to Bahá'ís just to insure they would not be

discriminated against as Zoroastrians. At the same time, Bahá'ís of Muslim background often adopted the Iranian fashion of preferring pure Persian names. In the older Bahá'í cemeteries one could readily identify the religious background of the one buried there. Sometimes the gravestone mentioned his origin directly but if not his name would identify it. In the newer Bahá'í cemeteries, I am told, this is nearly impossible to ascertain.

Even when Zoroastrian Bahá'ís ceased to conduct themselves as Zoroastrians, Muslims within Iran remained unable to recognize their independent identity, but since these converts were clearly no longer part of the Zoroastrian community, Muslims regarded them as they did other Bahá'ís in Iran, as apostate Muslims.

In 1958 Siyávash Safídvash, having spent several years as a Bahá'í pioneer (muhájir)<sup>30</sup> in Gurgán, died and was secretly buried in the Bahá'í cemetery which he had established there. When the Muslim 'ulamá discovered this, they complained to the authorities that he had been buried without proper Muslim rites.<sup>31</sup> This incident indicates the degree to which Zoroastrian Bahá'ís were indistinguishable from other Bahá'ís.

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<sup>30</sup> Muhájir has almost the opposite meaning amongst Bahá'ís as it does to Muslims. In Islám a muhájir is one who moves from non-Islámic lands to a Muslim community while in the Bahá'í Faith it denotes one who moves from a larger Bahá'í community to a place with no or few Bahá'ís in order to propagate the religion.

<sup>31</sup> Safídvash, op. cit., pp. 174-175.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This study has explored one aspect of the process which led to the development of the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion, namely the appeal to non-Muslims. In the period between 1852-1875 an important transformation occurred within the Bábí movement, out of which the Bahá'í Faith emerged. During this period the Bábís were subject to fierce persecution which forced them underground. Many of them developed attitudes of antipathy towards the Muslim establishment and ceased to identify themselves with Muslims. Instead they began to sympathize and associate with other religious minorities in Írán. As in the case of the Parsi agent, Mánakjí, circumstances often forced Bahá'ís to seek the protection of the Western or westernized protectors of these minorities.

The theological changes introduced by Bahá'u'lláh facilitated the process which would attract minorities to the Bahá'í Faith. The militant posture which Bábís had assumed from Islám was repudiated and replaced by a political pacifism similar to that of other religious minorities in Írán. Doctrines regarding ritual uncleanliness were discarded, thus easing social relations with those minorities. In claiming to be the Promised One of all religions, Bahá'u'lláh set a pattern for relating to those of other religions by seeking to affirm

the religious heritage of other persons and presenting Bahá'u'lláh as its culmination. This attitude both transformed the behavior of Muslim Bahá'ís towards the religious minorities and attracted those minorities to the new religion, to whom it presented such a striking contrast to the behavior exhibited by other Muslims.

Although prepared theologically to receive non-Muslims, Bahá'ís made no specific attempt to promulgate actively their religion among Zoroastrians. It did not even occur to the early Bahá'ís that Zoroastrians might be inclined to their religion. Close association rather than active proselytization attracted the first Zoroastrian converts to the Bahá'í Faith. Those Zoroastrian Bahá'ís then took it upon themselves to promulgate aggressively, their new religion among their former co-religionists.

While Bahá'ís had adopted affirming attitudes in relating with other religions, the specific content of those relationships depended on the challenges and issues raised by those minorities themselves. Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy, for instance, acquired significance only when Zoroastrians began to inquire about it. Likewise, Bahá'ís interpreted only those Zoroastrian prophecies which Zoroastrians themselves presented.

Zoroastrians of Írán in the 19th century depended on their relations with the Muslim community for many of the components of their own identity. This inevitably led to a negative self-image since Zoroastrians were despised, humiliated and restricted to low-status professions such as farming. The clergy likewise was poorly educated,

knowledgeable only in the performance of specified rituals and the recitation of the holy texts which they read without understanding.

