BAHA'ISM : A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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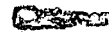**School of International Studies**

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "BAHA'ISM : A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY" submitted by **Rafiul Alam Laskar** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY,** is his own work and has not been submitted for the award of any degree of this or any other university.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Acknowledgement

PREFACE

The following is a study of Baha'ism from the sociological point of view. It is not a study of Baha'ism as a religion per se. In fact, it tries to study Baha'ism using sociological concepts. It attempts a comprehensive overview of the origin, growth, worldview and social structure of the Baha'i Faith with a part devoted to the Indian aspect.

The **Introduction** tries to put the origin of the Baha'i Faith in the context of historical Persianate religious innovation. The **First Chapter** deals with the history and sociology of the origin and growth of the Faith. It attempts to explain its rise from the sociological 'resource mobilization perspective' at the same time outlining the various other viewpoints. The **Second Chapter** elaborates on the "worldview" of Baha'ism. What kind of a society Baha'is visualize? What are the social values the Baha'i Faith emphasizes? The **Third Chapter** carries forward the ideas of the second chapter and sees them in terms of the social structure and the institutions Baha'is visualize. The **Final Chapter** is about the development of the Baha'i Faith in India right from the Babi movement to the present day. It also has a section on the programmes and projects of the Baha'is in India. **Summary and Conclusion** attempts to see the Baha'i ideals in the present day

context. How far the Baha'i ideals can help in countering the forces of violence and the so-called 'clash of civilizations?

I sincerely hope my study will help in outlining this lesser known religion. It is expected that it will stimulate further in-depth and better studies on the Baha'i Faith.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Baha'i Faith was founded by Baha'u'llah (Mirza Husayn Ali Nuri) in Iran in the middle of the nineteenth-century. It claims to be one of the revealed religions in the line of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It grew out of the Iranian messianic movement of Babism and developed into a world religion with emphasis on internationalism and pacifism. Among the factors contributing to its rise were beliefs held by the *Ithna'asharis or Twelvers*. This is the largest Shi'a school or rite which acknowledges a succession of twelve Imams. The last Shi'a Imam, Mohammed al-Mahadi, disappeared, in 878, but the Ithna'asharis believe he is still alive and will reappear in the last days before the Day of Judgement as the Mahadi (Guided One) – a sort of messiah – who will rule personally by divine right. Baha'is believe the Mahadi has already appeared in the person of 'Bab' (Sayyed Ali Mohammed) and abrogated the 'Quran'. They also believe that Baha'u'llah was the prophet who Bab had said would come and modify Babism. This gave rise to the new Baha'i Faith and its followers – the Baha'is.

The Baha'i Faith in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century could be aptly described as an underground messianic movement. The tradition of Persianate religious radicalism goes back to the origins of Persianate Islam and has always been linked in significant and predominant ways to chiliastic fervour. From the outset of Persianate Islam, successive political regimes in Persia

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evolved and zealously guarded Islamic identities that buttressed their power by imposing cultural hegemonies over a volatile cultural mix. In this context, radical religious innovation not only challenged the cultural hegemony of a given Islamic identity, but inescapably undermined the legitimacy of the political order that upheld it. With such weight accruing to ideological conformity in a milieu brimming with cultural tensions, it comes as no surprise that Islamic heresiography should have specially flourished in the Persianate sphere, as groups fought for political power through cultural control. Religious dissent was inevitably political dissent too. What makes Persianate religious dissent distinctive is its persistent attempt to reconcile its Islamic identity with a pro-Islamic heritage that refuses to relax its ideological grip. We thus find, for instance, formulations of the Islamic escathon not only turning to pre-Islamic theological orientations, but even making room for pre-Islamic Iranian legend, as in the case of the radical Sufism of the Safavi period.

True to the Persianate tradition of religious innovation, Baha'u'llah's vision was able to transcend a strictly Islamic worldview through realized eschatology. Only Baha'u'llah appropriated not merely the pre-Islamic past but, crucially, the non-Islamic present, to predict a post-Islamic future. In the past, Islamicate religious dissent had been used to challenge other Islamic cultural hegemonies. Persians who embraced Baha'u'llah's message, and, even more, Persians who embraced the Bab's

message, were responding to similar pressures, seeking to resist cultural encroachment from a new religious-political hegemony fractiously championed by the ulama and, to a lesser degree, the secular ruler of Qajar Persia. The Baha'i teachings, typically, criticized the clerical establishment and formulated an alternative, spiritualized, and disestablished view of its place in society, legitimizing the sovereignty of secular rulers independently of clerical authority.

For the first time, however, equally strong pressures on identity came from a source outside the Islamicate world altogether: the Western world, whose expansion was accompanied by a subtle but insidious assertion of cultural hegemony in the form of Empire, one of the drivers of globalization. The Baha'i teachings gave nineteenth-century Persians who wished to do so, a vehicle to resist the cultural (hence social and political) hegemony not only of the ulama but also of the intruding Western world. The Baha'i teachings could appropriate the idiom not just of Persianate Islam, but also of the West and use it to resist its cultural hegemony, in the same way as Islam gave the Sassanids a means to appropriate the cultural idiom of the Arabs to resist their attempt at cultural dominance. In other words, the Baha'i teachings opened an avenue for a new, post-Islamic identity that promised to overcome and finally resolve the cultural (and by implication political and social) tensions of the day. They also posed an un-mistakable challenge to

the existing order. What was seen by some as the fulfillment of Islam, was regarded by others as its open subversion.

What is perhaps most remarkable is that through the far-reaching political and social changes that have taken place since the day of Nasir-i-Din Shah, the repression of Iranian Baha'is has remained constant, varying only in intensity, regardless of the prevailing order of the day. Till now they have not been given the official status of a minority. Whereas Christians, Jews and other minorities have reservation for their members in parliament, the Baha'is have none. Newspaper reports suggest that the Supreme Revolutionary Council of Iran had prepared in 1991 a blueprint for the persecution of the Baha'is.[1] A copy of the code was obtained by the United Nations Special Envoy to Iran, Reynaldo Galindo Pohl who described it to the United Nations Human Rights Commission. The code prescribes denial of employment and school enrolment to Baha'is. It also calls for the expulsion of known Baha'is from universities as punishment for their political (espionage) activities. This also aims at blocking the growth of the Baha'i Faith and destroying its cultural roots outside the country. In 1955 also, they had to appeal to the United Nations to intervene against the outbreak of persecution.[2] This appeal was sympathetically received both by the secretariat and the member nations and international pressure relieved the situation. In 1979, the revolutionary regime in

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[1] Cited in Prakash C.Jain, *Population and Society in West Asia: Essays in Comparative Demography* (Jaipur and New Delhi, 2001), pp.151–2.

[2] John Ferraby, *All Things Made New: A Comprehensive Outline of the Baha'i Faith* (New Delhi, 1997), p.303.

Iran initiated yet another full-scale persecution of the Baha'i community. The pogrom developed into the most severe onslaught of this century against the Baha'i Faith, its members, endowments, holy places and institutions. By April 1983, well over 100 Baha'is had been killed.[3]

Having elaborated on historical continuities, we may now elaborate on the discontinuities – the way in which Baha'u'llah's revelation departs from the Persianate tradition. For even as there can be little doubt that the worldview and community that crystallized around Baha'u'llah has inextricable connections with the rich current of tradition, there can likewise be little doubt that in Baha'u'llah's hands, the traces of tradition were embedded in something new, something other, something amounting, both in intent and consequence, to a new religion. Baha'u'llah's teachings can be regarded as "an ideological bridge to a new worldview".[4] This new worldview implied sociological innovation too. Traditionally, the energies released by large-scale Islamicate responses to a messianic claim have sought outlet in military enterprises. Such indeed was the case with Babism. The idea of conquering Mahadi or Qaim pervaded prophetic expectations, and the conquest was expected to occur by military or supernatural means. This Islamic ideal of messianic conquest, like so much else in the Islamic heritage, was not rejected by Baha'u'llah, but it was recast in spiritualized form,

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[3]   ibid, p. 304.
[4]   Chris Buck, *Symbol and Secret* (Los Angeles, 1995), Chapter 5.

community building and moral regeneration taking the place of physical combat as the proper instruments of victory. Baha'u'llah would eventually conquer the world, but would do so by spiritual means, through the attraction of hearts, and the battle would be waged by Baha'is through the attraction of hearts, and the battle would be waged by Baha'is through a consecrated dedication to community building and the cultivation of moral rectitude. Not surprisingly, a doctrinal outlook that appropriated the prophetic expectations of all religions yet upheld the relativity of truth led to early experiments in multiculturalism. On the one hand were the imperatives from Baha'u'llah to consort with the followers of all religions; on the other was the conversion of non-Muslim minorities, which initiated a slow and gradual process of cultural rapprochement between converts from these various backgrounds.

Academically speaking, the area of Baha'i studies has received scant attention. The absence of even one solid academic monograph on the Baha'i Faith in Iran is positively intriguing. Not many studies have been done on the topic from the sociological point of view either. Most of the books on the Baha'i Faith have been written by its followers. Nevertheless, the names of Momen, Smith, Maneck, Lawson, Walbridge, Amanat, MacEoin, Baussani, Milani, Cole, Lambden, Buck, Bayat and Balyuzi stand out within the broad area of Middle-Eastern studies for the impact of their published work on the academic study of the Baha'i Faith. Many more scholars of like calibre within and outside the field of

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Islamics have similarly advanced the area of academic Baha'i studies. But, these scholars have been working on the periphery of academic discourse. Evidence for such marginalisation may be found in the fact that the bulk of this research remains unpublished, out of print, or in circulation in relatively obscure or inaccessible publications, internet discussion lists, seminars and periodicals, beyond the field of vision of the overwhelming majority of students.

Out of the published literature, mention can be made of the book *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* edited by Moojan Momen. This book is compiled from many varied sources, the accounts and opinions of those Westerners who because they happened to be in the Middle East at that time (initial period of Babi and Baha'i religions), were able write what they had themselves seen or had heard from first-hand sources. Secondly, the author has attempted to show the way in which knowledge of the new religion spread to the West in its earliest days before there were communities of Baha'is in those areas. The principal disadvantage of the Western accounts presented in this book is that these observers were for the most part ignorant of the social and religious background and framework of the Babi and Baha'i religions. Whatever little knowledge they did have of Islam and of Persian social and cultural life tended to be prejudiced and incomplete. Thus, they were often unable to understand fully the sociological significance of the events that they

recorded. A further drawback is that many of the most important events of Babi and Baha'i history were not observed by outsiders and hence no report of these are to be found in the above work.

The book *Studies in Babi and Baha'i History, Vol.I* edited by Moojan Momen is a comprehensive study of the movement. It blends together the work of several different displines : Oriental studies, History of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Comparative Religion and Theology and so on. From the view point of sociology, the essay by Peter Smith is worth noting. This surveys the beginning of the Baha'i Faith in North America during the period 1893-1917, sketches out its principle features and gives a preliminary sociological analysis of the early American Baha'is.

The second book in the series *Studies in Babi and Baha'i History, Vol. II, From Iran East and West* edited by Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen deals with the historical impact of the Baha'i Faith outside the Persian Speaking Iranian Shi'ites within which Babi movement originated. The chapter by William Garlington on the Baha'i conversions in Malwa is of particular importance. It provides an analysis of the by and large low-caste conversions to the Baha'i Faith in Malwa region of India. This event was the beginning of the phase Baha'i mass conversions in India.

The third volume in the series *Studies in Babi and Baha'i History Vol. III, In Iran* edited by Peter Smith is important for the chapter on the origin and spread of the Babi movement by the editor and Moojan Momen. This looks at the Babi conversions in

Iran from the 'resource mobilization' perspective. But, very few studies have actually written about the kind of society the Baha'is visualize. A majority of the academic undertakings have been to study the origin and growth of the Baha'i Faith from various perspectives. A study on the kind of social structure and social relationships stressed by the Baha'i teachings is lacking.

The following study attempts to present a sociological analysis of the Baha'i Faith. It is not a study of Baha'ism as a religion per se but an analysis of the Baha'i teachings using sociological concepts. Apart from the first and the last chapter which deal with the origins and growth and aspects of the religion in India respectively, the rest of the study is focused on the nature of society implicit and explicit in the Baha'i religious texts. Baha'is visualize the creation of a 'world community' and realization of 'world peace'. In pursuance of these ideals they have laid down rules for both inter-personal as well as inter-national behaviour. They have codes for social relationships both at the micro- and the macro-levels. Their institutions like the Administrative Order can be said to be a dress-rehearsal for the attainment of their ultimate ideal of the 'unity of mankind'.

The materials for the study were collected both from primary as well as secondary sources. Primary sources included books containing words of Baha'u'llah Himself and also informal discussions with the Baha'is living in Delhi. Books by non-Baha'i

writers were also consulted. Data were also collected from a large number of internet websites relating to the Baha'i Faith.

Chapter 1

ORIGINS AND GROWTH

The Baha'i faith had at its background two earlier and much different religious movements in the nineteenth-century Iran : Shi'ite Shaikhism (following Sheikh Ahmad-al Ahsai) and Babism. Shaikhism centered on theosophical doctrines and believed that a perfect Shi'ite existed on earth at all times and many Shaikhis (as well as other Shi'ites) expected the return of the hidden 'Twelfth Imam' (who had disappeared a thousand years ago) in 1260/ 1844. Shaikhis in particular joined the messianic Babi movement of the 1840s which shook Iran. To trace the origins of the Baha'i Faith we have to go into the reasons which gave rise to the Babi Faith – the precursor to the Baha'i Faith. We have to study the conditions prevailing in the nineteenth-century which gave rise to Babism. This chapter deals with the origin of Babism and its subsequent transformation into the Baha'i Faith. The seeds of the Baha'i Faith lay in the militant Babi Faith. But, what is interesting is the transformation of this militant religion into one with the message of unity, world peace and universal brotherhood.

BABI MOVEMENT – THE PRECURSOR TO THE BAHA'I FAITH

The year 1844 (or 1260 of the Muslim era) marked the thousandth anniversary of the disappearance of the Hidden Imam 'Mahadi.' Out of this millenarian ferment arose the Babi movement. Its founder, a young man from merchant background in Shiraz, Sayyid Ali Mohammed, declared himself from 1844 to have some sort of extraordinary relationship with the 'Hidden Imam'. At first he proclaimed himself a 'Bab' (gate) to the 'Twelfth Imam'. He later said he was the return of the Imam Mahadi himself and he asserted that divine importation led him to reveal a holy book abrogating the Quran. Bab's religion spread greatly appealing to merchants, guildsmen and workers in Iranian cities and small towns. In 1879, he was officially pronounced a heretic. Clashes began to occur between Shi'ite and newly created Babi quarters of some towns, necessitating the intervention of the Qajar state. In 1850 the Qajar state had the 'Bab' executed and intervened on the side of the Shi'ites in local conflicts. In 1852, Babi leaders in Tehran attempted to have Nasiruddin Shah assassinated in retaliation for the execution of their prophet, but failed. In response, the Shah ordered a nationwide witch hunt for Babis, hundreds of whom were tortured and put to death.

Here, it would be appropriate to go into the reasons for the origin and growth of the Babi movement Different scholars have given different interpretations of its origin. Assertions like Babism

represented an expression proto-nationalistic sentiment (Avery, Keddie), regional antagonism (Avery), political rebellion (Bayat) or social crisis (Smith) have been put forward.[1] However, without dissenting from the above views, Peter Smith and Moojan Momen say that the nature of the linkage between the Babis and the social tension of the 1840s is far from clear. They examine the Babi movement from a "sociological resource mobilization perspective" which they admit is not a total theoretical framework. [2]

The various elements of the mobilization are the following – (1) the *social environment,* that is, the structural characteristics of Iranian society which defined and facilitated the emergence of Babism, the role of social control and opposition, and the interactive process by which the religion's political role came to be defined; (2) the *organization of resources* to secure the movement's objectives; (3) the *pattern of recruitment* to the movement; and (4) the form and content of the *movement's ideology* which defined and promoted its growth.

The Babi movement began as a sub-sect of the Shaikhi school, in the specific context of the succession crisis of 1844. Shaikhism originated with the teaching of Shaykh Ahmad-al Ahsai (1753-1826) and it became a powerful expression of the tradition of

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[1] Peter. W.Avery, *Modern Iran* (London, 1965), pp.52-58; Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socio-religious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1982), pp.87-131; Nikki R. Keddie, "Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism", *Comparative Studies in* Society *and History* (New York), vol. 4, 1962, pp.267-71; idem., *Roots of Revolution* (New Haven and London, 1981), p.49; Peter Smith, "Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha'i Religions" in R. Wallis edited *Millennialism and Charisma* (Belfast, 1982), pp.231-81.