The reforms generated by the Parsi agents in the latter half of the century helped create a new educated and mercantile elite. Religious reforms, however, failed to keep pace with social and economic change. By associating themselves with the Parsi agents and this elite, Bahá'ís succeeded in presenting themselves as the ideological alternative to the traditional Zoroastrian establishment. Unlike the Parsis, Bahá'í drew upon paradigms common to Íránians of most religious backgrounds. Paramount among those paradigms was the role suffering and persecution was thought to play in legitimatizing a religion. In many ways the Bahá'í Faith created less dissonance than reforms which might be generated from Bombay.

The earliest Zoroastrian converts to the Bahá'í Faith were drawn from the aforementioned mercantile elite. Those conversions were catalytic to others who included their relatives and lower status Zoroastrians with whom they associated. Initially, these converts did not distinguish themselves from other Zoroastrians in regards to lifestyle, place of residence, and communal rituals. Since Bahá'ís were subject to fierce persecution and had not developed the distinctive features of their own social life, Zoroastrian Bahá'ís found it necessary to secure their own safety and position by continuing to affiliate themselves with the larger Zoroastrian community. The conversion process itself depended on the ability of Bahá'ís to keep boundaries between the religions open and fluid.

While Zoroastrian Baha'is continued to abide by the customary laws of their ancestral religion and supported its institutions, they at the same time associated freely with Bahá'ís who were outside the Zoroastrian community. In so doing they violated the unspoken ethno-religious boundaries which restricted relations between members of separate communities to largely economic ones. This excited the opposition of many Zoroastrians against the Bahá'ís, especially the clergy. For the most part merchant and professional classes within the Zoroastrian community regarded the Bahá'ís as progressive members of the community and showed no reluctance in appointing Bahá'ís to positions of leadership.

Gradually, Zoroastrian Bahá'ís began to establish separate institutions alongside the traditional Zoroastrian ones. Still Zoroastrian Bahá'ís sought to justify their departures from Zoroastrian customs in terms of Zoroastrian law and appealed to reforming elements of the community to support them. In so doing they markedly altered the character of the entire Zoroastrian community, discrediting the Zoroastrian clergy, and allowing the secular elite to assume effective leadership. Zoroastrian Bahá'ís did not finally separate themselves from the Zoroastrian community until that community itself ceased to recognize them as Zoroastrians.

In general four phases were involved in the emergence of a distinctive Bahá'í identity. In the first phase the Bahá'í Faith dissociated itself from the traditional religious establishment and ceased to derive its identity from it. In the second phase it began to appeal to those outside its original religious matrix. This occurred

while others had not yet recognized the religion as independent and before its boundaries were fixed. In the third phase there was a process of assimilation and integration wherein the various elements of the new religion were brought together and merged into a single community. In this process all elements of that community were altered. Finally the perceptions of outsiders toward the new religion changed to the point that they regarded Bahá'ís as separate from themselves and excluded them from participation in their own community. In accepting these boundaries, the Bahá'í Faith acquired its fully distinctive identity. With the rigidity of boundaries, the incidence of conversion slowed.

This study points to a number of social factors involved in religious conversion movements. These conversions seem to be predicated by radical, usually positive social change which necessitates an ideational change as well. Identity perceptions must be adjusted to reflect the reality of the new situation, yet the religious institutions tend to function to perpetuate themselves and therefore resist change. Given this situation, religious conversion is often the only alternative. Conversion will be towards the alternative which supports the improvements made and removes perceptual blocks to it, and at the same time least disrupts other still functional aspects of life and thought, drawing upon familiar and still useful paradigms.



## APPENDIX A

### THE MASSACRE OF 1852: A EUROPEAN ACCOUNT

The most dramatic account of the executions of the Bábís in 1852 is given in a letter written by Captain Alfred von Gumoens, an Austrian officer who was employed by the Sháh but resigned in disgust after witnessing these events.