[2] John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald., "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory", *American Journal of Sociology* (Chicago), vol. 82, no.6, July 1976-May 1977, pp.1212-

theosophical Shi'i dissent. Under the leadership of Shaykh Ahmad's successor Sayyid Kazim Pashti (C.1795-1843/44), it developed into a well-organized movement within Ithna'ashari Shi'ism. The Shaikhi leaders promulgated the doctrine that the spiritual guidance of Shi'i depended on the existence in the world of a true Shi'i to function as intermediary between the 'Hidden Imam' and the faithful. By implication, this was a function performed by the Shaikhi leaders. With the death of Sayyid Kazim the Shaikhis were thrown into confusion. He had designated no one as his successor and a number of individuals contended for leadership. Chief among these came to be Haji Karim Khan Kirmani (1809/10-1870/71) and Sayyid Ali Mohammad Shirazi, the 'Bab' (1819-1850). Ali Mohammad, a relatively unknown merchant's claim was more radical in the sense that he proclaimed himself to be the 'Bab' (gate), the direct intermediary between the 'Hidden Imam' and the Shi'i faithful. Initially, he faced little virulent resistance as the movement remained strongly Islamic in its ethos. It did not breach the ideological confines of Shi'i Islam except in regard to the religious status implicit in the Bab's claim to authority. But in 1948, he announced his higher claims to authority, declaring himself to be the 'Hidden Imam, and even more radically, to be the bearer of a new divine revelation which totally abrogates Islam.

Under the circumstances, though the Babis were largely confined to the peoples of Iran's Shi'i heartland, the construction of a new, more or less unified national religious movement during the

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course of a few years was an impressive organizational achievement. The expansion of the movement "reflected existing social divisions" and was variously related to the "putative group interests." [3]

The nineteenth-century Iranian society was a highly divided one. With no means of modern communication, divided by mountains and vast tracts, it made the expansion of any movement a very difficult proposition. The Babis succeeded where they could utilize the existing networks of communication efficiently. Besides this, the Iranian society of the nineteenth-century was structurally conducive to the emergence of what Neil Smelser has termed "value oriented movements" that is movements concerned not with reformist change but with the radical transformation of basic social values and institutions. [4] These elements of structural conduciveness were: (1) close inter-connection between the major social institutions, and the prevailing value system. A challenge to one part of the system thus readily became a challenge to all. Therefore, any major religious movement readily attained political significance (as did Babism) regardless of its adherents' intentions, (2) the absence of means for most of the population to express their grievances which inclined them to support movements which postulated total change.

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[3] Peter Smith and Moojan Momen's article, "The Babi Movement: A Resource Mobilization Perspective" in Peter Smith edited *Studies in Babi and Baha'i History: In Iran* (Los Angles, 1986), p.40.

[4] Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behaviour* (London, 1962), pp. 318 -81.

The Babi movement seems to have co-opted these economic and political demands though it is not yet quite clear in what way it did so. Social movements are most likely to emerge when existing "holders of power either encourage their emergence" or are "unable to apply effective social controls."[5] Timely action can prevent a movement from snowballing into a major threat for the established order, though the cost of such action can be high. The then Iranian authorities, both clerical and secular were a divided lot. They could not make any decisive move until the Babis were well-established. As a result, the costs of extirpation were correspondingly greater. The Shi'i ulama were weakly structured to oppose any perceived heresy. The absence of a unified national hierarchy worked in the Babis' favour. Individual clerical leaders made their own variant responses to the new movement. As for the secular authorities, their initial response was similarly diverse and ineffective. As the human and organizational resources of the Babi movement were not overwhelmed, such "opposition only facilitated its growth." [6]

The interaction between a movement and its wider environment plays a crucial role in its development. In the process, a movement's objectives and modes of action are rarely unchanged. The "Bab's challenge" to the existing social order "was itself interactive" with the response of his potential supporters and opponents.[7] Successive rebuttals, at first by the non-Babi Shaikhis,

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[5] ibid, pp. 364-79.
[6] Smith and Momen, n.3, p.42.
[7] ibid, p.43.

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then by other clerical leaders, and finally by the government, shaped the nature of the continuing Babi challenge. The conflict that occurred between the Babis and the clerical authorities should be viewed against the background of established patterns of religiously defined district factions, each with its own patrician patrons and local associations. Inter-communal fighting was common. "Large scale conversions" to the Babi religion "reflected these divisions." [8]

As organizations, successful social movements must achieve certain goals: motivate, integrate and direct their memberships; and maintain their existence. In the case of the Babi movement, the various objectives were closely interlinked, particularly as the full messianic import of the movement became apparent. Shi'is believed that the anticipated return of the 'Hidden Imam' will revolutionize the whole world and usher in the 'Day of Resurrection'. The Babis believed themselves to be the elect who had recognized the Imam (or initially his agent) and were thus charged with the recreation of the world. Their existence as a community was itself an integral part of the process of transformation. The Babis wanted to establish a theocracy initially in Iran and ultimately in the whole world. As regards the overall strategy of the Babi movement whether it was reactionary in nature or not, is not quite clear.

For the leaders of a social movement to accomplish their objectives, it is generally necessary for them to ensure the

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[8] ibid, p.44.

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movement's survival. A key factor in that survival is the relationship which develops between the movement and the wider society. Only when this relationship is relatively stable and peaceful can the thought of external threats to survival be ignored and movement's membership concentrate on the accomplishment of established goals. Conversely, when relationship between the movement and its environment is turbulent and uncertain, survival is liable to become the central concern for movement leaders. The primary strategic task becomes the concern with learning to adapt to change. Those movements whose leaders choose to ignore this task, or who are unware of the implications of environmental interaction, are unlikely to survive. In those cases where actual conflict with the authorities has occurred, non-survival may take the form of physical extirpation. The relationship between the Babis and the wider Iranian society was evidently unstable and eventually conflictual. Although the movement was finally destroyed by the authorities, most of its "leaders seem to have been aware of the implications of environmental interaction" and "to have taken pains to ensure the movement's survival." [9]

That they were unsuccessful in this objective is an indication of the difficulty of successfully managing such an interaction. In organizational terms, the Babis were certainly flexible and responsive to change given the Babis' intention to establish the

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[9] ibid, pp.47-48.

theocratic Kingdom of the Mahadi, their predominant target for change consistently remained that of the social structure rather than the individual. Individual change was subsumed under broader societal objectives. Under the pressure of events. "Babi organizational strategy appears to have changed from social bargaining to social disruption and then (for a minority) to revolution".[10]

For the early years of Babi expansion the manifest goals of the movement were to win public support and gain adherents. To mobilize public support, the Babis needed to gain visibility and legitimacy. Visibility was relatively easy to gain. Even the initial declaration that the Bab of the Imam had appeared was sufficient to attract widespread public attention. This was furthered by an extensive missionary campaign, and the dispatch of letters from the Bab to various religious and political leaders. Legitimacy was far more difficult to attain.

The Babis might win public attention but they were relatively powerless to shape the public definition of their movement. Apart from informal contacts and group associations, communicative control of public opinion was dominated by the ulama. Those Babi converts who were prominent clerics were able to exert influence, but in general the ulama closed ranks against the Babis and denounced them savagely from their pulpits. With the initiation of

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[10] ibid, p.49.

bloody confrontation and persecution, the Babis became practically powerless to combat the malicious representation of their motives and morals. In context, heroic struggle and martyrdom demonstrated the truth of their cause. Lacking any established religious position or clerical training, the Bab's claim to authority was justified almost solely on charismatic grounds ultimately, as he himself made clear, legitimation of his authority rested in the believer's response to the sacred power manifested in his person and his writings.

All voluntary organizations face the problem of precariousness. Lacking the means of coercion they depend on their existence on the continuing support of their members. To this end an organization will generally develop distinctive commitment mechanism to maintain its membership's motivation. Babis seem to have "taken mostly informal method" in this direction.[11] Ceremonial initiation or public testimony of belief was not required. Distinctive patterns of behaviour were voluntary rather than coercive. In spite of that, high levels of commitment were maintained. Commitment appears to have been generated primarily by the movement's ideology. For devout Shi'is recognition of the Imam (or his agent) was at the centre of religious meaning. To become one of the elect who had attained such recognition in the age of the Mahadi must, of itself, have constituted a powerful experience of commitment. The

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[11] ibid, p.54.

ideological distinction between believer and unbeliever doubtless reinforced this experience.

Leaders of any larger movement face problems of integration and control if they wish to preserve the movement's unity. As recruitment to a social movement is to a particular local group. But, in certain cases segmentation can be effective. As Gerlach and Hine have argued, a movement which is strongly experiential in emphasis may spread far more rapidly without centralized organization and a sense of "conceptual community" provides the basis for continuing interaction between a diversity of local groups.[12] A movement which is based on a more restricted sense of charismatic authority lacks this option. The initial focal point for belief for Babism was the doctrine that the agent of the Imam had appeared and was summoning all people to his cause. A unified movement was clearly desirable. The Bab also utilized his business and mercantile contacts in reaching his disciples. As the size of the Bab's following grew, he utilized a better system of communication based on itinerant Babi couriers.

According to the resource mobilization perspective, the most salient characteristic in the recruitment of the membership of most social movements is prior social interaction. Recruitment tends to follow pre-existing and positively valued social relationships, whether these be based on ties of kinship patronage, or vicinal

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[12] Luther P. Gerlach and V.H. Hine, *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation* (Indianapolis, 1970), pp.33-78.

proximity. So, in the first instance, diffusion of the movement was strongly concentrated within the existing network of the Shaikhi communities. After the Bab's initial declaration of his mission, the Letters of the Living (his first eighteen disciples, huruf al-hayy) dispersed to various parts of Iran, Iraq and India. Their initial contacts were largely confined to their fellow sectaries. Some also utilized their own existing social networks as a means of diffusing the Bab's message. The messianic import of the Bab's claim also attracted adherents well beyond the Shaikhi community. The conversion of a religious notable favoured the conversion of the entire local community to which they were related (mid nineteenth-century Iranian small towns were divided into a number of mutually antagonistic urban districts, each with its own internal communalism and linkages to the web of patrician politics).

The Babi missionaries, confined largely to the lower or middle ranks of the ulama, utilized the position effectively for communicating the Babi teachings. The other associational networks were those of the bazaar. The wholesale merchants (tejjar) were key figures. Due to their connection with the Babi ulama (by intermarriage and business association) the bazaari merchants were accessed easily. The merchants in turn influenced their nationwide contacts – fellow merchants, craftsmen, shopkeepers and petty traders. The spread of the movement in rural areas among Iranian peasants may be explained by patronage relationships.

From resource mobilization perspective the significance of movement ideology is held to lie in its adaptability and in its provision of conceptual certitude which enhances commitment. It is provided by an all embracing meaning system which eludes falsification. The Babi movement seemed to have had that. Adaptability facilitates the coexistence of a common rhetoric (to symbolize the movements unity) with the diversity of ordinary members' belief. It is clear that beneath the unitary symbol of belief in the Bab, there existed a great array of beliefs by which Babis expressed simultaneously the appeals of messianism, esoteric rationalism, pietism, legalistic reformism and popular thaumaturgy. For adherents to be gained a new religious movement must at least posses ideological flammability. Its doctrines must possess an elementary accessibility to its potential membership. In this area, the Bab was eminently successful. The Babis articulated many of the traditional concerns of popular Shi'ism and Shi'i dissent. There is "clear continuity between many of the central teachings of Shaikhism and those of Babism", especially during the period of its early development.[13] The quest for charismatic authority was common to both official and popular nineteenth-century Iranian religiosity. Esotericism remained a potent theme in Shi'i life. In announcing his mission in the prophetic year 1260 A.H. (1844) – a full millennium after the concealment of the 'Hidden Imam' – the

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[13] Smith and Momen, n.3, p.66.

Bab directly addressed the popular millenarian speculation of the time.

Kazemi attributes the success of Babism to the "structural crisis" of the societal order which was caused to a large degree by the Western impact on all spheres of social life in Iran apart from its essential historical continuity and affinity with Shi'ite religious practices.[14] The psychological effect of defeat and humiliation, the physical effect of losing territories, and the financial effect of paying indemnities all contributed to an increasing popular anger. The general social and political dislocation was also extended into the economic realm. The central government's action of raising taxes added to the common people's woes. In such a situation of economic difficulty and general restlessness, the coming of the Bab as a messiah was enough to stir the Iranian society. The general milieu of Iran at that time was conducive to the emergence of such a leader.

SOCIAL BASIS OF BABISM

Farhad Kazemi makes an impressionistic view that Babism appealed to many of the peasants and lower classes who were experiencing a general worsening of their socio-economic position.[15] Whereas Kurt Greussing sees it as basically a merchant protest which was later taken to the urban and lower classes after the

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[14] Farhad Kazemi, "Some Preliminary Observations on the Early Deveopment of Babism," *The Muslim World* (Hartford), vol.LX III (1973), pp. 119-22.
[15] ibid, p.131.

religious propaganda failed among the elites.[16] It can be said that both political and socio-economic crises in Iranian society as well as its cooption of Shi'ite millenarian doctrine helped in its spread among a cross-section of people in Iranian society. But, M. Momen gives a different interpretation of the spread of Babism. He says it was more out of conviction of the people who converted rather than any revolutionary ideology of Babism. The majority of the Babis were attracted because of their "belief in Bab's divinity"[17]. This is corroborated by the fact that the majority of the Babis were to lay down their arms when Baha'u'llah came and transformed the religion into a pacifist one. Had the religion been motivated by considerations of revolt or social reform, it would not have so easily transformed into its peaceful and tolerant successor – the Baha'i Faith.

BABISM TO THE BAHA'I FAITH – RADICALISM TO PACIFISM

The Bab had spoken of a future prophet, "one whom god would make manifest," who would arise to confirm or modify Babism. In 1863, an Iranian notable and important Babi figure, Mirza Husayn Ali Nuri revealed to a small group of relatives and friends that he was the promised one of the Bab. But his younger brother and ward, the teenaged Yahya Nuri (entitled Subh –i- Azal or Morn of

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[16] See his article "The Babi Movement in Iran 1844 -52: from merchant protest to peasant revolution" in J.M. Bak and G. Benecke edited *Religion and rural revolt* (Manchester , 1984), p.267.

[17] Moojan Momen, "The Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals in Iran (1848-53): A Preliminary Analysis," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (Cambridge), vol.15, 1983, pp. 179-80.

Eternity) was said to have been appointed by the Bab as vicar in 1850. Mirza Husayn Ali Nuri (entitled Baha'u'llah or the 'Glory of God') later maintained that Azal's appointment had been a ruse to draw fire from himself, the real leader. Baha'u'llah had been implicated in the plot to assassinate Naser-al-Din Shah but was found innocent. He had been exiled to neighbouring Ottoman Iraq in 1853 for his Babi beliefs. It was in the garden of Necip Pasa in Baghdad in 1863 that Baha'u'llah made his revelation. In the same year the Ottoman authorities responded to Iranian pressure by further exiling Baha'u'llah, first to Istanbul and then to Edirne. Between 1864 and 1867 Baha'u'llah began sending emissaries back to Iran with the news that he was the one whom the Bab prophesied God would make manifest. This proclamation met with an enthusiastic response among Babis, who began becoming Baha'is, or followers of Baha'u'llah in great numbers. This can be attributed to the fact that many Babis were disappointed that their religion had gone underground and were yearning for some "new form of authority" and there was also the "widespread expectation that Jesus would return after advent of the Mahadi which led many to speculate that a new theophany would soon appear".[18]

During his stay in Edirne, Baha'u'llah's relations with his younger half-brother Subh-i-Azal became increasingly strained, and in 1887 Baha'u'llah sent his younger brother a missive demanding

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[18] Juan Cole, "The Baha'is of Iran : Prophets Without Honour?", *History Today* (London), vol.40, March 1990, p.26.

his obedience to the new revelation which Azal rejected. Babis in Iran were then forced to choose between Baha'u'llah and Azal. The vast majority accepted the assertions in Baha'u'llah's writings that he was a manifestation of god (*mazhar-e-elahi*) bearing a new revelation, rejecting Azal's form of Babism. Although the Baha'is date the inception of their religion from Baha'u'llah's 1863 private declaration in Baghdad, the Baha'i community only gradually came into being in the late 1860s, and most Babis did not become Bahai's in earnest until after 1867.

In 1868 Baha'u'llah and some close followers were exiled to Akka in Palestine by the Ottomans and Azal and his partisans were sent to Cyprus. The vast majority of Babis lived in Iran, and Baha'u'llah found ways to continue to send epistles and tablets to them. In 1873, while under house arrest in the old city of Akka, Baha'u'llah in response to request by the Baha'i community in Iran for a new book of laws to accompany his new revelation, set down the Aqdas (*al-Ketab al –aqdas*), meant to supersede the Quran and the Bab's book of laws, the Bayan. Baha'u'llah succeeded in his tussle against Azal partially because he solved the problems of legitimacy and organization as mentioned earlier. He prescribed the establishment of a Baha'i steering committee in every locality termed *bayt al-adl*, 'house of justice'. In addition, Baha'u'llah provided active leadership through his letters from exile, and through his close companions (called *moballegin*, 'teachers') who were sent back to Iran to implement his policies.

After 1873 the Baha'is in Iran began to organize themselves in accordance with the Aqdas and gradually began to follow its laws. For example, because of that Book's emphasis on the education of children of both sexes, informal Baha'i schools were set up. The Christian missionary Bruce noted "in 1874 in Isfahan the rapid increase in Baha'is".[19] There are evidences of substantial Baha'i followings among the merchant class in Qazvin, and among townsmen in Hamadan, Abada and Mashad. The government and the Shi'ite ulama carried out periodic persecution of the new religion, as in Isfahan in 1874 and 1880, in Tehran in 1882-83 and Yazd in 1891.[20] The Baha'i faith spread in this period, not only among Iranian Shi'ites but also among the Zoroastrians in Yazd, Jews in Kasan and Hamdan.

Baha'u'llah appointed his eldest son Abbas Effendi 'Abdu'l-Baha' to head up the Baha'i Faith after him. Abdu'l-Baha' assumed the leadership of the religion in 1892 upon his father's death and was accepted by almost all Baha'is as the perfect exampler of his father's teachings. Some of his younger half brothers led by Mohammad Ali joined a handful of Baha'i teachers in opposing his authority, but this small group eventually died out. Baha'is faced several waves of major persecution. The 1896 assassination of Naser-al-Din Shah by Mirza Reza Kermani a follower of Sayyed Jamal-al-Din 'Afgani' was widely blamed on Baha'i at first. Pogrom

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[19] Letter of Reverend Bruce, 19 November, 1874 in M. Momen, ed., *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford, 1981), p. 244.
[20] ibid, pp. 251-305.

against Baha'is were undertaken in 1903 in Rast, Isfahan and especially Yazd.[21] They were caught in the middle of the constitutional Revolution of 1905-11. Despite the support for constitutionalism in Baha'u'llah's writings Baha'i leaders were careful not to take sides too openly, primarily it seems, in order to avoid provoking their opponents in the opposing camps, thus endangering the vulnerable community, but probably also out of concern that their very identification with the cause might undermine it in Iran. Nevertheless, Abdu'l-Baha around 1906 urged Baha'is to attempt to elect two *ayadi e amir Allah* "Hands of the Cause of God" to parliament. He later became disillusioned with the Majles and urged Baha'is to dissociate themselves from politics, a policy which gradually became frozen into a Baha'i principle. Anti-Baha'i attacks increased again at times of political unrest, and the early 1920s prelude to Reza Khan's coup also saw numerous pogroms.[22]

Abdu'l-Baha further refined the Baha'i administrative apparatus, calling for election for Local Houses of Justice or Spiritual Assemblies (*mahfel-e ruhani-e mahalli*) by majority vote, and preparing for the election of an International House of Justice (*bayt al-adl-e bayn al melali*). Also in his will and testament, Shoghi (Sawqi) Effendi Rabbani, his grandson, was appointed the leader of the Baha'i faith after him as *wali-e amr Allah* (Guardian of the

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[21] ibid, pp.373-404.
[22] ibid, pp. 405-52.

Cause of God). He stipulated that Shoghi Effendi should appoint the next guardian from among his children or close cousins. Some Baha'is like Ruth White refused to accept Shoghi Effendi, others, like Ahmad Sohrab thought him too authoritarian. Only a minuscule number of Baha'is, however, followed them, and Shoghi Effendi's vigorous leadership and administrative abilities led to a great expansion in the number of Baha'is world-wide.

After 1925 many Iranian Baha'is began refusing to be identified by their family's ancestral religion on their passports and other official papers, and Baha'i institutions began issuing marriage certificates in accordance with the laws of the Aqdas. In 1927, Baha'is convened their first national conference of delegates from the nine provinces of Iran, and planned to begin annual national convention like those held in the United States. Baha'is organized for the establishment of primary schools, the improvement of the status of women and the propagation of their religion. The secularism of the Reza Shah government in the late 1920s at first helped the Baha'is, who built a Baha'i centre (*hazirat-al quds*) in Tehran, and began holding public meetings. There eighty-four of the ninety-five delegates to the national convention gathered to elect the first National Spiritual Assembly in 1934 in accordance with the laws translated from those of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. Wali–Allah Khan Warqa was elected chairman, Ali-Akbar Forutan became secretary. A Baha'i house of worship (*masreq al-adhkar)* was established on a tract of land near Tehran.

From 1934, however, the Reza Shah period was not a happy one for the Iranian Baha'i community though violence against them occurred much less frequently because of better security and less influence over affairs by the Shi'ite ulama. Reza Shah's autocratic rule meant he brooked no independence and uncontrolled activity from any social or religious institution including the Baha'i Faith. The rise of the Baha'i administrative order was perceived as a challenge to this central policy, and therefore all schools belonging to the Baha'i community were closed throughout Iran. Moreover, his government refused to recognize the validity of Baha'i marriage certificates, banned the printing and circulation of Baha'i literature, closed some local Baha'i centres, confiscated Baha'i ballot boxes at district conventions in some localities, forbade Baha'is to communicate with their coreligionists outside Iran, dismissed some Baha'i government employees and demoted some Baha'is in the military.

The installation of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi as Shah in the 1940s signaled no change in the legal status of the Baha'i Faith. Looser government authority in that decade allowed an increase in major mob attacks on Baha'is such as those at Abada in May of 1944 and at Sahrud in July –August of 1944. In 1946 and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran adopted a six-point plans for spreading the Baha'i Faith and for improving the status of women. For the first time, women were elected to Baha'i assemblies in Iran (they had served on them in the West much

before), and women's adult education and literary classes were set up. In 1955, in a move which seems to have been done as much for the appeasement of ulama as to divert the attention of the general populace from unpopular policies including the forging of a US-British sponsored military alliance (the Baghdad pact), the Shah's military destroyed the dome of the Baha'i centre in Tehran. The ulama and pro-clerical deputies in the docile parliament took the opportunity to voice support for the complete outlawing of the Baha'i faith, the jailing of all avowed Baha'is, and the sequestration of all Baha'i Property. During this campaign shops and farms were damaged by mob attacks and a number of Baha'is were assaulted. The government ultimately gave up the move, but the "campaign did strengthen the hand of the ulama with the government until the late 1950s."[23]

In 1953, Shoghi Effendi launched a global campaign for the Baha'i Faith, the 'Ten-year World Crusade', which sought with some success to spread the religion even to remote areas and islands. Shoghi Effendi passed away in London in 1957. Because he died childless and the actions of eligible relatives had forced him to excommunicate them, he found it impossible to appoint a 'Guardian' to succeed him. In 1963 there was a global congress of the Baha'is which elected the first Universal House of Justice. Almost all Baha'is accepted its authority, though a small number

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[23] Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics* in *Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany, N.Y., 1980), pp.76-87.

followed 'Hand of the Cause' Mason Remey who declared himself the Guardian despite Abdu'l-Baha's stipulation of descent from Baha'u'llah. The seat of the Universal House of Justice is in Haifa, Israel near the shrines of the Bab and Baha'u'llah.

In the 1970s Baha'is were often watched and harassed by the security apparatus, SAVAK, and the Baha'i publishing trust in Tehran was forced to offset rather than print books and to limit the number of books it circulated in order to avoid sanctions. Since its inception in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has, despite denials and explanations, demonstrated every intention of destroying the Baha'i community altogether. It has gradually and systematically confiscated all Baha'i properties and investment companies, fired Baha'i civil servants, dissolved all Baha'i National and Local Spiritual Assemblies and executed nearly two hundred of the country's most active and prominent Baha'is. It has harassed, detained and persecuted many others on various pretexts, ranging from violation of Islamic laws to conspiracy with and spying for international Zionism and imperialism. Since the Islamic Republic considers the performance of Baha'i marriage ceremonies heretical and illegitimate, Local Spiritual Assembly members who performed them have been tried on charges of promoting prostitution. Baha'is who went on visitation to shrines in Israel or sent monetary contributions to the Baha'i world Centre in Haifa came under suspicion of supporting Zionism or spying for it even though the establishment of Akka and Haifa as Baha'i centres dated from the

nineteenth-century, long before the founding of Israel. The parliament has made it illegal for parents to pass the Baha'i Faith onto the their children and refuse admittance of Baha'i children to schools and denies Baha'is ration cards.

The Baha'is are the largest non-Muslim minority in Iran, numbering perhaps 250,000 or more but unlike the Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and the Sabeans (Mandeans) they are "not protected people of the book." [24] What is more serious, from the point of view of fundamentalist Muslims, they descend from a religious movement that broke off from Islam, and conversion from Islam is prohibited in strict Muslim law.

BAHA'I EXPANSION AND DISTRIBUTION

The development of the Baha'i faith has been accompanied by a massive transformation of the religion's social base. From being a religion predominantly composed of those of Iranian Shi'ite background, it has become a world wide movement comprising people of a multitude of religious and national backgrounds. A distinctive Baha'i community may be said to have come into being during the 1860s and 1870s following the open rupture between the leaders of the Babi movement as mentioned earlier. In terms of total numbers, the official Baha'i estimate in April 2001 was that there

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[24] Nikki R. Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* (New York, 1995), p.150.

were in the region of 5,000,000 Baha'is world-wide.[25] In terms of distribution, the Baha'i expansion can be divided into three separate "worlds": the *Islamic heartland* in which the religion first developed (the Middle East, North Africa, and Asiatic Russia); the *West* (North America, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand); and the *Baha'i "Third World"*. Utilizing itinerant Baha'i couriers and teachers, Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha created a viable Iranian Baha'i community, whilst the efficient and widespread distribution of Baha'u'llah's major writings provided the basis for doctrinal unity of major population groups, only the nomadic tribes and the Sunni and Christian minorities remained effectively beyond the reach of Baha'i missionaries. In term of social class, both the existing Babi membership and the new converts represented a wide ranging diversity. European observers noted the particular success which the Baha'i missionaries enjoyed among the educated classes, but craftsmen, urban workers and peasants were also well-represented. In contrast to Babism, relatively few clerics were converted. The ulama now had a well-defined and negative image of the Babi-Baha'i movement, and were thus more resistant to its message. Next to Iran, the most important Middle Eastern Baha'i Community has been in Egypt. Founded in the 1860s by expatriate Iranians,

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[25] Baha'i World Statistics, August 2001, downloaded from *http://www.bahai-library.org/resources/ worldstatistics.2001.html,* source – Keyser, Jason (AP), "In a Land of War, a Garden of Peace" in *Salt Lake Tribune,* 21 April, 2001; for details see the tables attached with this chapter.

the community came to include native Sunni Muslim and Christian converts.[26]

The Baha'i teachings were first introduced to the West by a Syrian Christian convert, Ibrahim George Kheirada. Establishing himself in Chicago he gained his first converts in 1894. The Baha'i situation in North America changed dramatically in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The community increased due to a great boom of youth conversions. A second wave of conversions followed as the American Baha'is successfully made contact with rural Afro-Americans in the southern states. The combined impact of these two developments was considerable. In terms of total numbers, the total population of Baha'i is in the region of 753,423 in the USA.[27] The first group of Baha'is in Europe were formed as a result of contacts with American Baha'is. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the American Baha'is under took a major teaching campaign in much of Western Europe, local Baha'i communities being established in all the countries outside the communist block. As in America, the European Bahai's gained a lot of youthful converts from the late 1960s onwards.

Baha'i teachers from the United States visited Latin America even before the First World War, but sustained activity only began in the inter-war period, particularly the start of American Seven-Year Plan (1937-44), which aimed to establish Baha'i Local

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[26] Juan Ricardo Cole, "Rashid Rida on the Baha'i Faith: A Utilitarian Theory of the Spread of Religions", *Arab Studies Quarterly* (Lake Forest), vol. 5, no..3, Summer 1983, p.280.

[27] See table 1.1. attached with this chapter.

Assemblies in all the mainland republics. Initially, the Latin American communities drew much of their membership from amongst the urban middle-classes, but from the 1950s onwards, increasing contacts were made with Amerindians, particularly in the Andean Countries. The Baha'i community of the Indian subcontinent dates back to the 1870s, the Baha'i teacher, Jamal Effendi undertaking an extensive tour under Baha'u'llah's direction (1872-78). Most of the early Baha'is were either of Iranian extraction or Persianzed Indians. Little contact was made with the Hindu masses. By concentrating their efforts on the urban lecture going population, the Baha'is greatly limited their chances of success, and even as late as 1961, these were still less than 900 Baha'is in the whole of India.[28] The decisive breakthrough was the determined attempt to present the Baha'i teachings to the rural masses. When this was done (from 1961), the whole character of the community was changed, and large numbers of people became Baha'is, most of them Hindu by background. By 1971 there were upto 356,744 Baha'is in India.[29] They are now said to be approaching two million.[30]

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[28] See International Survey of Current Baha'i Activities," *Baha'i World, 1954-1963* (Haifa), vol. 13(1970), p.299.

[29] See William Garlington's article "Baha'i Conversions in Malwa," Central India in Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen edited *Studies in Babi and Baha'i History : From Iran East and West* (Los Angles, 1984), p.181.

[30] see table 1.1 attached with this chapter.

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To Sum Up

Various theories have been put forward for the rise of the Babi and Baha'i religions. But, one fact which underlies all of them is the Shaikhi belief in millenarianism. The year 1844 was the thousandth anniversary of the disappearance of the Hidden Imam 'Mahadi' . The Iranian society of that time was steeped in this millenarian ferment. The Bab's revelation only acted as a catalyst to trigger the subsequent events. Also, Babi 'organizational efficiency' played a major role in its spread. We should also take into account the fact that there was a tradition of religious innovation in the Persianate context. There was the recurrence of certain outlooks and motifs. At the centre of 'ghulati' movements ('ghulats' are often idealists and visionaries who believe that justice could reign in the world of ours) has been found a sense of immediacy in the desire to experience a utopia on earth. They do not see the universe, in linear terms of a beginning and an end, but as successive cycles where the end of one era spontaneously flowed into the beginning of another. There is no Final Apocalypse, no End-Time as is believed by 'mainstream' Jews, Christians and Muslims. Bab's and particularly Baha'u'llah's messianic messages strongly resonated with the above enunciated themes and may be regarded as emerging out of that tradition. This view finds further reinforcement from the fact that Baha'u'llah repudiated finality for his revelation, holding fast to a cyclical yet

evolutionary approach to eschatology that envisaged no end to the periodic and progressive (re)appearance of divine Messengers.

Table 1.1: Top 20 Largest National Baha'i Populations

Country	Number of Baha'is	Percent of Country's Pop.
India	1,716,148	0.17%
USA	753,423	0.27%
Iran	463,151	0.69%
Viet Nam	356,133	0.45%
Kenya	308,292	1.02%
Bolivia	269,246	3.25%
South Africa	255,775	0.59%
Philippines	229,522	0.29%
Congo (Zaire)	224,596	0.43%
Zambia	162,443	1.70%
Thailand	144,243	0.23%
Venezuela	141,072	0.58%
Tanzania	140,593	0.40%
Malaysia	97,078	0.42%
Chad	80,683	1.01%
Myanmar	79,044	0.16%
Pakistan	78,658	0.05%
Uganda	66,546	0.29%
Colombia	64,758	0.16%
Cameroon	64,286	0.42%

Source: Year 2000 Estimated Baha'i statistics from: David Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2000; Total population statistics, mid-2000 from Population Reference Bureau (http://www.prb.org) downloaded from http://www.adherents.com/ largecom /com_bahai.html

Table 1.2: Top 20 Most Baha'i Countries -Countries with the Highest Proportion of Baha'is in the Population

Country	Number of Baha'is	Percent of Country's Pop.
Nauru	1,106	9.22%
Tonga	6,582	6.09%
Tuvalu	580	5.86%
Kiribati	4,321	4.70%
Tokelau Islands	65	4.33%
Cocos Islands	27	3.72%
Bolivia	269,246	3.25%
Falkland Islands	67	2.98%
Vanuatu	5,418	2.78%
Belize	6,941	2.73%
Samoa	4,178	2.37%
Guyana	14,584	2.09%
United Arab Emirates	55,214	1.95%
Sao Tome and Principe	3,011	1.88%
Mauritius	21,848	1.84%
Zambia	162,443	1.70%
Dominica	1,225	1.61%
Micronesia	1,909	1.61%
Niue Island	29	1.53%
Marshall Islands	1,023	1.50%

Source: Year 2000 Estimated Baha'i statistics from: David Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2000; Total population statistics, mid-2000 from Population Reference Bureau (http://www.prb.org) downloaded from http://www.adherents.com/ largecom /com_bahai.html

Table 1.3: World Baha'i Population Estimates by different sources for the years 1998 to 2001

Group	Where	Number of Adherents	% of total pop.	Year	Source
Baha'i Faith	world	5,000,000	-	1998	official web site; home page (viewed 27 Feb. 1999)
Baha'i Faith	world	5,000,000	-	1998	Web site: "How to Find Truth and Update Your Religion " (c)1998 by George Norwood; web page: "The Baha'i Faith, Cults and Sects " (viewed 9 Jan. 1999)
Baha'i Faith	world	7,666,000	-	1998	web site: "Kids Incorporated "; web page: "Religion Statistics " (viewed 5 July 1999).
Baha'i Faith	world	5,517,000	-	1998	web site: "Mike Croghan's Religion Page "; web page: "Baha'i Faith " (viewed 27 Feb. 1999; viewed & URL updated 1 July 1999)
Baha'i Faith	world	5,000,000	-	1998	web site: "New Religious Movements " (University of Virginia); web page: "The Baha'i Faith " (viewed 31 Jan. 1999); "Created by Adele Skaff for Sociology 257, Fall, 1998. An earlier version of this page was created by: Elizabeth Williams, Spring Term, 1996. "
Baha'i Faith	world	5,000,000	-	1998	web site: "United Church of Canada Inter-Faith Dialogue "; web page: "Baha'i Faith " (viewed 19 Feb. 1999), written by Fritz B. Voll, "Updated: Tue Jun 9 23:39:38 1998 "
Baha'i Faith	world	5,000,000	-	1998	web site: New Religious Movements (University of Virginia) (1998); (viewed 31 Jan. 1999); "Created by Adele Skaff for Sociology 257, Fall, 1998. An earlier version of this page was created by: Elizabeth Williams, Spring Term, 1996. "
Baha'i Faith	world	4,000,000	-	1998	web site: Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance (viewed circa Nov. 1998) [Original sources: J.W. Wright, Editor, *The Universal Almanac, 1996*, Andrews & McMeel, Kansas City. Greg H. Parsons, Executive Director, "U.S. Center for World Mission, " Pasadena, CA; quoted in Zondervan News Service, 1997-FEB-21.]
Baha'i Faith	world	6,000,000	-	1998	web site: Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance; web page: "The Baha'i Faith " (viewed 18 Feb. 1999)
Baha'i Faith	world	6,000,000	-	1999	Chryssides, George. *Exploring New Religions.* London, U.K.: Cassells (1999).
Baha'i Faith	world	6,000,000	-	1999	Spartos, Carlos. "Practical Piety: A Guide for the Perplexed " in *Village Voice* (New York), Jan. 27-Feb. 2, 1999; (viewed online, 29 Jan. 1999)
Baha'i Faith	world	6,000,000	-	1999	web page "Baha'is of Flemington, New Jersey, U.S.A. "
Baha'i Faith	world	7,111,661	0.12%	2000	Barrett, David B. *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2001)
Baha'i Faith	world	5,000,000	-	2000	Stack, Peggy Fletcher. "Baha'is Prayerfully To Choose National Convention Delegate " in *Salt Lake Tribune* (14 Oct 2000)
Baha'i Faith	world	5,000,000	-	2001	Keyser, Jason (AP). "In a Land of War, a Garden of Peace " in *Salt Lake Tribune*, 21 Apr 2001.