Dear Friend, My last letter on the 20th inst. mentioned the attempt on the King. I will now communicate to you the result of the interrogation to which the two criminals were subjected. In spite of the terrible tortures inflicted, the examination extorted no comprehensive confession; the lips of the fanatics remained closed, even when by means of red-hot pincers and limb-rending screws they sought to discover the chief conspirator. All that transpired was that they belonged to the Bábí sect. These Bábís are heretics; though they pray to the Prophet (sic!), yet they differ in many usages from the orthodox Musulmans. This sect was founded about fifteen years ago by a certain Báb, who was shot by the King's command. The most faithful of his adherents fled to Zanzan, where, two years ago, they were reduced by the Royal Troops, and, as was generally believed, were exterminated without regard for age or sex. Like all religious intolerance, this unmeasured persecution produced exactly the opposite of the effects intended. The Báb's teaching gained more and more ground, and is at the present moment diffused throughout the whole country. Since the government obstinately clung to the system of persecution, the schismatics found occasion to steel their resolution, and develop qualities which, contrasted with the effeminate luxury of the State Religion, compelled respect. Very skilfully had the Prophet (i.e., the Báb) pointed out to the disciples of his teaching that the way to Paradise lay through the torture-chamber. If he spoke truly, then the present Shah has deserved great merit, for he strenuously endeavours to people all the realms of the Saints with Bábís! His last edict still further enjoins on the Royal servants the annihilation of the sect. If these followed the Royal command and rendered harmless such of the fanatics as are arrested by inflicting on them a swift and lawful death, one must needs, from the Oriental standpoint,

approve of this; but the manner of inflicting the sentence, the circumstances which precede the end, the agonies which consume the bodies of the victims until their life is extinguished in the last convulsion are so horrible that the blood curdles in my veins if I now endeavour to depict the scene for you, even in outline. Innumerable blows with sticks which fall heavily on the back and soles of the feet, brandings of different parts of the body with red-hot irons, are such usual inflictions that the victim who undergoes only such caresses is to be accounted fortunate. But follow me my friend, you who lay claim to a heart and European ethics, follow me to the unhappy ones who, with gouged-out eyes, must eat, on the scene of the deed, without any sauce, their own amputated ears; or whose teeth are torn out with inhuman violence by the hand of the executioner; or whose bare skulls are simply crushed by blows from a hammer; or when the bázár is illuminated with unhappy victims, because on the right and left the people dig deep holes in their breasts and shoulders and insert burning wicks in the wounds. I saw some dragged in chains through the bázár, preceded by a military band, in whom these wicks had burned so deep that now the fat flickered convulsively in the wound like a newly-extinguished lamp.

Not seldom it happens that the unwearied ingenuity of the Orientals leads to fresh tortures. They will skin the soles of the Bábís feet, soak the wounds in boiling oil, shoe the foot like the hoof of a horse, and compel the victim to run. No cry escaped from the victim's breast; the torment is endured in dark silence by the numbed sensation of the fanatic; now he must run; the body cannot endure what the soul has endured; he falls. Give him the coup de grâce! Put him out of his pain! No! The executioner swings the whip, and- I myself have had to witness it- the unhappy victim of hundred-fold tortures runs! This is the beginning of the end. As for the end itself, they hang the scorched and perforated bodies by their hands and feet to a tree head downwards, and now every Persian may try his marksmanship to his heart's content from a fixed but not too proximate distance on the noble quarry placed at his disposal. I saw corpses torn by nearly 150 bullets. The more fortunate suffered strangulation, stoning or suffocation: They were bound before the muzzle of a mortar, cut down with swords or killed with dagger thrusts, or blows from hammers and sticks. Not only the executioner and the common people took part in the massacre; sometimes Justice would present some of the unhappy Bábís to various dignitaries and the Persian (recipient) would be well content, deeming it an honour to imbrue his own hands in the blood of the pinioned and defenceless victim. Infantry, cavalry, artillery, the ghulams or guards of the King, and the guilds of butchers, bakers, etc., all took their fair share in these bloody deeds. One Babí was presented to the crack officers-corps of the garrison; the general in command dealt the first blow, and

afterwards each one as his rank determined. The Persian troops are butchers, not soldiers. One Bábí fell to the share of the Imam-Jum'a, who put him to death. Islám knows nothing of charity!

When I read over again what I have written I am overcome by the thought that those who are with you in our dearly beloved Austria may doubt the full truth of the picture, and accuse me of exaggeration. Would to God that I had not lived to see it! But by the duties of my profession I was often, only too often, a witness of these abominations. At present I never leave my house, in order not to meet with fresh scenes of horror. After their death the Bábís are naked in two and either nailed to the city gate, or cast out into the plain as food for the dogs and jackals. Thus the punishment extends even beyond the limits of which bound this bitter world, for Musulmans who are not buried have no right to enter the Prophet's Paradise.