Source: Downloaded and adapted from www.adherents.com/Na_60.html.

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Chapter 2
THE BAHA'I FAITH AND SOCIAL VALUES

Every community strives to live according to some generalised guidelines called values. "A value is a belief that something is good and desirable. It defines what is important, worthwhile and worth trying for."[1] The Baha'i religious texts lay down an array of guidelines according to which an individual should live. This chapter deals with the social values stressed by Baha'i teachings. It shows how a true adherent of the Baha'i Faith is more inclined towards universalism than individualism. The societal goals are his/her personal goals. There is supposed to be no contradiction between the individual and the society.

THE ONENESS OF MANKIND

The central theme of the teaching of Baha'u'llah is unity and particularly the oneness of mankind. The world in the days of Baha'u'llah was a very different place from what it is today. At that time, most countries of the world were ruled by powerful despots. Wealth was in the hands of chosen few, while the mass of people everywhere lived in abject poverty. The appalling insanitary conditions, the terrible diseases that swept through the towns and villages, the utter ignorance of the masses throughout the world, the cruelty with which the under-privileged were treated by their lords and masters, the superstitions and the fanatical religious

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[1]   M. Haralambos and R.M. Heald, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* (Delhi, 1981), p.6.

hatreds that abounded everywhere — all these were signs of the darkness which enveloped the world when Baha'u'llah declared His Mission and gave His teachings to mankind.

The message of Baha'u'llah was not for the individual alone. He also gave many practical teachings for the reconstruction of society. He called upon the kings and rulers of the world and the religious teachers of mankind everywhere to unite in bringing about the necessary changes. Baha'u'llah says:

> The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light is these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal Ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He who is the Day Star of Truth beareth me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth. The one true God, He who knoweth all things, Himself testifieth to the truth of these words.[2]

He told the world leaders that the plan of God for this day is the unity of the entire human race and that the complicated problems facing the world today could not be solved until its unity was first established. He repeatedly warned that if they who had the reins of authority in their hands refused to put into practice the principles which God had given for the new age, they would bring great suffering upon themselves and on those they ruled.

The principle of the oneness of Mankind is stressed again and again in the Holy Writings of the Baha'i Faith with many picturesque illustrations. It is not easy always to love one's fellow men; human imperfection sometimes arouses in us feelings that

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[2] Baha'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Shoghi Effendi, trans. (Wilmette, 1979), p.14.

conflict with love. Moreover, our own imperfection may cause us to recoil from what ought to attract us. Such obstacles to universal love vanish if we look upon all we meet as embodiments of spiritual qualities emanating from God.

The Baha'i teachings see the diversity of the human race as one of its glories. Its variety enchants, as does a garden of varied flowers. Unity does not require uniformity. Like varied limbs and members of the human body are coordinated and united by the soul of man, so also the varied peoples of the world can be coordinated and united by the power of God.[3] At a time, when the world is torn apart by ethnic and religious conflicts, this Baha'i idea of unity is worth noting.

Baha'u'llah speaks against the idea of belligerent nationalism. Of all the prejudices, which hold men apart, the most potent in recent times has been that of nation. Few people wholly evade its grasp. Too many people still regard as paramount the interests of those belonging to the same nation as themselves. To do so is to deny the oneness of Mankind. A sane and moderate patriotism is harmless enough, or even beneficial in encouraging local public spirit, but such patriotism must always be subordinate to the wider loyalty to Mankind, which is the foundation of unity. Baha'u'llah states categorically: "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens."[4] Baha'i teachings urge its followers to devote

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[3] John Ferraby, *All Things Made New* (New Delhi, 1997), p.74.

[4] *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, Shoghi Effendi, trans. (London, 1978), p. cxvii.

themselves to the interests of mankind rather than to the interests of any limited section of it. Rulers as well as people should try to promote the well-being of the whole mankind. More they do this, the world's sickness would quickly be healed.

The Baha'i teachings also explicitly speak against race and colour prejudice. It is one of the most dangerous and longest lived of prejudices. It threatens civil strive in some parts of the world and if unchecked it will undoubtedly be responsible for much bloodshed. Baha'u'llah exhorts mankind to reject this prejudice especially. In the words of Abdu'l-Baha:

> Baha'u'llah once compared the coloured people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black people is seen the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the spirit shineth forth.[5]

This statement of equality of races has been qualified by the evidence of scientific research. True Baha'is are no more and no less conscious that someone comes from another continent than that he comes from another town. Intermarriage of the races, far from being frowned upon, is warmly approved because it smoothes the path to racial harmony.

The Baha'i teachings also stress the unity East and the West. People from the East and people from the West have backgrounds so different that they need to guard against misunderstanding of each other. Both the East and the West can and have to learn from each other's virtues.

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[5] Abdu'l-Baha quoted in *Advent of Divine Justice* by Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, 1974), p.31.

WORLD UNITY

The Baha'i teachings presage the disintegration of the old World Order and the creation of a New Order. The bankruptcy of the old order is visible both in the impotence of statesmanship to harmonise conflicting views of national governments or provide a sure basis for international co-operation, and in the decline of ecclesiastical institutions. The new order will not reach full flower for many hundreds of years. According to Baha'i teachings, the new order will attain its finest development when mankind accepts, and sincerely tries to apply, all the teachings of Baha'u'llah. "The New World Order of Baha'u'llah is being built today in thousands of small communities where the Baha'i Administration is taking form."[6] When this new order has been universally adopted, humanity will at last be free to move on towards the world organisation implicit in the teachings of Baha'u'llah. As Shoghi Effendi says:

> The unity of the human race, as envisaged by
> Baha'u'llah, implies the establishment of a world
> commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and
> classes are closely and permanently united, and in
> which autonomy of its state members and the personal
> freedom and the initiative of the individuals that
> compose them are definitely and completely
> safeguarded.[7]

At present the New World Order of Baha'u'llah is still embryonic. The Baha'i Administrative Order is concerned only with the affairs

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[6] Ferraby, n.3, p. 85.
[7] Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette, 1969), p.203.

of a comparatively small community, and the day when the peoples of the world shall voluntarily install it as a World Order of their own choosing is yet far distant.

Many years before the idea of a League of Nations found favour with the world's advanced political and sociological thinkers, Baha'u'llah urged the adoption of a system of collective security. The principle of collective security was propounded by him in statements addressed to the rulers of the world. "He called for the formation of some form of a world super-state in whose favour all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for purpose of maintaining internal order within their respective domains."[8] Such a state will have to include within its orbit an International Executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the commonwealth. A world parliament whose members shall be elected by the people in their respective countries and whose election shall be confirmed by their respective governments and a Supreme Tribunal whose judgement will have a binding effect even in such cases where the parties concerned did not voluntarily agree to submit their case to its consideration.

The Baha'i teachings call for the creation of a world community. A community which is driven by 'universalistic values'

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[8]   Shoghi Effendi quoted in *The Promise of World Peace*, A statement by the Universal House of Justice, (New Delhi, 1985), p.21.

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in Parsonian terms.[9] A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of capital and labour definitely recognised. The clamour of religious fanaticism and strife will have forever stilled and the flame of racial animosity will have finally extinguished. A world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship.

At a time when every other country in the world is troubled by linguistic jingoism, the Baha'i advocacy of the adoption of an international auxiliary language is commendable. This language may be newly invented or one already existing provided, the choice is agreed by a large number of governments. Instruction in the chosen language will not replace instruction in anyone's mother tongue. The international language is to be auxiliary to the various national ones and to exist alongside of them. Everyone will speak two languages, so that even if the number of living languages remains as great as it is now, all people will have one in common.

The Baha'i Faith teaches that one should be obedient to the government of the area in which one lives. This is to preserve unity and is very important . A true Baha'i is justified in disobeying his government only if it requires him to do something contrary to the fundamental teachings of Baha'u'llah, so that obedience to the

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[9] Francis M. Abraham, *Modern Sociological Theory: An Introduction* (Calcutta, 1982), p. 58-
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government would amount to a denial of Faith. Thus, if a government tries to make a Baha'i say he is a Muslim, or a Christian, or a Buddhist, or a Jew he does not obey, but if the laws of a country require all able-bodied men to serve in the armed forces and admit no exceptions, Baha'is have to obey their government even to the extent of fighting. Thus, the Baha'i values stress the need for an individual to become a responsible member of the society. The societal priorities and goals should come before individual needs and expectations.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC TEACHINGS

Equal Status for Men and Women

The Baha'i Faith teaches that men and women are equal in the sight of God and neither sex is superior to the other. Each has something to contribute towards the advancement of the world, and both men and women should enjoy equal privileges in society. In the past humanity suffered because women were treated as though inferior and were not given the chance of developing their abilities. When women have equal opportunity of education, they too will be able to cultivate their potential talents and offer their full share to progress of mankind. Speaking on this subject Abdu'l-Baha said:

> The world in the past has been ruled by force and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman

is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced.[10]

Baha'i writings proclaim that the world of harmony has two wings — one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly[11]. Here, it is noteworthy that the Baha'i teachings do not undermine the role of men in their efforts for gender equality. As the above statement shows, they recognize the roles of both sexes in the advancement of humanity. The complementarity of the roles of men and women is emphasized. Thus, equality between men and women, entailing full and equal participation of women in " all fields of human endeavour" is a cardinal principle of Baha'i belief. Encouraging women in realizing their potentiality is the major theme of Baha'i development activity.[12] Consequently, the Baha'i community throughout the world is constantly striving to improve the status of woman at all levels of society. "Baha'is stress that change must be a unifying force, leading towards full partnership of men and women — and beyond this towards the unity of human family."[13] Baha'is see the need to involve men in recognizing and promoting the issue of

[10] Quoted in Gloria Faizi, *The Baha'i Faith: An Introduction* (New Delhi, 1992), p. 79.
[11] Baha'i Writings quoted in *Two Wings,* (New Delhi), vol.2, Issue#2, September-December 2001, p. 3.
[12] C. Rajyalakshmi, "Women in a Religion of Recent Origin: The case of Baha'i Faith" , *Social Change* (New Delhi), vol.28, no.4, December 1998, p. 84.
[13] Information booklet issued by *The Baha'i Office for the Advancement of Women* — an Agency of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of India, p. 4.

equality. What benefits will accrue either to men or to women if only women see the need for equality?

Women and men have to put in a united effort in order to bring about enduring changes effectively and to fundamentally alter the attitudes of both men and women. Gender focused activities for women only, will result in conflict between men and women and therefore will be detrimental to community life rather than beneficial, since they may polarize the sexes rather than improving relationships between them. Problems facing women can not be resolved unless men are also educated to value women as equal partners. Laws and ordinances woven into the fabric of the Baha'i social order facilitate the integration of women in all aspects of social life and the Baha'i administrative system promotes practical steps leading to a society where equality will be the norm. Realizing the goal of unity, rather than hegemony in male-female relationships, will radically alter the social life of human family. If the parents do not have enough funds to send all their children to school, Baha'i writings advise that the education of girls takes precedence over the education of boys.

> The decision making agencies involved would do well to consider giving first priorities to the education of women and girls, since it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly utilized throughout society[14]

Society cannot progress as long as mothers stay in a state of ignorance.

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[14]   Effendi, n.8, pp. 16-17.

Education

Baha'u'llah's teachings on education are quite explicit. At a time when education of the masses was unknown, even in the most advanced countries of the world, Baha'u'llah called upon His followers to educate their children. He said:

> It is decreed that every father must educate his sons and daughters...He who educates his son, or any other's children, it is as though he hath educated one of My children.[15]

He laid special stress on the education of girls because they as mothers of the future would have a great influence on the education of their children. But Baha'u'llah explained that education does not consist of the mere acquisition of academic knowledge. Children should be taught the spiritual standards and great attention should be paid to the training of their character.

Baha'i education avoids both the extreme of religious fanaticism and the extreme of scientific narrow-mindedness. Combining spiritual and ethical instruction with the study of arts and sciences, it will fittingly prepare the children of the future to uphold and exploit the Most Great Peace.

Work

The Baha'i teachings state that education should also fit a child to earn its living when it grows up as all must work. Even the rich should not be idle. Work, whether paid or voluntary should be done

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[15] Baha'u'llah quoted, Faizi, n.10, p.77.

in a spirit of service to mankind. Baha'i teachings certainly extol the dictum " Work is Worship".

These teachings are important now, but will be even more needed in the world of the future from which want will have been vanished and in which a high standard of living will be available to all for little exertion. Without the attitude to work inculcated by Baha'u'llah, this prosperity might be imperiled by reluctance to work by men grown soft from good living.

Limitation of Wealth and Poverty

Absolute equality, as far as riches are concerned, is impossible because people's capacities and tastes are different. The order of the world would be upset if we were all forced to live alike. But Baha'u'llah teaches that society must not permit extremes of either wealth or poverty. Regarding this matter, He has given certain general economic principles, which, like so many of His other teachings, are gradually being accepted by many thoughtful people.

Mention has already been made of the importance of work for every able-bodied individual. To a Baha'i work is a religious obligation, and when it is done in the spirit of service to others, it is considered as worship. Society must allow no idle rich, or poor, to live on fruits of other people's labours.

Baha'u'llah teaches the principle of graduated taxation. When a person is earning just enough to afford a comfortable life, he should not be taxed; but if his income exceeds his needs, he

should pay into the public fund, the percentage of tax increasing as the surplus over his necessary expenditure increases. On the other hand, if a man, due to illness, bad harvest, or some other reasons for which he is not responsible, is unable to provide the necessary means of comfort for himself and his family, he should be helped out of the public fund. No human being should be permitted to live bellow certain standard.

Baha'u'llah has also laid down certain rules regarding capital and labour. He states that a labourer should receive, besides his wages, a percentage of the profits of capital. Abdu'l-Baha explains thus:

> The owners of properties, mines and factories, should share their incomes with their employees, and give a fairly certain percentage of their profits to their working men, in order that the employees should receive, besides their wages, some of the general income of the factory, so that the employee may strive with his soul in the work.[16]

Although social laws are necessary for the regulation of wealth, Baha'u'llah teaches that the economic problem is essentially a spiritual one. When there is starvation through poverty among people, it is a sure sign that there is tyranny somewhere. The rich must become willing to give voluntarily of their abundance through love and compassion for their fellow men, not because they are forced to do so. When people become aware of the spiritual values of life and feel a genuine band unity with the rest of mankind, they will not wish to amass riches while others are in need.

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[16]   Abdu'l-Baha quoted, ibid, p. 82.

Thus, the Baha'i teachings lay emphasis on the equal distribution of wealth in society. But, this equality should not come through conflicts but through conviction. The rich should be made aware of their obligations towards their poorer brethren. The sharing of wealth should be voluntary.

Religion and Science

One of the important principles given by Baha'u'llah is that true religion and true science are always in agreement. According to the Baha'i Faith, true religion can never be opposed to scientific facts; and God, Who has given man the gift of the intellect, does not expect him to lay it aside when investigating religious truth. Scientific theories have not always proved to be right, but this does not mean that one should accept ideas contrary to all logic and reason because they are advanced in the name of religion.