Since my whole soul revolts against such infamy, against such abominations as recent times, according to the judgement of all, present, I will no longer maintain my connection with the scene of such crimes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From E. G. Browne, ed., Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion (Cambridge: University Press 1918) pp. 267-271.

## APPENDIX B

### MÁNAKJÍ AND THE TÁRÍKH-I-JADÍD

The most well known effect of Mánakjí's collaboration with Bahá'ís was the production of the Táríkh-i-Jadíid, one of the earliest histories of the Bábí Faith. The primary author of that work was Mírzá Ḥusayn of Hamadán, who at one time was secretary to one of the ministers of state. In consequence to his faith, he was imprisoned for a time. In response to an inquiry from E. G. Browne, Mírzá 'Abu'l-Faḍl wrote of Mírzá Ḥusayn:

After his release from the prison of Teherán, he obtained employment in the office of Mánakjí the Zoroastrian, well known as an author and writer. Mánakjí treated him with great respect, for had he not become notorious as a Bábí, he would have never engaged in this work. Now it chanced one night that he and Muḥammad Isma'íl Khán the Zend who was a writer skillful in Persian composition, were Mánakjí's guests at supper and Mánakjí requested each one of them to write a book (for he was most zealous in book collecting, and whomsoever he deemed capable of writing and composing he would urge to write a book or compose a treatise). So on this night he requested Muḥammad Isma'íl Khán to write a history of the kings of Persia and begged Mírzá Ḥuseyn to compile a history of the Bábís.

. . . Mírzá Ḥuseyn came to the writer and asked his assistance, saying 'Since hitherto no full or correct history has been written treating the events of this Theophany, to collect and compile the various episodes thereof in a fitting manner is a very difficult matter. . . .'

To this I replied 'There is in the hands of the Friends a history by the late Hájí Mírzá Janí of Káshán, who was one of the martyrs of Teherán, and one of the best men of that time. But he was a man engaged in business and without skill in historiography, neither did he record the dates of the years and months. At most he, being a God-fearing man, truthfully set down the record of events as he had seen and heard them. Obtain this book, and take the episodes from it, and the dates

of the years and months from the Násikhu'i-Tawárikh and the appendices of the Rawzatu's-Safá; and, having incorporated these in your rough draft read over each sheet to His Reverence Hájí Seyyid Jawád of Kerbela . . . for he, from the beginning of the First Point [i.e., the Báb] until the arrival of His Holiness Behá'u'lláh in Acre, accompanied the Friends everywhere in person, and is thoroughly informed and cognizant of all events. . . .'

Then he requested the writer to indite the introductory preface, and so open for him the path of composition. So I, agreeably to his request wrote two pages at the beginning of that book, and embellished this introduction with prefatory exhortations and excitements to strive after truth. . . .

But Mánakjí would not suffer this history to be finished in the manner which the writer had suggested, but compelled the chronicler to write what he dictated. For Mánakjí's custom was to bid his secretary to write down some matter and afterwards read the rough draft over to him. So first of all the secretary used to read over to him the rough draft which he had made in accordance with his own taste and agreeably to the canons of good style; and then, after Mánakjí had made additions here and excisions there, and had docked and re-arranged the matter, he used to make a fair copy. And since Mánakjí had no great skill or science in the Persian tongue, the style of most of the books and treatises attributed to him is disconnected and broken, good and bad being mingled together. In addition to this defect, ignorant scribes and illiterate writers have, in accordance with their own fancies so altered the Tárikh-i-Jadíd that at present day every copy of it appears like a defaced portrait or a restored temple, to such a degree that one cannot obtain a correct copy of it, unless it were the author's own transcript; otherwise no copy can be relied upon.

As for Hájí Mírzá Jáni of Káshán, he was one of the most highly respected merchants of that town. . . . He it was who, when the First Point (exalted be his Supreme Name!) was being conveyed, by the command of Muḥammad Sháh, from Isfahán to Teherán, entertained His Holiness for three nights in his house at Káshán. Some while afterwards he came from Káshán to Teherán, and abode in Sháh 'Abdu'l-'Azím, where he wrote his history. He was involved in the catastrophe of the year A.H. 1268 (A.D. 1852, Aug.-Sept.), and in prison shared the same cell with his Holiness Behá'u'lláh, and was bound by the same iron chain. Some days later he was put to death, an innocent victim, in this massacre, and attained to the rank of martyrdom. But of his history I, the writer, cannot now procure a copy; for from Samarkand to Teherán is very far, and fortune frowns of the People of Behá, and is beyond measure jealous of them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>From E. G. Browne trans., Tárikh-i-Jadíd (Cambridge University Press, 1975) pp. xxxvii-xli.

Browne mistakenly assumed Hájí Mírzá Jáni's work to be another early history he had discovered, Nuq̄ṭatu'l-Káf, however Dr. Denis MacEoin's careful textual analysis shows no connection between the two works. No internal evidence indicates the Nuq̄ṭatu'l-Káf was authored by Hájí Mírzá Jáni either. A thorough and dispassionate discussion of this matter can be found in "A Critical Survey of the Sources for Early Bábí Doctrine and History," unpublished manuscript, April 1976.

## APPENDIX C

### THE ANCESTRY OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Bahá'í historian H. M. Balyuzi writes the following regarding the background of Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy:

It is to Yazdigird III, the last Sásánian monarch to occupy the throne of Írán, that the genealogy of Bahá'u'lláh can be traced. Ustád Javánmard, the principal of the Zoroastrian school of Yazd, presented seven queries to Bahá'u'lláh, the seventh of which concerned His ancestry. The Tablet known as Shír-Mard (Lion of a Man)- thus called because the recipient was so addressed by Bahá'u'lláh- was sent to him in reply. (This Tablet is also known as Lawh-i-Haft-Pursish.) Answering his questions one by one, to the seventh query Bahá'u'lláh responded by referring him to the genealogy which Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání had gathered and compiled. Many years later, in the year A H 1320 (10 April 1902-30 March 1903), Áqá Khusraw Bimán, who was also of Zoroastrian origin, was visiting the Holy Land. He asked resident Bahá'ís for information regarding the ancestry of Bahá'u'lláh. They presented his request to Abdu'l-Bahá who also referred them to Mírzá Abdu'l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání, then visiting the United States. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl's answer to Áqá Khusraw Bimán's letter was published in Bombay, at a later date, as a pamphlet.

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, designated by the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith as one of the nineteen "Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh, was a man of rare erudition and a degree of scholarship so far unequalled amongst the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, whether in the East or in the West. In his reply to Áqá Khusraw Bimán, he describes how his interest was aroused in the genealogy of Bahá'u'lláh, and how his researches led him to Yazdigird III, the last of the Sásánian monarchs of Írán. He goes on to state, however, that his work, which Bahá'u'lláh had mentioned in the Tablet addressed to the schoolmaster of Yazd, was lost when he and a number of other Bahá'ís were arrested in Tíhrán in the early months of 1883 by order of Kámran Mírzá, the Náyib's Saltānih, son of Náṣiri'd-Din Sháh.

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl writes that he was, in the course of his investigation, particularly impressed by the fact that so severe and unsympathetic a critic of the Bahá'í Faith (and

so hostile a commentator) as Riḍá-Qulí Khán-i-Hidáyat, entitled the Amíru'sh-Shu'ara' (The Emir of Poets), had admitted in the Nizhád-Námih (The Book of Ancestry), that the Núris of Mázin-darân are descended from Choroës I, the renowned Sásánian monarch known as 'Ádil (The Just). And final confirmations came from Háji Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí, a half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh, who told Mírzá Abu'l-Faḡl categorically, in answer to his query, that the Núris possessed a genealogical table tracing their line back to Yazdigird the Sásánian.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H. M. Balyuzi, Baha'u'llah: King of Glory (Oxford: George Ronald 1980) pp. 9-11.