Science, as well as religion, has been greatly abused at times; but true science which discovers the laws of the universe and helps our material and mental advancement can never be opposed to true religion which reveals spiritual truths.

Baha'is are taught to look upon science and religion as the two wings of humanity. Unless both wings are strong, we cannot soar to any heights of progress. Science provides us with tools and means; religion teaches us how to use them to our best advantage. Science without religion leads to materialism and destruction,

religion without science breeds fanaticism and superstition. Abdu'l-Baha says:

> When religion, shorn of its superstitions, traditions and unintelligent dogmas, shows its conformity with science, then there will be a great unifying, cleaning force in the world, which will sweep before it all wars, disagreements, discards and struggles, and then will mankind be united in the power of the love of God.[17]

It is a notable feature of the Baha'i Faith that in spite of being one of the revealed religions, it preaches scientific rationalism alongside spiritualism. In these terms it can be perfectly called a religion of the modern world.

Bequest and Inheritance

Baha'u'llah states that a person should be free to dispose of his possessions during his life time in any way he chooses, and it is incumbent on everyone to write a will stating how his property is to be disposed of after his death. When a person dies without leaving a will, the value of the property should be estimated and divided in certain stated proportions among seven classes of inheritors, namely, children, wife or husband, father, mother, brothers, sisters and teachers, the share of each diminishing from the first to the last. In the absence of one or more of these classes, the share, which would belong to them, goes to the public treasury.

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[17]   Abdu'l-Baha quoted, ibid, p. 80.

Public Finance

Baha'i teachings suggest that each town and village or district should be entrusted as far as possible with the administration of fiscal matters within its own area and should contribute its due proportion for the expenses of the general government. One of the principal sources of income should be graduated income tax. Other sources of public revenue e.g. interstate estates, mines, treasure-trove and voluntary contributions. While among the expenditures will be grants for the support of the infirm, of orphans, of schools, of the deaf and blind and for the maintenance of public health. Thus the welfare and comfort of all will be provided for.

Material and Spiritual Civilisation

Baha'i teachings stress that individual faith and action must be supplemented by the right kind of governmental organization. Nevertheless, right governmental organization without spiritual rebirth of the generality of mankind will not heal the world's ills. Only a regenerated humanity can benefit from or adequately administer the New World Order of Baha'u'llah. At present mankind is immersed in materialism, so that most people's desire for material, not spiritual things. One man wants wealth, another power, another the material happiness of several satisfaction; few have as their prior aim doing the Will of God.

The intellectual and scientific achievements of man in this new age have so outrun his spiritual development that he himself

acknowledges his incompetence to control the effects of his discoveries. Only when he progresses spiritually will be able to reap the full benefit of his material achievements. Until then, each advance in material civilization will bring fresh problems, fresh dangers and fresh unhappiness.

Of Crime and Criminals

Baha'i teachings stress the role of the community in bringing down incidents of crime. The community can do so not by having repressive laws and punishing the culprits. In fact, a more effective way of dealing with crime would be by educating the masses. This will broaden the understanding, develop the sensibilities, customs would become good and morals normal. All these classes of perfection will lead to progress and hence fewer crimes.

Concluding Remarks

From the above account, we see that the Baha'i religious ideals stress the subordination of the individual goals to societal ones. Societal interests come before the individual ones. This is an important way of keeping peace in society at a time when it is being torn apart by various centrifugal forces. In fact, Baha'i conception of societal predominance is taken further and seen in the context of relations between nations. Here, the Baha'i ideals speak for the formation of a World Government. For that to happen, all the countries of the world have to let go some aspects of their sovereignty. The Baha'i ideals speak of the formation of an

international auxiliary language over and above the various existing languages. This will go a long way in solving linguistic and ethnic strifes.

The Baha'i ideals also speak of equitable distribution of resources of the society. This will lessen the tensions and conflicts between the haves and the have-nots. At global level, a transfer of wealth from the rich to the poor countries will help solve problems of poverty and economic disparity.

To sum up, the single theme, which runs through all Baha'i teachings and ideas, is the unity of mankind. The world should be devoid of any conflicts – whether based on religion, ethnicity, territory or politics. Then only it will become a safer place to live in. The creation of a World Government will usher in everlasting peace and unity of mankind.

Chapter 3

THE BAHA'I FAITH AND THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Baha'i religious texts explicitly mention the kind of social structure they visualize. Right from the village level to the world level, Baha'i teachings have something to say. In fact, they argue for an inter-connection between the micro-level social relationships with those at the macro-level. The teachings have one strong theme which runs through all the Baha'i texts. And, that is the realization of world peace and unity of mankind. Every ideal of the Baha'i Faith is in fact a step towards the attainment of the world order they visualize. This chapter deals with those teachings of the Baha'i Faith which talk about the social structure.

In the context of the Indian society Yogendra Singh has classified social structure into two broad categories – the micro-social structure and the macro–social structure.[1]For the purpose of studying the Baha'i social structure, it would also be worthwhile to follow the above schema. This will help us in studying the inter-linkages between the two which are so important a part of the Baha'i ideals.

Micro-structures[2] are relatively autonomous institutions where primary relationships dominate. They are driven by affective

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[1]   Yogendra. Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition: A Systemic Study of Social Change* (Jaipur and New Delhi, 1996), p.127.
[2]   According to Yogendra. Singh, Family, Community, Clan, Tribe, Caste and Sub-Caste are examples of micro-structures in Indian society.

and particularistic relationships and their organization is less formal. They are focused to needs which are narrow yet primary in nature. The network of relationships in these groups is also limited and the quality of relational bonds is diffused rather than specific. Relationships are governed by kinship, birth, territorial bonds which delimit the horizon of social interaction and reinforce values which may be in apparent contrast with those of a modernized role-structure. But, even in a modernized or relatively modernized society there is legitimate scope as well as need for such group structure. Some of the roles performed by there micro-structures, for instance, those performed by family, cannot be substituted and constitute structural universals.

In contrast, macro-structures[3] refer to those organized roles and relationships which are more extensive, more formal, are organized or acclaimed to be organized on universalistic principles (rational-legal norms) and which have to do with the integration or regulation of the larger system of society and involve secondary and higher orders of relationships.

BAHA'I FAITH AND THE MICRO-STRUCTURES

The Baha'i religious texts clearly mention the kind of social structure they visualize. A careful reading of the Baha'i texts helps

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[3]   Yogendra Singh has identified the following familiar examples of macro-structures in Indian society –political and other types of elite, administration and bureaucracy, industrial workers and entrepreneurs and other urban and industrial groups and social classes.

one to identify the following micro–structures – family, Local Spiritual Assemblies, Local communities etc.

The Baha'i view is that there are two essential requirements for the establishment of a just society where all will have the opportunity to find a fruitful and meaningful life. The first is commitment to the highest moral principles, that is the creation of a new race of men and women. The second requirement is a completely new system of institutions which will give expression to, shape and strengthen the aspirations of such a race of men and women. In the last chapter we had discussed the qualities or social values which will make for a more just society. It is now time to say something on institutions which are also required.

THE FAMILY : A NEW MODEL

The oldest, strongest and most basic of all social relationships is the family. Many sociologists have regarded the family as the cornerstone of society. They consider it as the basic unit of social organization without which human society cannot function. In the recent past the role of family as an institution has been questioned. It is supposed to be an oppressive device where a narrow inward looking atmosphere prevails.[4] David Cooper sees the family as a stultifying institution which stunts the self and largely denies people the freedom to develop individuality.[5] Leach regards family

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[4] John Huddleston, *The Earth is But One Country* (New Delhi, 1999), p.75.
[5] Cited in Haralambos and Heald, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* (Delhi, 1981) p.338.

as a source of all our discontents.[6] But, Baha'is believe that when a family is based on sound moral and spiritual principles it will make an invaluable contribution to the development of all concerned; husband, wife, parents, children, and to society and is an essential element in the development of a just society and it is believed that there is no substitute for it.

The last chapter discussed Baha'i teachings on equality between all members of the human race. This theme permeates the idea of the Baha'i family. Of particular importance is the belief in the equality of men and women – one of the basic principles of the Baha'i Faith. Women, in some respects, have different areas of capacity than men and a distinctive view point; partly, of course as a result of upbringing, but partly also from difference in physical make-up and their unique function in society. The capacity and the contribution they make to the general good of society are just as important as the capacity and contribution men make. Consequently, when women are prevented from reaching their full potential, society is thrown off balance and suffers accordingly.

It is the purpose of Baha'i teachings to ensure that women play their full role in society and they find a true pride in their femininity. Baha'is stress that women should be given equal legal rights with men, equal social treatment and respect, and equal opportunities, and they should have equal hearing in councils of government.

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[6] Leach cited, ibid, p.335.

Abdu'l-Baha said that the key to achieving equality for women in society is to ensure that their education is the same as for men. In fact, he went further and said that in view of the critical part women play in the raising of children, the generation of the future, their education should be given the higher priority.[7]

The above principles apply both in society at large and within the family. Though a man and a woman may not necessarily perform the same functions in the day-to-day life of the family, there has to be equal treatment and the affairs of the family should be conducted on the basis of consultation giving equal consideration to the views of both men and women.

Marriage

The core of the family is marriage. Baha'i Writings say that the purpose of marriage is procreation and the raising of children. But, this is not all. It is also an instrument for the spiritual development of all members of the family, living together in intimacy with persons of different sex and different age groups, learning to appreciate the beauty and variety of life, and learning the responsibilities of protecting the young and weak. The Baha'i concept of marriage is therefore much more than a legal contract between two individuals. It is more a social and spiritual contract covering all members of the family.

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[7] Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: A Compendium of 129 Public Talks given in the United States and Canada in 1912* (Wilmette, 1982), pp.169-70.

Baha'u'llah described the Baha'i marriage laws a fortress for well being and salvation.[8] The qualities and experiences of marriage and the family are of the utmost importance in learning how to live in the wider family of the community of the human race. Marriage and the family should provide an open home for the community, a haven and a place of love for all, including those who are deprived and lost. This is the outward–looking family giving every opportunity for the spiritual growth of its members, and of those who visit it. This is the family setting the example of how a community should be.

So rewarding are the fruits of marriage for the individual and for society in general that Baha'u'llah said that all should marry if they are able and can find the right partner. He specifically deplored professional celibacy which, though never advocated by any of the great educators, has become nevertheless a tradition in many religions.

In the past there were circumstances, as was recognized by prophet Mohammad when polygamous marriage might be necessary in the interest of society because strife had so upset the natural balance in number between men and women that there was an overriding need for the protection of women for an increase in population. However, as humanity progresses and peaceful balanced society is established, monogamy becomes the most satisfactory basis for the family, for only then can there be real

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[8] Baha'u'llah quoted, Huddleston, n.4. p.78.

equality between man and women.[9] Monogamy is a logical biological unit for human species as such a union is best made for the full development of the complementary qualities of the marriage partners and for the provision of a stable, balanced, responsible and loving background for the rearing of children.

A monogamous family does not mean a narrow family. The Baha'i family is much more than just parents and children. Every effort should be made to keep vigorous ties within the wider family, grandparents, cousins and the other members of the family. At a time, when the forces of industrialization and urbanization are more or less leading to the breakdown of the joint family, the Baha'i advocacy of maintenance of ties with the wider family is noteworthy.

Baha'i teachings also advocate the process of consultation among family members, especially husband and wife. The partners should recognize their own weaknesses and should try to put them right. They should at the same time make a full commitment to make it as early as possible for their spouse to overcome his or her limitations. When a marriage is fully based on consultation of this sort there will be less chance of painful confrontation, nagging or trials to place blame for past events. One of the major reasons for divorce in the present day society is maladjustment between the spouses. The Baha'i method of consultation provides a helpful remedy.

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[9] The Baha'i Faith is the first of the world's religions to specifically lay down monogamy as the only basis for marriage.

Baha'is place great emphasis on careful choice of a marriage partner. The Baha'i view is that this involves becoming thoroughly acquainted with both one's own character and that of the proposed partner, so that both can be assured that there is the required maturity of outlook for marriage on both sides. A person who is mature enough for marriage will be loyal, faithful, honest and trustworthy in all dealings with others. A marriage relationship has the best chance of success if each partner is appreciative, sensitive and fundamentally at one with himself or herself.

The Baha'i Writings recognize the fact that marriage may go wrong. This is certainly true in present society where there are so many forces at work which are likely to have a divisive effect on a marriage. There is a provision for the couple to consult with their Local Spiritual Assembly if they need help to keep their marriage going. This body will do all in its power to reconcile them. If reconciliation at that time seems impossible there is then a period of separation during which time husband and wife should not live together. During this time they will have the opportunity to reflect and gain perspective on their situation away from the arena of conflict. If after a year of separation the couple are still unreconciled they will be allowed to divorce. Though the Baha'i Writings do not condemn divorce as such they tend to discourage it.[10] There is nothing to prevent a Baha'i from remarrying if he wishes. However, before making such an undertaking he will consider carefully just

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[10] J.E. Esselmont, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era* (London, 1974), p.165.

what limitation in his character contributed to the failure of his first marriage and whether or not those limitations still exist.

Chastity

Baha'i writings affirm that physical side of marriage is also of great importance. Sex is not only the means of procreation, which in itself is one of the main purposes of marriage, but it is one of the most beautiful channels for the expression of the spiritual union which should exist between husband and wife. However, sex, as is true of every other physical aspect of nature quickly loses its beauty when it becomes an end in itself, and when it is used outside its proper bounds it can and does become an ugly and a destructive force. The Baha'i view is that the proper bounds are the marriage bond.

Despite the prevalence of the permissive view of sex, young people becoming Baha'is realize very quickly the significance of the idea of chastity in the overall scheme of Baha'i philosophy – that chastity is an essential attribute of a just race of men and women.[11]

Raising of Children

One of the main purposes of family is the raising of children. To a Baha'i the responsibility is not only the normally-accepted one of a parent protecting and educating another innocent and defenseless human being, but one of helping to raise up a new race of men and women on whom depends future world society. From the time when the baby is born the parents must be ever conscious of their

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[11] Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, 1974), p.25.

responsibility and their power to influence the character of the child in their care. A properly educated child should receive more praise for the things he does well than chastisement for the thing he should not do. A child not properly socialized may grow up to become an 'authoritarian personality'.

As a child grows up, an important part of his education should be diversity of experience. He should have continuous access to his parents in both formal learning and in play. If he is left solely in the company of his peers he is likely to develop a narrow view of life. It is partly to end this that a Baha'i home should be always a centre of hospitality. This practice has the benefit of allowing the child to see in his everbody experience, and from an early age, the highest principles of universal brotherhood in action.

The prime object of the education of the child as he grows older is to give him tools to think freely for himself and to think wisely. This objective can be partly achieved by seeing to it that he receives a balanced schooling in the teachings of all religions and other systems of ethics.

LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES

The Local Spiritual Assemblies represent the lowest rung of the Baha'i administrative order (see table 3.2 at the end of this chapter for details on the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies in the world at present). Baha'ism possesses no clergy formally trained to administer rituals. Rather, the administration both of religious

observances and of community affairs rests with elected officials. At the level of villages, towns, cities or countries, these officials constitute the Local Spiritual Assembly, consisting of nine members elected annually on the eve of April 21 by universal adult suffrage and secret ballot. To be eligible to vote in a Baha'i assembly, a Baha'i must be twenty-one years old or more.

The Spiritual Assembly of every village is to help Baha'is teach the cause of God.[12] The Message of Baha'u'llah should reach the people in every part of the world. Another important duty of a Spiritual Assembly is to try to promote amity and love among the believers. An assembly must create a loving atmosphere of unity among the Baha'is; it must see that everybody is happy in the community. If there are any differences among the friends, it is the duty of the Spiritual Assembly to see that they are removed. Each Spiritual Assembly must act as a wise and loving father to the Baha'is of its locality.

Every Spiritual Assembly has to have its own fund. This fund is collected by the voluntary contributions of friends and it is used in the interests of the community. The Assemblies come to the aid of the Baha'is in their times of need with the help of these funds. The Spiritual Assemblies help in the education of Baha'i children and youth. In the words of Shoghi Effendi:

> they must promote by every means in their power the material as well as the spiritual enlightenment of youth, the means for the education of children,

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[12] Baha'u'llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas* (Haifa, 1992), para. 30, p.29.

institute whenever possible, Baha'i educational institutions, organize and supervise their work and provide the best means for their progress and development.[13]

In addition to their own usually closed administrative meetings, every nineteen days Local Spiritual Assemblies sponsor the Baha'i feast for the entire community, consisting of three parts. In the first part local lay believers read from Baha'i Writings first, and then often from scriptures of other religions as well. In the second part community affairs are discussed. Committees of the Local Spiritual Assembly and its officers give reports on their activities. Suggestions may be made from the floor of the Local Spiritual Assembly to consider at its next meeting. The third part consists of friendly conversation over refreshments. Because the feast partially has the character of a community business meeting, only registered members of the Baha'i Faith may attend.[14]

The Local Spiritual Assembly sees to it that the sick, old and handicapped are properly cared by the community and that they are given all the love and attention which might be expected of a good close-knit family. The poor are helped in every way to overcome their difficulties so that they are more able to help themselves. Baha'is stress that the community members must be made to feel that they can turn to the Local Spiritual Assembly for help when they have personal problems. As noted earlier, one

[13] Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance: The Message From The Guardian of the Baha'i Faith to the Baha'is of Germany and Austria* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i-Verlag), p.124.
[14] National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the British Isles, *Principles of Baha'i Administration: A Compilation* (London, 1950), pp.51-53.

important aspect of this work is consulting with friends who are experiencing marital or family difficulties.