## APPENDIX D

### THE PERSECUTIONS OF 1891 AND THE TOBACCO REGIE

The persecutions of 1891 took place against the background of the Tobacco Protests. On March 8, 1890 Násiru'd-Dín Sháh signed a concession with Mr. G. E. Talbot granting him full control over the production, sale and export of all tobacco in Írán for the next 50 years in return for certain payments. Since this concession cut directly into the market of a large portion of the merchant community of Írán protest arose almost immediately. Among the prominent leaders of the opposition were Mírzá Malkam Khán and Siyyid Jamálu'd-Dín-i-Afghani. Mírzáy-i-Shírází, a leading mujtahid played the most important role by forbidding people to smoke. Nearly the entire country obeyed and the concession was cancelled in 1892. In connection with this a number of Bahá'ís in Tihrán were arrested who were suspected of being partisans of Mírzá Malkam Khán and Jamálu'd-Dín Afghani. Persecutions against Bahá'ís reached their culmination with the gruesome execution of seven Bahá'ís in Yazd in May 1891. 'Abdu'l-Bahá regarded some of the supporters of the Tobacco protests as largely responsible for the persecutions. He wrote to E. G. Browne on August 19, 1891:

The partisans of Malkom Khán and Jamálu'd-Dín devised a plan to alarm, intimidate, and greatly disturb the government by involving the Bábís also in suspicion, and wrote pamphlets so worded that it might appear that there was an alliance between these and themselves. To be brief, they arrested Malkom Khán's brother with your friend the Mírza of

Hamadán and several others, and also two Bábís, and the government officials, without any enquiry or investigation, began on every side to persecute this oppressed community, although these poor innocents, as I swear by God's Might, knew absolutely nothing of this agitation and disturbance, non-interference in political matters being required by their creed.

No sooner did this news reach Isfahán than the Prince Zillu's-Sultán, one of whose confidential advisers had been accused and arrested, considered it expedient, for the exculpation of himself from all suspicion of complicity in this plot and for the concealment of his own evil deeds, to inaugurate a violent and cruel persecution of the Bábís. So he entered into correspondence with Prince Jalálu'd-Dawla, and a persecution was set on foot in the city of Yazd and the surrounding villages, where such cruelties and injustices were perpetrated as are unparalleled in the history of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Shoghi Effendi described the execution of the Yazdi Bahá'ís:

In Yazd, at the instigation of the mujtahid of that city, and by the order of the callous Mahmúd Mirzá, the Jalálu'l-Dawlih, the governor, a son of Zillu's Sultán, seven were done to death in a single day in horrible circumstances. The first of these, a twenty-seven year old youth, 'Alí-Asghar, was strangled, his body delivered into the hands of some Jews who forcing the dead man's six companions to come with them, dragged the corpse through the streets, surrounded by a mob of people and soldiers beating drums and blowing trumpets, after which, arriving near the Telegraph Office, they beheaded the eighty-five year old Mullá Mihdí and dragged him in the same manner to another quarter of the city, where, in view of a great throng of onlookers, frenzied by the throbbing strains of music, they executed Áqa 'Alí in like manner. Proceeding thence to the house of the local mujtahid, and carrying with them the four remaining companions, they cut the throat of Mullá 'Alíy-i-Sabzivári, who had been addressing the crowd and glorying in his imminent martyrdom, hacked his body to pieces with a spade, while he was still alive, and pounded his skull to a pulp with stones. In another quarter, near the Mhriz gate, they slew Muḥammad-Báqir, and afterwards, in the Maydán-i-Khán, as the music grew wilder and drowned the yells of the people, they beheaded the survivors who remained, two brothers in their early twenties, 'Alí-Asghar and Muḥammad-Ḥassan. The stomach of the latter was ripped open and his heart and liver plucked out, after which his head was impaled on a spear, carried

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<sup>1</sup>The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944 (Oxford: George Ronald 1981) p. 357.

aloft, to the accompaniment of music, through the streets of the city, and suspended on a mulberry tree, and stoned by a great concourse of people. His body was cast before the door of his mother's house, into which women deliberately entered to dance and make merry. Even the pieces of their flesh were carried away to be used as medicament. Finally, the head of Muḥammad-Ḥassan was attached to the lower part of his body and together with those of the other martyrs, was borne to the outskirts of the city and so viciously pelted with stones that the skulls were broken, whereupon they compelled the Jews to carry the remains and throw them into a pit in the plain of Salsabil. A holiday was declared by the governor for the people, all the shops were closed by his order, the city was illuminated at night, and the festivities proclaimed the consummation of one of the most barbarous acts perpetrated in modern times.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>God Passes By (Bahá'í Publishing Committee: Wilmette 1944) pp. 201-202.

## APPENDIX E

### THE MASSACRES OF 1903

The London Times carried the following account of the massacre on July 13, 1903.