Two specific social services which are supervised by the Local Spiritual Assembly are the Baha'i ceremonies for marriage and burial which occur in its areas of jurisdiction. As well as looking to its responsibilities within its own locality, the Local Spiritual Assembly should also be aware of what is going on in the wider community. The Local Spiritual Assembly serves as a channel of communication between its own community and the National Assembly.

The Local Spiritual Assembly represents the wider Baha'i society in a microcosm. Apart from the religious functions of a Church, Temple or a Mosque it also takes care of a Baha'i individual's day to day problems. It is a forum where community affairs are discussed democratically more or less in an informal atmosphere. Though an administrative hierarchy is there, it is only to help in taking collective decisions. It works through consultation where everybody is free to express his or her views. While in the process of consultation the Baha'is are enjoined to look more into the universal interests of the Faith and the Community.[15]

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Present day society is dominated by megalopolises, huge, ugly, dirty blotches on the landscape – which have grown far beyond the

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[15] Hushmand Fathea'zam, *The New Garden: An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith* (New Delhi, 2001), p.98.

human scale and which crush the human spirit. Baha'i Writings seem to visualize a future world society which will be more balanced and that the city will have a less dominating role. The megalopolis has grown partly as a result of the need for large numbers of workers to man vast mass-production factories and partly – ironically now – to facilitate rapid communication in government, commerce and the arts. There are indications that the age of mass-production may be passing its peak and that in future industrial plants will be small and will be designed to use highly specialized skills, and quality craftsmanship. If so, dispersal will become practical as well as attractive. The tendency toward dispersal might be strengthened by developments in communications. All this is likely to reduce the pull of the giant city over the long term.

This impression that society will be more decentralized in future is strengthened by the statements in the Baha'i Writings to the effect that agriculture with its associated activities will reassert itself as the core activity of the economy and that man's occupation and way of life in general will became harmonized with nature.

The Baha'i visualization of a typical community of the future is a relatively small and 'human–sized' city or an agricultural village.[16] Each town or village would have a 'community centre' at the heart of which would stand the place of worship. This house of worship is known as the "Mashriqu'l–Adhkar" or "Dawning Place of God's Praise". Other public buildings in the town or village would be

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[16]   Huddleston, n.4, p.143.

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the 'Local House of Justice' the community assembly hall, schools, a university, a library, scientific research laboratories, hospitals and auxiliary medical units, house for the aged, the orphaned and the handicapped.[17]

The public facilities of the centre will have the highest social priority in contrast to what happens in most capitalist societies where there is private affluence and public squalor. Being human-sized communities, the sick, the aged, the orphans and the students who are served at the centre will not have to suffer from faceless institutions which seem to be a characteristic of nearly every 'advanced' society today but will feel the warmth of participation in a living family.

The local community will have a major role to play with regard to anti-social behaviour. Crime today is predominantly associated with the uneducated and those who are rootless, particularly in the big city. In a Baha'i community, social cohesiveness and an emphasis on a full spiritual and material education for all will greatly reduce the likely incidence of crime.

BAHA'I FAITH AND THE MACRO-STRUCTURES

Baha'i teachings also explicitly mention some macro-structures where primary relationships give way to secondary and higher order ones. Their composition is more or less formal. Some of the

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[17] The Local Spiritual Assembly will take the form of the Local House of Justice when all the Baha'i ideals are realized fully.

examples are the National Spiritual Assemblies, the Universal House of Justice, The Baha'i World Community which have been explicitly mentioned in the Baha'i literature.

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

All the Local Spiritual Assemblies in one country are linked through a National Spiritual Assembly (See Table 3.1 at the end of this chapter for details on the number of National Spiritual Assemblies in the world). The National Spiritual Assembly is a body that is elected by the Baha'is of a country through National Convention. Delegates are sent to this convention from all parts of that country. The basic rules of Baha'i election, which have been mentioned before, apply to the election of the National Spiritual Assembly too.

The purpose of National Spiritual Assembly is to guide, coordinate and unite the work that is done by the Baha'is throughout the country and to encourage them in their activities. Baha'i communities lend their cooperation through their Local Spiritual Assemblies. The National Spiritual Assembly maintains contact with the Baha'is of the country through letters and circulars. It provides them with news about the activities of the other Baha'is and the progress of the Faith throughout the world. Though much of the work in a national community is done at the local level, there are certain services which are best done by the National Spiritual Assembly. These include the production of

publications and other material on the Faith, and the organization of nationwide summer schools.

The National Spiritual Assembly also acts as the mouthpiece of the Baha'i community to that country's national government.[18] The National Spiritual Assemblies also engage in work outside their national jurisdiction, so adding to the sense of cooperation and oneness throughout the Baha'i Community.

The members of National Spiritual Assembly are elected each year by delegates chosen to represent regional areas. Each Baha'i community or electoral unit elects a certain number of delegates from its own members who in turn elect the members of the National Spiritual Assembly at a National Convention.[19] The National Spiritual Assemblies have been described as the pillars of the Universal House of Justice because they make up collectively the International Convention which elects the House, and because they have the major part of the task of organizing the execution of the programmes of the Universal House of Justice for the development of the worldwide Baha'i community.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

This body is at the apex of the Baha'i administrative hierarchy. It directs, coordinates and safeguards the Baha'i world community. This body has executive, judicial and legislative function. Baha'u'llah had given the fundamental laws and teachings. But, he

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[18] Huddleston, n.4, p.117.
[19] Fathea'zam, n.15, p.114.

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also recognized the need of other social rules that will be gradually decided according to changing needs. These social rules and regulations, Baha'u'llah said must be ordained by the Universal House of Justice.

Abdu'l –Baha says:

> ...if it be established under the necessary conditions – with members elected from all the people – that House of Justice will be under the protection and the unerring guidance of god. If that House of Justice shall decide unanimously, or by a majority, upon any question not mentioned in the Book that decision and command will be guarded from mistake.[20]

As a legislative body, as mentioned above, it may institute new laws for the Baha'i world community which are in keeping with the spirit and principles laid down in the Writings. As an executive body it draws up the long range plans for the growth and development of the faith and it allocates goals in these plans to various National Spiritual Assemblies. Other executive functions include administration of the Baha'i properties at the World Centre at Haifa, and contact with the government of Israel. It is also in contact with the United Nations. The Baha'i International Community is an accredited non-governmental organization with consultative status to the Economic and Social Council of United Nations. As a judicial body the Universal House of Justice is the final court of appeal in the Faith. It lays down boundaries for the jurisdiction of National

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[20] Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions,* Laura Clifford Barney, trans. (London, 1971), p.172.

Assemblies and has sole authority to recognize new National Assemblies.

⟍ The Universal House of Justice has the assistance of groups of men and women chosen for their dedication and distinguished services to the Baha'i cause. Those who were appointed by Shoghi Effendi during the period of his guardianship of the Faith (1921- 57) are known as "Hands of the Cause of God" and they are held in particularly high esteem by the Baha'i community because of their personal qualities and the services they have rendered individually, and also because of the critical part they played collectively in the evolution of the Administrative Order following the death of Shoghi Effendi. The others are counsellors appointed by the Universal House of Justice.

THE WORLD COMMUNITY

The Baha'i Writings visualize the creation of a 'World Community'. The first principle which will have bearing on the nature of a such a community is the necessity for a world system of government. This would be similar in many ways to the Administrative Order crowned by the Universal House of Justice which is the backbone of the present Baha'i community, developed to take account of the vastly expanded responsibilities. There will be minimum of bureaucracy and the prevailing spirit will be to rely on voluntary compliance with the ruling of the world government, and in consequence a great deal

of responsibility will be delegated to national and local bodies.[21] As in all open societies, there would be room for great diversity of view and discussion. In some respects, it might be true to say that the national level will be less important than it is within the present political framework which gives the national state more or less unrestricted sovereignty. On the one hand, general direction will be given to national governments by the world institutions, and on the other there will be a devolution of much responsibility to the local community where most of the day-to-day affairs will be conducted.

There will be an international peacekeeping police force which would be the only significant armed group permitted. An important function of the world government would be to strengthen the sense in all men of belonging to one world family. There would be a universal system of education which would place equal emphasis on spiritual growth and on objective scientific investigation. The system of education would also restore the balance between intellectual learning and manual skills, giving recognition to each in the fully rounded man. Another important function of the world government will be to ensure the efficient and equitable utilization of world's resources for the benefit of all mankind.[22]   A fair distribution of the world's resources would be partly achieved by the creation of a unified world economy.

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[21]   Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette, 1969), pp.41-43.
[22]   ibid, p.204.

THE INSTITUTION OF THE MASHRIQU'L -ADHKAR

The words Mashriq'l-Adhkar mean literally "Dawning-place of the praise of God". The central edifice is a House of Worship, nine-sided and domed and dedicated to the worship of God as manifested by Baha'u'llah. Round it will be built social institutions such as old people's home, an orphanage, a hospital and a college of science; administrative buildings will cluster near it. The life of every community in the World Order of Baha'u'llah will centre in its Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. Open to people of every race, background and belief, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar with its nine doors facing every direction, is a focal point of unity. Here followers of all religions and those with none are welcomed to share silence, meditate, pray or attend regular services. Here the sacred scriptures of all the world's revealed religions are read side by side.[23]

THE INSTITUTION OF THE HAZIRATU'L QUDS

Haziratu'l Quds means 'The Sacred Fold'. It is the name given to the administrative headquarters of the Faith in an area if these are housed in property owned by the Assembly. It is complementary in its functions to those of Mashiru'l-Adhkar — an edifice exclusively reserved for Baha'i worship. This institution, whether local or national, will have its component parts, such as the secretariat, the treasury, the archives, the library, the publishing office, the assembly hall, the council chamber, the pilgrim's hostel and are

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[23]   John Ferraby, *All Things Made New: A Comprehensive Outline of the Baha'i Faith* (New Delhi, 1997), p.285.

brought together and made jointly to operate in one spot, be increasingly regarded as the focus of all Baha'i administrative activity. Shoghi Effendi says that although a Haziratu'l Quds is primarily an administrative centre, it should also, through suitable social and intellectual activities be made a centre for teaching the Faith.

SUMMER SCHOOLS AND TEACHING CONFERENCES

In areas where there are sufficient number of believers, summer schools open both to Baha'is and non- Baha'is are held to provide facilities for studying the Faith. Baha'is regard these as forerunners of future Baha'i universities. Shoghi Effendi has defined their present function as "to foster the spirit of fellowship in a distinctly Baha'i atmosphere, to afford the necessary training for Baha'i teachers and to provide facilities for the study of history and teachings of the Faith, and for a better understanding of its relation to other religions and human society in general.[24]

Regional or national Teachings Conferences are gatherings with a more specialized purpose than the summer schools, held for consultation on the problems of teaching the Faith in an area and for instruction of those who wish to teach. Usually Baha'is only may attend them.

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[24] Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, 1979), p.340.

Remarks

The crux of the Baha'i Writings is the three unities : God is one, Religion is one, Mankind is one. The above discussed social structure – both micro and macro are the pillars on which they plan to build a New World Order. The above given account shows the inter-connection between the micro and macro–structures of the Baha'i society. The micro-structures are composed in such a way as to realize the greater vision of a New World Order. The relationship between the local community and the world community will not be one of hierarchy. There will be an organic linkage between the two. Take the example of the Baha'i family. The role-relationships have been delegated in a way so as to conform to the needs and aspirations of the Baha'i community as a whole. The Baha'is believe that the new model of family will help to usher in the New World Order which is based on equality of human beings.

Table 3.1: No. of National Spiritual Assemblies in the World

National Spiritual Assemblies	
Africa	46
Americas	43
Asia	39
Australasia	17
Europe	37
World Total	182

Source : Department of Statistics, Baha'i World Centre, August 2001, downloaded from http://www.bahai-library.org/resources / worldstatistics.2001/html.

Table 3.2: No. of Local Spiritual Assemblies in the World

Local Spiritual Assemblies	
Africa	3,808
Americas	3,152
Asia	2,948
Australasia	856
Europe	976
World Total	11,740

Source : Department of Statistics, Baha'i World Centre, August 2001, downloaded from http://www.bahai-library.org/resources / worldstatistics.2001/html.

ASPECTS OF BAHA'I RELIGION AND COMMUNITY IN INDIA

The Baha'i Faith in India started out as a religion primarily of the urban middle-class. The middle of twentieth century saw the dispersal of the Faith to the rural areas. This chapter deals with the transformation of the Baha'i Faith from a predominantly urban middle-class religion to a Faith of the rural masses. It was during this period that it gained a large number of converts from the rural Hindu masses. This was possible mainly because of the efforts of the Baha'i teachers to present the Faith to the rural populace in terms of local traditions and lore. This Chapter also outlines the projects and programmes engaged in by the Baha'i community in India.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BAHA'I FAITH IN INDIA

The Baha'i community of the Indian subcontinent dates back to the 1870s, the Baha'i leader, Jamal Effendi, undertaking an extensive tour at Baha-Allah's direction (1872-78). Most of the early Baha'is were either of Persian extraction or were Persianizeed Indians. Little contact was made with the Hindu masses. Nevertheless, the Baha'i community embarked on an energetic campaign to propagate the Baha'i teachings and an extensive Baha'i literature in the main Indian languages was developed.

By concentrating their efforts on the urban lecture-going population, the Baha'is greatly limited their chances of success, and even as late as 1961, there were still "less than nine hundred Baha'is in the whole of India".[1] The decisive breakthrough was the determined attempt to present the Baha'i teachings to the rural masses. When this was done (from 1961), the whole character of the community was changed , and large numbers of people became Bahâi's, most of them Hindu by background. By 1971, "there were 356,744 declared Bahâi's in India and of these, some 1,00,000 resided in Malwa".[2] Their number is now said to be approaching two million.[3] This means that close to 40% of the international Baha'i community is to be found within the borders of this South Asian nation, a statistic that not only reflects the important position India currently holds within the world-wide Baha'i community, but also suggests that this country may have an important impact on the future direction the religion might take. The study of the history and sociology of the movement in the subcontinent is therefore an increasingly vital component of Baha'i study as an academic field. William Garlington has distinguished five distinct stages of

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[1] See "The International Survey of Current Baha'i Activities," The *Baha'i World, 1954-1963*(Haifa), vol. 13(1970),p.299.

[2] Cited in William Garlington's article "Bahai Conversions in Malwa, Central India" in Juan R. Cole and M. Momen edited *Studies in Babi and Baha'i History: From Iran East and West*(Los Angeles,1984), Vol. 2, p.181.

[3] According to *World Christian Encyclopedia, 2000*, and World Baha'i Statistics Baha'is in India are estimated to be around 1,716, 148 representing 0.17% of the Indian Population. See Table 1.1 attached with Chapter 1.

development during the nearly 150 years of Baha'i history in India.[4]

These are : I) the Babi or pre-Baha'i period; 2) The initial stage of Baha'i community development (1872-1910) ; 3) the first steps towards national unity (1910-1921); 4) the period of the Guardianship and the evolution of the community as part of an international administrative order (1921-1957); and the era of mass teaching (1957 to the present). With the emphasis during the last decade given to economic and social development projects, the Indian Baha'i community may well have entered a new 6th stage. Beyond containing their own unique personalities and events, these periods also display distinct patterns of community organization and missionary endeavour.

THE BABI PERIOD

The Babi movement, the precursor to the Baha'i Faith, had some connections with India. One of the Bab's original disciples (Letters of the Living) was an Indian known as Shaykh Sa'id-i-Hind. Following instructions he took the Bab's claim throughout several provinces of Iran and into his own homeland. Although some knowledge of the Bab's claims had penetrated into South Asia and fired certain local millenialist expectations, there was lacking the needed doctrinal and ritual coherence that is required of community. Both the physical distance from the sources of

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[4] See his article "The Bahai Faith in India : A Developmental Stage Approach", Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi, and Baha'i Studies, no.2 (June, 1997) downloaded from *http: //h-net2.msu.edu/~ bahai/bhpapers.htm.*

inspiration, as well as the disruption and turmoil evident amongst the Babi communities in Iran, especially following Bab's execution, made community virtually impossible. Thus it would not be until the movement came under the influence of Baha'u'llah and , later of Abdu'l-Baha, that a true community would begin to develop.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE INDIAN COMMUNITY (1872-1910)

Baha'u'llah sent Jamal Effendi as a teacher of the Baha'i Faith to India in 1872. His arrival can be rightly said to signal the beginning of organized missionary activity in the subcontinent. Jamal Effendi adopted an elitist approach to teaching the Baha'i Faith in India, and it was the style of teaching that would dominate Baha'i missionary activity in India for decades.