According to information received from trustworthy sources, the city and province of Yezd, in Southern Persia were the scenes of very serious disturbances during the latter part of June. Rioting, which lasted more than a fortnight at Yezd, culminated towards the end of June in a popular outbreak directed against the Babis, religious reformers whose aspirations have always been viewed with great suspicion by the ruling classes. Rumours of a demonstration against them circulated in Yezd early in June on the arrival from Nedjef of a new Mujtehid, or high priest, Mirza Muhammad Ibrahim. On the 27th and 28th especially the position, even of foreign residents, became at times critical when the mob were searching for certain well-known Babis in the quarter of the town in which the houses of the English missionaries are situated. Throughout the whole of those two days every Bab who fell into the hands of the rabble was butchered in whatever manner was most pleasing to the mob at the moment, and mutilated bodies were drawn through the town in all directions, followed by an exultant crowd. Houses were searched and plundered, women beaten and in one or two cases killed, and the town was in the hands of a mob whose only programme was to kill. The houses of Babis were broken into and plundered by the mob, assisted by Gholams and soldiers. On Sunday, the 28th, the Mujtehids, enjoined the populace to bring all Babis either before them or before the Governor for judgement. The Prince refused to give away to the threats of the mob. But his Palace was surrounded by a turbulent crowd, and on the next day he gave way and had one man taken before him blown from the mouth of a cannon and throat of another one cut, the body being dragged afterwards through the town. Order is reported to have been finally restore in the city, but the province is very disturbed and no one could leave the town with safety. All Babis who attempted to fly were either killed or had to return and hide themselves in the

ruins and ditches around the town, some to be captured, others to escape.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cited in Momen, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

## APPENDIX F

### INDIAN ZOROASTRIANS AND THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

While Parsi agents of the Amelioration Society at first supported the activities of Bahá'ís, when Siyávash Safídvash, Mullá Bahrám and other Zoroastrian Bahá'ís traveled to Bombay and actively promulgated the Bahá'í Faith among the Zoroastrians there their reception was mixed. While one dastur, Jiyun Ji Mahdi, regarded them as similar to the Theosophist, and therefore no threat to the Zoroastrian religion, others became quite concerned. Dr. Mánekjí Dhalla, the prominent Zoroastrian theologian, wrote of their activities:

A great deal of harm has been wrought by the teachings of the great religions about the advent of a future Soshiyosh, a Messiah or a Mahadi. At least fifty faked the pretentious prophets and God's messengers have beguiled mankind from time to time. Some have succeeded in establishing new sects, but more have failed to do so.

Dreading the oppression of the Muslim Mullahs of Iran, the Bahais carried on their work clandestinely in the beginning. They could not construct public places of worship. Practising of the faith and even conversion when the occasion presented itself, were conducted behind closed doors. For generations our community had been disgruntled by the persecution of the mullahs. We had been rebuffed, repudiated and rejected. At such a stage of existence the Bahais welcomed us with open arms. They invited us to dine with them. This was something to gladden the hearts of our unfortunate co-religionists in their homeland, Iran. They were naturally drawn towards the Bahais. The shrewd Bahais played upon their religious sentiments and deluded the ignorant Zoroastrians that the prophesy in their scriptures that Shah Behram Varjavand would come one day has been fulfilled, for Bahauallah himself was Shah Behram Varjavand.

In some of the unauthentic Pazend and Pahlavi books written after we lost our kingdom, it has been foretold that Shah Behram Vajavand of Kyanian lineage will come some day.

At the age of thirty he will raise an army of Hindus and Chinese and attack Iran and conquer it and will reinstate a Zoroastrian regime in Iran.

It is understandable that uneducated Zoroastrians of Iran, fifty or sixty years ago, believed these fictitious fair tales; but for highly qualified and cultured Parsis of India to gulp down such fanatic stories today is truly regrettable. . . .

At first some Zoroastrians of Iran and later Iranian Zoroastrians settled in India accepted Bahaism. The secret movement of this new religion had misled us in the past. We have been misguided by the deceptions up to this day. The Bahais have no churches, they have no priests, they are free to marry non-Bahais. . . . Under the canopy of their faith it is permissible to retain the 'sudra' and 'kusti' when necessary, to pass as Zoroastrians when need arises, to derive benefit from communal funds and its institutions. The corpse of the deceased they bury in their own separate cemetery.