The progressive character of many of the Baha'i principles spoke well to reformers, and the universality inherent in many of the religion's teachings was welcomed by those who feared communalism. There were, however, exceptions. Both in Bombay and Calcutta Jamal Effendi raised the ire of conservative religious leaders. These conservative Muslim and Hindu anti-Bahai polemics were muted by the relatively small number of converts Jamal Effendi was able to attract by the time of his departure in 1878.

During this period, a number of Indian Zoroastrians (Parsis) were converted to the Baha'i Faith, thereby forming a nucleus of future Baha'i leadership in India. The conversions came about as a result of the work of agents who had originally been sent abroad by

Indian Zoroastrian community to help their coreligionists in Iran. There they came into contact with the Baha'i Faith and supported its activities. Later, several Iranian Zoroastrian converts to the Faith traveled to Bombay and actively promulgated their new religion among local Zoroastrians.[5]

This second stage of development, which manifested the first true signs of Baha'i community in India, was characterized by two main features. The first was the previously noted elitist approach to teaching the Faith. Following the lead of Jamal Effendi, the nascent Baha'i communities focused their efforts on local leaders and members of the intelligentsia. Association with reform movements such as the Theosophical Society and the Brahma Samaj proved popular, as did lectures and pamphleteering. The main assumption underlying the focus on literate members of the middle and upper classes was that legitimate conversion to the Baha'i Faith required fairly extensive knowledge on the part of a new believer of the religion's doctrines and principles, which in turn required a fairly high level of education. In following this tack the Baha'is were in many ways mirroring the attitudes of the reform movements with which they came into contact. Moreover, the fact that for the most part the Baha'i message was presented in Persian, Arabic, Urdu or English added to the sense of exclusivity, as these languages were generally associated with

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[5] For details see Susan Stiles, "Early Zoroastrian Conversions to the Baha'i Faith in Yazd, Iran" in Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen edited *Studies in Babi and Baha'i History : From Iran East and West* (Los Angeles, 1984).

cultural elites. The second feature concerned the nature of Baha'i community organization which was almost exclusively local in orientation. Throughout the country various Baha'i communities acted virtually independent of one another. When it came to organizing teaching plans and developing community administration there was little sense of national unity.

In looking at the factors that helped move the Indian Baha'i community into this stage of development, the ability to make contact with the established sources of authority stands out as vital. Up until the time of Jamal Effendi's arrival in Bombay those Babis and then Baha'is who traveled to, or resided in the subcontinent remained effectively isolated and without central leadership. The use of travelling teachers, especially by Abdu'l-Baha, helped bridge this gap of isolation, and although the individual communities remained relatively autonomous, the symbolic sense of leadership that was available provided a much needed sphere of spiritual orientation.

THE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS NATIONAL UNITY (1910-1921)

With the advent of a national teaching plan in 1910 a new phase of Baha'i history in India began. In January of that year a convention of members of India's various religious communities was organized. It was then decided that the Baha'i 'teaching' (proselytization) activities in the subcontinent should be accelerated and a national teaching campaign was launched. Although not winning many

converts, the teaching campaign of 1911 was of marked importance to the Indian Baha'i community, since it signified the first real attempt systematically to proselytize for the Faith on a national basis.

While the pattern of elitism continued during this phase of development, the shift toward organizational centrism was new. To some degree this movement was a consequence of expanded teaching plans that required greater logistical coordination. This period saw a growing sense of Indian nationalism among the Indian intellectuals and reformers. The political milieu in which the then Baha'i community found itself operating was one that focused its thinking in national terms, and such an attitude may well have influenced the community's view of itself.

THE PERIOD OF GUARDIANSHIP (1921-1957)

In April 1923, Shoghi Effendi created the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of India and Burma and thereby formalized the idea of an Indian National Community. Under the guidance of the of the National Spiritual Assembly and the supervision of Shoghi Effendi in Haifa, the Indian Baha'i community slowly began to feel the effects of emerging worldwide Baha'i administrative system. In addition to welcoming travel teachers from different parts of the world, Indian Baha'is gradually began to generate teaching campaign modeled on the times of those initiated by Shoghi Effendi in the United States.

While the period of Guardianship witnessed important structural and administrative changes in India, the style of teaching remained fundamentally the same as in earlier periods. It was still to the urban, educated members of Indian society that Baha'i teachers primarily directed their message. The base was broadened to some degree by the fact that literacy rate in India rose during this period, especially in urban areas. Moreover, the translation of Baha'i literature into a number of different Indian languages meant that Baha'i written publications could receive a wider audience. Lecture tours and university visits were incapable of reaching the masses, yet these activities remained by and large the order of the day. In spite of the dynamic leadership and a new sense of being an active part of an expanding international organization, at the time of Shoghi Effendi's death in November, 1957, there were still less than a thousand Bahai's in the entire country.

THE MASS TEACHING ERA

Baha'i Conversions in Malwa

The mass conversions of rural Hindu populace in Malwa started a new phase of the Baha'i Faith in India. It is from this point of time that the Baha'i Faith shed its elitist nature and reached the masses. Thousands of Hindu villagers in the central Indian region of Malwa became Baha'is and set in motion a process that would add more than one hundred thousand persons to the movement's

membership roles over the next decade. Thus had the Baha'i Faith suddenly entered the arena of depressed caste conversion.

Historical Background

Malwa is that region of the modern day state of Madhya Pradesh that is bounded on the north by the Gwalior Hills, on the east by the Betwa River, on the south by the plains of Nemar, and on the west by the Chambal River. The region contains two major cities: Ujjain of traditional fame and Indore. The former is situated on the banks of the sacred Shipra River and was once the capital of Avanti, one of the sixteen principal states in India during the time of the Buddha. Indore , on the other hand ,is largely a product of modern India. Developed as a trading centre during the eighteenth century, it blossomed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into a leading industrial site.

The "first Baha'is settled in Malwa in the latter part of 1941."[6] Prior to that time Central India had been visited by Baha'is, but no permanent residence had been established. The change came about as a result of India's Six-Year Plan. When Shoghi Effendi(1897-1957), the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, initiated the First Seven-Year Plan in the United States in 1937, the Indian Baha'is meeting in Convention in Karachi suggested to their National Spiritual Assembly that a similar project be started in India and Burma. As a consequence of this recommendation, the National Assembly

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[6]   ibid, p.159.

resolved to undertake a teaching plan to be launched in 1938. However, due to lack of funds, it was not until 1940 that the Six-Year Plan commenced. It was the Guardian himself who finally set the project in motion by donating money earmarked for the creation of special teaching fund.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the new plan was the "shift in emphasis from travel teaching to the settlement of believers in new districts."[7] In Baha'i parlance 'pioneering' was to be given priority. In a 1941 letter to the Indian Baha'i Community, Shoghi Effendi called on the believers to dedicate themselves to the project and "to go forth and settle in new districts , travel and teach."[8]

One of the first Baha'is to answer the Guardian's call was the Meherbani family of Zoroastrian ancestry. They were joined by the Munjes. They decided to leave Bombay to travel to new districts and teach the Baha'i Faith. In 1941, local spiritual Assemblies were established in the South Indian cities of Hyderabad and Bangalore. Likewise an Assembly had been established in the Rajasthani town of Kota. The Meharbanis and the Munjes finally decided to settle in Ujjain as they wanted to direct their teaching activities towards the members of the Hindu Faith.

Early Baha'i activities in Ujjain were conducted in a slow and personal manner. Contacts were made primarily through normal,

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[7] ibid, p. 160.
[8] From a letter written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of India and Burma, June 29, 1941, quoted in *Arise To Serve*(New Delhi, 1971), p.69.

day-to-day relations. Friends and acquaintances would be invited home for refreshments and discussion of the Baha'i teachings. If they proved to be interested, further meetings would be arranged. If not, the issue was not pursued. While this method did not introduce the Faith to a wide range of people, it did produce some converts. In 1942, a Local Spiritual Assembly was established, the first Assembly in all Madhya Pradesh.

Perhaps the most significant event for the young Ujjain Baha'i community was their participation, in one of the city's inter-religious conferences. In terms of the further development of Baha'i missionary activity in Malwa, this conference was of great importance. It allowed the Baha'is to establish contact with several individuals who would later be instrumental in helping them teach their religion in the rural areas. Mr. Mahfuzal-Haq Ilmi, a well known Baha'i travelling teacher, was asked by the Baha'is of Ujjain to address an Arya Samaj sponsored meeting on the subject of Baha'i social principles. His speech attracted the attention of one Kishan Lal Malviya, a depressed caste leader from Shajapur (a, district in Malwa located north-east of Ujjain). Following the conference, Kishan Lal came into active contact with the Ujjain Baha'i community and eventually declared himself a Baha'i. At about the same time, another such leader, Dayaram Malviya, also

became a Baha'i. Thus, in 1944 the first villagers in Central India entered the Baha'i Faith.[9]

Outside of Iran, the Baha'i Faith had been a religion dominated primarily by middle class, urban and literate adherents. This was true of its development in Europe and North America, and was no less characteristic of its history in India. The general attitude concerning accepting new believers which prevailed on the subcontinent prior to the launching of the Ten-Year crusade in 1953 was that before anyone could be enrolled into the movement, he(or she) had not only to demonstrate an adequate knowledge of the basic doctrines and principles of the Faith, but also had to show that he understood its administrative structure and historical development. This approach to finding converts "virtually excluded the illiterate members of Indian Society".[10] For many years it was standard procedure in India for local administrative bodies to personally examine a potential convert before accepting his declaration. If the members of the Assembly felt that his knowledge was inadequate, he was not enlisted. Hence, in 1944 the Baha'is of Ujjain did not even consider the possibility that illiterate, low caste villagers could be enrolled en masse. By the time India gained nationhood the Baha'i communities in Malwa amounted to one Assembly, one Baha'i group and several isolated believers.

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[9]   Garlington, n.2, p.162.
[10] ibid, p.163.

For the next ten years Baha'i missionary activity in Central India followed a similar and traditional pattern. After the disturbances of partition had died down, study classes were inaugurated in Indore, and fireside teaching and public proclamations were initiated in Gwalior. By 1952 the efforts in Gwalior proved successful, and Madhya Pradesh's second Local Spiritual Assembly (but the only functioning Assembly at the time) was established. Six years later the persistent work of the Indore Baha'is finally bore fruit. By Ridvan 1958, there were enough active adult Baha'is in the city to elect the first Local Spiritual Assembly.

Baha'i Mass Conversions

The establishment of the Indore Assembly and the revival of the Ujjain community seemed to signal the changes that were about to take place in the Baha'i teaching mission in Central India. Since the advent of the Ten-Year Crusade, "a new attitude toward missionary work had begun to develop in the minds of forward-looking believers, one which showed the necessity of taking the movement to the masses"[11]. With the resurgence of enthusiasm in Malwa, the possibilities for such a campaign became viable. Moreover, the beginnings of large-scale conversions in Africa had opened the way. Shoghi Effendi had personally endorsed the project, as he had stated in a message to that continent. This attitude was also shared

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[11] ibid, p.164.

by the National Spiritual Assembly of India, which in February 1959, voiced the following:

> On the other hand we should not deprive people to embrace the Faith pending their acquiring elaborate knowledge of the Faith and details of administration etc. If conviction in Faith has been established in mind and heart of our friends, no matter how little they know about the Faith, we should not deprive them to have rights and privileges of being Baha'i.[12]

In 1960, Dr. Rahmatullah Muhajir, the Hand of the Cause, met in Special Session with the Indian National Spiritual Assembly. His main advice was for Baha'i teachers to go to the villages, and he called for volunteers from that body to help launch the campaign. One of the members, Mrs. Meharbani offered her services and left for Madhya Pradesh. There she resided in a village known as Kweitiopani located approximately forty-five miles from Indore in Dewas district. During this period she spent days at a time sharing the villagers' hospitality and giving them the message of Baha'u'llah. Having elaborated upon the Baha'i Faith's various teachings, she then invited those who believed in Baha'u'llah to declare themselves as Baha'is. As a result nearly seventy-five percent of the village's two hundred members thumb-printed enrollment cards. Thus "Kweitiopani was the first village in India to experience the new mass teaching technique, and its conversion

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[12] *Bahai Newsletter*(India), no. 100(January-February 1959), p. 2.

marked the beginning of a new style of Baha'i missionary work in the subcontinent"[13].

The next major step in the evolution of the mass teaching process involved a special village conference in Malwa. Dr. Muhajir had informed the National Spiritual Assembly of his desire to participate in such an event, and it was finally decided that village Sangimada in Shajapur district would be suitable. An open air meeting was held at which Baha'i speakers voiced the Faith's claims and teachings. When the conference was concluded those who wished to declare their belief in Baha'u'llah were asked to thumb-print an enrollment card. Over two hundred villagers became Baha'is. Representatives from neighboring villages did not leave the place until they were assured by the Baha'is that they would send somebody to their places. As the momentum in missionary activity accelerated, the number of declarations increased dramatically. "In less than two hundred years the Indian Baha'i community expanded its membership from less than one thousand to 89,217. The great majority of these new believers came from Malwa"[14]. Following this, Baha'is in other areas of India, notably Northern Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat initiated rural teaching campaigns and a significant number of declarations were made in these states.

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[13] Garlington, n.2, p. 166.
[14] ibid, p.167.

Alongwith the teaching efforts at Malwa went attempts at consolidation. A Teaching Institute was established at Indore where certain of the new converts were especially trained to "deepen" their fellow villager's knowledge of the Faith. Specific villages were selected into which such Baha'i institutions as the Local Spiritual Assembly and the Nineteen-Day Feast were introduced. In addition, a number of village primary schools were created. A new era in the history of the Baha'i Faith in India had begun.

Dynamics of Baha'i Conversions

There is available a certain amount of information regarding the general social and historical forces prevalent in Malwa at this time. One of the main social forces at work in Malwa, and for that matter in most of all India, is modernization. The villagers' contact with modern city way of life and the new technology and ideologies associated with it has helped expand their world view. At the same time, a large number of villagers, particularly those who belonged to the scheduled castes, find themselves living under rather static social conditions. This was especially true in certain districts of Malwa where there is extreme disparity in social and economic conditions between city and village. Another theme, which is woven into the social history of Malwa, is what might be termed a "delicacy of social stability." Malwa's political history shows the region had been an arena of much political and military contention. But, more than this, Malwa is known for the vast number of peoples who have

migrated to it over the centuries, the most recent example taking place in the 1930s when famine in Rajasthan led to a large-scale immigration. According to Adrian Mayer such movements have caused upheaval at the village level.[15]

Given these conditions, one might assume that Malwa would have been ripe for the growth of conversion movements, especially those which offer the scheduled castes a higher vision of self-esteem. And yet, "outside of the Baha'i conversions, there was virtually no movement away from Hinduism."[16] Apart from this, the region was under the influence of right-wing Hindu Parties and factions. In the mid 1960s the Arya Samajists made attempts to check the Baha'i teaching efforts.

So, it can be said that the above said social and historical factors in Malwa give us little insight into the success of Baha'i teachers in the early 1960s. The large number of scheduled caste Hindus and the disintegrating forces of modernization were no doubt influential, but the same could be said about several parts of India. While there existed in many areas a lack of social cohesion, the traditional dominance of Hinduism and its strong political and cultural manifestations would seem to have effectively countered the weakness.

Initially, it might seem that the devaluation of Hinduism would necessarily be a component of any conversion movement.

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[15]   Adrian Mayer, *Caste and Kinship in Central India*(Berkeley, 1960), p.14.
[16]   Garlington, n.2, p. 170.

The call to change from one religion to another would surely involve the devaluation of the former. This is where the Baha'i conversions differ from Christian, Muslim or Buddhist conversions.[17] For while it disdains untouchability and certain polytheistic interpretation, the Baha'i Faith does not identify them as being Hindu phenomena. On the contrary, it accepts Hinduism, as it does other great world religions, as a valid spiritual tradition. Specifically it believes that Krishna was a Manifestation of God and that his spirit has returned in the personage of Baha'u'llah. Hinduism, therefore, is not seen as a false religion, but one which will be reformed by the Spiritual Power of Baha'u'llah. So much so, Baha'u'llah is often presented as an avatar of the Lord(Bhagawan). In this vein he is associated with the Vaishnavaite eschatological figure, the Kalkin Avatar, who according to Vishnu Purana will appear at the end of the Kali Yuga. Secondly, those who declare their belief in Baha'u'llah are not required verbally or symbolically to negate the Hindu religion. Thus, Baha'i teaching methods employed what may be termed a "culturally adaptive technique." Here indigenous concepts and symbols are used as channels of communication. Also, by not forcing an individual to denounce his Hindu heritage, the Baha'is allow him to remain, psychologically speaking, a Hindu. He is a Hindu who believes in the Yugavatar, Baha'u'llah. Furthermore, even though Baha'i teachers were involved in introducing Baha'i institutions and modes of behaviour into village communities in

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[17] ibid, p.174.