During my stay in New York from 1905 to 1908 I saw that the Christians who were converted to the Bahai religion ceased to be considered Christians and were known as Bahais only. On returning from America in 1907 I drew the attention of leaders in Bombay to this fact, but scholars and eminent people alike refused to countenance the Bahai Movement as anything more than an innocent institution, or a Brotherhood, like the Theosophical Society. The Bahai religion had not found a footing amongst the co-religionist of Karachi at that time. . . .

Our visit to Iran in 1920 brought us in contact with Bahais at various places. In Kazvin we found that all Iranians credited as Zoroastrians had already become Bahais. They had called an assembly of all the Muslim and other Bahais residing in the city in my honour. As a priest or a mullah is intent upon making people believe that theirs is the one and only true faith, I found their leader debating with me during our discussions.

Mr. Ardeshir Edulji Reporter, who had been residing in Teheran for nearly four decades as a representative from Bombay of the 'Society for the Improvement of the condition of the poor Zoroastrians of Iran', informed me that the Zoroastrians of India are making a serious mistake and their indifference is harmful to the community. Every year an increasing number of Zoroastrians is abandoning the religion of their forefathers and becoming Bahais. Despite repeated warnings the coreligionists of Bombay are not being alerted.

Even today Bahais are organizing feasts on a grand scale and extending a gracious invitation to our credulous Zoroastrians with the purpose of attracting them to the Bahai religion. With many such devices the Zoroastrians are being converted. At this end the conversion of our Iranian co-religionists is conducted chiefly in Bombay and Poona and recently in Karachi. Destitute co-religionists coming from Iran are immediately approached by converted Iranian-Zoroastrian Bahais, are employed in their shops, are helped

in setting up separate shops of their own, or are given employment in other ways and are later converted to Bahaism.

Due to our indifference and carelessness such Iranian Bahais have, up to date, blatantly and freely taken advantage of our communal schools, hospitals, maternity homes, rest house, sanatoriums, charitable chawls, and innumerable such institutions and benefitted by our various funds. Thousands of Iranian-Zoroastrians of Iran and India have already been converted to Bahaism and the number is ever on the increase. The most distressing fact is that in our country it is not the Muslim Bahais who convert our co-religionists but our own one-time Iranian-Zoroastrians themselves.

Since the last five years the community has become aware of this calamity that is staring it in the face and the Trustees of the Parsi Panchayat of Bombay and Karachi have published in the press that henceforth the benefit of communal institutions and funds will not be extended to these non-Zoroastrian Jooddin Bahais.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Máneckjí Nuserwanji Dhalla, Dastur Dhalla: The Saga of a Soul (Karachi: Dastur Dr. Dhalla Memorial Institute 1975) pp. 722-727.



## APPENDIX G

### ZOROASTRIAN PROPHECY AND BAHÁ'Í CLAIMS

The following extract was written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in response to inquiries from a Zoroastrian Baha'i:

Thou hadst written that in the sacred books of the followers of Zoroaster it is written that in the latter days, in three separate Dispensations, the sun must needs be brought to a standstill. In the first Dispensation, it is predicted, the sun will remain motionless for ten days; in the second for twice that time; in the third for no less than one whole month. The interpretation of this prophecy is this: the first Dispensation to which it refers is the Muḥammadan Dispensation during which the Sun of Truth stood still for ten days. Each day is reckoned as one century. The Muḥammadan Dispensation must have, therefore, lasted no less than one thousand years, which is precisely the period that has elapsed from the setting of the Star of the Imamate to the advent of the Dispensation proclaimed by the Báb. The second Dispensation referred to in this prophecy is the one inaugurated by the Báb Himself, which began in the year 1260 A.H. As to the third Dispensation - the Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh - inasmuch as the Sun of Truth when attaining that station shineth in the plenitude of its meridian splendor its duration hath been fixed for a period of one whole month, which is the maximum time taken by the Sun to pass through a sign of the Zodiac. From this thou canst imagine the magnitude of the Bahá'í cycle - a cycle that must extend over a period of at least five hundred thousand years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1955) pp. 101-102.

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