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Malwa and other rural areas during the 1960s, the absence of militancy in the way this was done and the "compartmentalization" in the process reinforced such an outlook.[18] This is the reason why William Garlington uses the term "convert" in quotation marks when referring to the Malwa Baha'is.[19]

Another aspect of the Baha'i conversions in Malwa is the role played by dominant individuals. The most striking example of the influence of a dominant individual in mass conversions is that of Dr. Ambedkar. Having personally raised himself from an untouchable background to the spot on the centre-stage of Indian politics, he became the virtual spokesman for the entire Mahar community. The Mahar conversions to Buddhism were primarily a result of his own conversion.[20] In the case of the Chuhras, caste leadership played a significant part in the conversions. The biradari(caste brotherhood)not only helped in the caste's entry into the Church, they provided cohesion and control during the initial stages of conversion[21]. In Meenakshipuram, the more educated elements within the untouchable community provided the initiative for the conversions to Islam. [22]

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[18] By "Compartmentalization" is meant the bracketing off of certain patterns of behaviour into specific frames of reference thus anti-caste patterns of behaviour might be demonstrated in one setting (for example, a Baha'i feast) but not in another (village commensal rules). This process of compartmentalization seems to be one way in which the village system accommodates changes.

[19] Garlington, n.2, p. 175.

[20] See the article by Eleanor Zelliot "The Psychological Dimension of the Buddhist Movement in India" in G.A.Odie edited *Religion in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1977), p.130.

[21] See the article by D.B. Forrester, "The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity" in G.A. Odie edited *Religion in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1977), p. 58.

[22] Theodore Wright, "The Movement to Convert Harijans to Islam in South Asia", *The Muslim World* (Hartford), vol.62, nos. 3-4 (July-October 1982), p.240.

As regards the Baha'i conversions in Malwa, the significance of dominant individuals is less clear, but knowledge of how caste functions as a social institution would lead us to believe that the caste hierarchy played some role in the process. In this regard, the parts played by Kishan Lal and Dayaram Malviya have already been pointed out. There is some evidence from village sources that leadership is a significant variable in the process of Baha'i conversions.[23] But until further evidence is gathered, the question will remain unanswered.

There is, however, another area where the role of individuals may have been significant - the Baha'i teachers. The Baha'i teachers who were active in Malwa during the 1960's can be divided into two groups: long standing urban Baha'is and indigenous village believers. The former were the dominant element during the initial teaching campaign, and they included those Baha'is who had migrated to Malwa from Bombay. The latter were village converts who were subsequently trained to help in both missionary and consolidation endeavours.

As a group, the urban Baha'is were characterized by their high educational achievements and material success. Thus they may well have symbolized to many Malwa villagers the fruits of modernization. Also, although several were from Parsi rather than Hindu background, they were nearly all Indian - most were born

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[23] For example, out of the five villages which William Garlington visited there were three headmen who had declared themselves Baha'is.

and raised in the subcontinent and spoke fluent Hindi. Consequently, they were probably not perceived as foreigners, but as brokers to the larger outside world. This image was no doubt enhanced during subsequent consolidation efforts when numerous villagers were brought to Indore to participate in the special deepening sessions at the newly constructed Training Institute. The Institute, which was organized and run by the urban Baha'is, provided a non-village setting for the promulgation of Baha'i ideals and values. Here villagers were not only taught the principles of their new Faith in greater detail, they were given the opportunity to come into contact with the movement's larger dimensions. They were able to meet believers from different areas of the country and, on occasion, different parts of the world.

While the indigenous teachers were neither as well educated nor as obviously identified with the outside world as the urban Baha'is were, many of them did reflect a modicum of modernization. In this respect they shared some similarity with the dominant elements in Meenakshipuram. For example, "of the thirteen indigenous village teachers whom Garlington met in 1973, all were literate in Hindi, several had received degrees from local schools and colleges, and at least one was relatively fluent in English"[24]. Moreover, they were not all members of the scheduled castes: several of the most active teachers came from "twice-born" castes. Thus it could well be that both urban and indigenous Baha'i

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[24] Garlington, n.2, pp.176-7.

teachers modeled many of the modernization aspirations of the scheduled castes with whom they were in contact. This role in the conversion process should, therefore, not be underestimated.

The above analysis brings to the fore the striking differences between Baha'i mass conversions in Malwa and other mass religious conversions in India. There seems to be no indication, outside of the general raising of the self-esteem and a rather limited identification with modernization, of the Baha'i Faith fulfilling specific caste ambitions. Since the religion had limited economic resources, it certainly did not find itself in the same situation as did the Christian missionaries in the Chuhra example. Outside of the building of a few schools, it could not meet lower caste's economic ambitions. Also because of its avowedly non-political orientation, it could not, like the Buddhist movement, answer scheduled caste political aspirations. Unlike the Islamic conversions in Meenakshipuram, the Baha'i Faith did not represent, as in the case of Islam, a historically well-defined religious community with which converts could readily identify and around whose political power base they could eventually rally.

As far as the effect of individuals is concerned, the person who seem to be of most significance were the Baha'i personnel, specially the village teachers. Whether from the urban centres or from the villages themselves, many of these individuals possessed a status that would probably have been identified with the modern sector.

Finally, the Baha'i Faith does not devalue Hinduism. It is this conciliatory approach in Malwa, more than any other factor, that sets its at odds with other mass conversion movements. While Christianity, Islam and neo-Buddhism all view Hinduism in a negative light, the Baha'is accept it as a divinely inspired religion, which like all other religions is in need of spiritual regeneration. This regeneration includes the elimination of caste prejudice and the rejection of many other historical evils. The Baha'i Faith "accommodates the psychological need to identify with one's past by openly proclaiming its role as one of regeneration, rather than negation"[25].

So, can the activities of the Baha'i Faith in Malwa be categorized a conversion movement? From the point of view of the Baha'i leadership, it was certainly a conversion movement. The Faith's major goal is to unite mankind by bringing people from different religious backgrounds together in a new religious system, complete with its own values and institutions. But, Garlington is of the opinion that "from the point of view of the declarants themselves, it may well be categorized as something else - a category of religious movements that has traditionally been called bhakti"[26].

The Baha'i Faith fits into this category in three ways: first, its respect for Hinduism; second, its presentation of Baha'u'llah as

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[25]   ibid, p. 180.
[26]   ibid, p. 180.

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avatar; and third, its preference for symbolic and utopian expressions of change, rather than direct social action. The Baha'i Faith may have been seen by the Malwa converts as a half-way house: one which allowed them to express certain deviant ideas without having to negate in word or in deed their cultural heritage.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

This can be called the latest phase of the development of the Baha'i Faith in India. The focus has new shifted to social and economic development projects. A number of institutions have been created to which key individuals from villages can be brought. There they are taught skills and knowledge, which they then take back to their villages and teach to others. The skills taught at these institutes include literacy, rural technology, health and hygiene, and crafts for women to enable them to earn a living. The participants are also taught about the Baha'i teachings and the functioning of Baha'i communities. Some of these projects are described below.

Baha'i Vocational Institute for Rural Women, Indore

The Baha'i vocational institute for rural women was established in 1985 for the upliftment all rural and tribal women living in small communities in the districts around Indore. The primary objective of the institute is to train rural and tribal women from villages in and around Indore and thereby empower them with knowledge of their true selves and to give them the skills and

Women at work at Baha'i Vocational Institute for Rural Women (from
http://www.bahaindia.org)

knowledge needed to improve the quality of life for themselves, their families and their communities.

Baha'i academy, Panchgani

It is a center for advanced higher studies of the teachings. There are both long-term and short-term courses. Various aspects of the Baha'i Faith and Community are taught here. Courses on comparative study of the Baha'i Faith are also available.

New Era High School, Panchgani

The New Era High School should be regarded not just another academic establishment. Although the promotion of academic learnings are one of its main functions, the need to foster moral development and to uphold spiritual values should always be kept in the forefront of its activities. New Era provides unique environment in which children gain spiritual and character training under the care of trained staff. Youth activities include regular dawn prayers, deepening classes, entertainment programmes, camps, travel teaching and musical trips to the communities all over India and involvement in social service programme entitled "Work is Worship".

New Era Development Institute (NEDI)

New Era Development Institute is an institute of the Baha'i community of India. The aim of New Era Development Institute is that each individual trained will have a new vision, a new heart, a

desire to serve his or her community, will have increased self confidence and will have understood the connection between his service and growth. Further, he will have gained a trade by which he can earn an income and will have learnt a few skills that can be of service to his community.

Rabbani School

Established in 1977 near Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, it is designed to meet the objectives set for it by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of India: to train a new generation of rural Indian youth with high moral standards, academic and practical skills for rural development, and a love for service. Through continual service to nearby villages, gradually the school and villages have become partners in many community development efforts.

It offers a full range of academic subjects and is developing a vocational curriculum. Short-term courses offer skills for rural development to Rabbani students and others, in such areas as literacy, primary school teaching, community health, poultry farming, commercial forestry, vegetable farming, crop production, dairy farming etc. It also trains Baha'i village tutorial teachers and coordinators from all over India.

Rashtriya Bahai Uchcha Shiksha Sansthan

It is a national institute for higher learning of the Baha'i Faith in Hindi. It was established on October 24, 1993 at Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh). The aims and objectives of the academy were to create :

human resources for the development of the Faith, enriched scholars of the Faith, skilled translators of the Baha'i Writings, deepened Baha'is to approach the prominent people as well as the persons of capacity, original writers capable of producing Baha'i literature on the contemporary issues, students empowered with spiritual vision so that they would be able to serve humanity through the life giving teachings of Baha'u'llah.

Conclusion

In looking back at the various stages of development outlined above, it becomes evident that over time there has been a general shift in the nature of the dynamics that have helped shape both the content and structure of the Indian Baha'i community. The transition from Babism to the Baha'i Faith was external to India, having to do essentially with developments in Iran. Likewise the initial stage of community development was primarily influenced by external elements, most notably in the form of travelling teachers and Iranian expatriates. However, by the early years of the twentieth century, when the Indian community began to take its first steps in the direction of national unity, a number of internal factors specific to the Indian context came to the fore. These factors were largely associated with cultural and nationalist developments among the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia (the two groups from which Bahai converts were mainly drawn) as well as

with the technological and commercial means then being used to unite the subcontinent.

Although there was an administrative shift during the period of the Guardianship that often focused the community's vision outward to the larger Baha'i international scene, the internal dynamics of the previous period, which were accelerated by the movement toward independence and culminated in Independence and partition, continued to have a significant impact on the Indian Baha'i community. And when we come to the mass teaching era, internal factors have become predominant. Despite the initial influences of the messages of Shoghi Effendi and the administrative prodddings of Dr. Muhajir, once the rural campaigns were underway they essentially came to express the yearnings of the scheduled tribes and castes for a new identity in independent, socialist India. Moreover, the policy of not demanding that new declarants completely separate themselves from their former religious affiliation can be seen as an essentially Indian approach to conversion which in some ways was actually at odds with the demands that Shoghi Effendi had made on those who had come into the Faith during the period of the Guardianship. To some extent this may have been due to the "vacuum of power" which the Baha'i Faith experienced between 1957 and 1963. In the absence of Guardian, Baha'i travel teachers and scheduled caste leaders were able to bring fellow villagers into the community by making use of this compartmentalized approach to proselytization. Thus

by the time the first Universal House of Justice was elected such a method had become firmly established in the subcontinent, and the fruits of that approach in the form of a more decentralized administrative system manned by a large number of indigenous believers will likely to help maintain, if not increase, the significance of internal forces in the future.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present period is one in which humanity is in an ideological crisis. By the beginning of the twentieth century, religion had ceased, at least in Europe, to play a central role in determining the vision and values of society. During the course of the twentieth century, humanity has experimented with a number of ideologies in an attempt to fill the vacuum left by religion at the centre of society. Nationalism, racism and communism have all been tried and have all spectacularly failed leaving behind destruction on a massive scale. The strident nationalism of the European states brought about the first World War and the consequent ruin of large parts of Europe. Racist ideologies led to the Nazi concentration camps and the destruction of the Second World War. Although Europe was the First to be affected, other parts of the world have had similar experiences. More recently, we have seen communism falter and fail, leaving behind a legacy of shattered economies and environmental devastation.

There are two major contenders competing to fill the ideological vacuum that now exists. One is free-market capitalism, which at the present time is principally a combination of laissez-faire economics and a strident individualism and consumerism. Having this as the ideology of a society is a paradox in that this ideology is itself destructive of society. For the adherents of this

philosophy, all government and regulation are an evil, which should be reduced to a minimum in order to allow the forces of the market to have a free run. There can be little doubt that the pursuit of free-market capitalism by a number of countries, and the individualism and consumerism which are inherent aspects of it, have resulted in a widening of the gap between the rich and poor in those countries, with a consequent deterioration of urban life.

The other major contender for the ideological vacuum at the centre of world society is religious fundamentalism. The basic premise of this movement is as follows: if the ideological experiments of the twentieth century have failed, then let us return to the previous situation when traditional religion was the ideology of society. In almost every major religion, there exists a fundamentalist movement seeking to bring about a return to a perceived golden past of morality and social responsibility. Unfortunately for the fundamentalists, a basic element of that past situation was that the religious viewpoint was not only the dominant viewpoint of society, it was the *only* viewpoint. It controlled everything because there was no other available viewpoint. The arts, literature, science, medicine, charitable works, all aspects of social life were dominated and controlled by religion and no competitor existed. From the time of the Renaissance and particularly with the coming of the Enlightenment, alternative viewpoints emerged which competed successfully with religion. With the passing of time, it became possible to see the world through

other eyes, the vision of scientific rationalism, for example. One by one, science, the arts, literature, medicine and even charitable works escaped the control of religion because alternative frameworks were found to be better. Once these alternative viewpoints have come into existence, it is almost impossible for the religious fundamentalists to return society to the previous situation where no alternative was even conceived. Even when the fundamentalists succeed in gaining power, no matter what Draconian steps they take to try to force the situation to be as they want it, they cannot reverse the tide of history. Once humanity is aware that alternative viewpoints exist, it is not possible to go back to a situation where such possibilities were not conceived, no matter how strident and overbearing the fundamentalists may become. However loud they shout, they cannot drown out the voice that insists that there is an alternative vision, partly because the voice is also from within themselves.

Baha'is would maintain that their religion presents a viable alternative to the choices that humanity is facing at present. On the one hand it presents a unified and integrated vision of the direction in which humanity should be proceeding. In a similar manner to the way that religion acted in the past, it presents an overall view of the world that colours everything; its teachings have some relevance to almost every aspect of the individual's personal life and human society as a whole. This does not mean, however, that it seeks to achieve the same aim as religious fundamentalists. The key

difference between the Baha'i Faith and the main established religions of the world is the fact that its vision was created within the last hundred years and so has an immediacy and relevance than visions that had their origins one thousand years ago or more. Thus for example, several of the established religions have been discredited in the eyes of many people or have split into deep divisions over such issues as scientific discoveries (for example, the debate over evolution) or the position of women in society. The Baha'i view on such subjects, however, is compatible with a modern outlook and, because it is based on scripture, is not a cause of division within its ranks.

The Baha'i Faith presents a unique integrated vision of the present state of the world and its future direction. This vision embraces politics, economics, environmental considerations, social issues, social administration, community development, ethical issues and spirituality. Baha'is maintain that this vision is not just a utopian dream, Baha'is around the world are actively working for it.

Baha'is envisage the eventual creation of a world order which will bring about peace and reconciliation among the nations of the world. Baha'is believe, however, that this can only be achieved on the basis of the teachings that Baha'u'llah has given. The Baha'i community world-wide is attempting to put into practice and give concrete shape to these teachings. It is taking positive steps towards peace and reconciliation between antagonistic groups and

factions in society; it is helping to promote the social role of women in society; it is promoting education, health and agriculture; it is making decisions and adopting policies by consultative means and without partisan politics and factional disputes; and it is building up social structures that are based on power being held by elected bodies and not by powerful individuals and cliques. In these ways, it may be considered to be a model for the kind of future for humanity which will give every individual the best opportunity for self-development and self-fulfilment.

Although several attempts were made as early as the closing decades of the nineteenth century in the Iranian Baha'i community to begin projects for social development, these did not flourish because of the atmosphere of repression against the Baha'i community. The numerous schools started by the Iranian Baha'is, for example, were all closed in 1934 on the orders of the government.

Recent decades, which have seen the emergence of large Baha'i communities in the poorer parts of the world, have led to a renewed impetus towards social and economic development plans. These plans are usually developed by the local communities with some assistance from the national level. In each area of the world, the nature of the development projects has varied according to the needs of the area and the possibilities open to the Baha'is. In South America, there are many Baha'is among the native Amerindian tribes of the Andes. The difficulty of travelling over the mountainous

terrain has led to the development of several Baha'i radio stations. These can broadcast programmes on health, agriculture and literacy as well as programmes about the Baha'i Faith to the people in their own languages. One of the major problems faced by the native peoples in this area is the down-grading of the Amerindian culture in favour of the Hispanic European culture. The Baha'i radio stations have played a major role in the revival of native American culture through native music and the re-telling of stories.

In India, the Baha'is have adopted a different approach. A number of institutions have been created to which key individuals from villages can be brought. There they are taught skills and knowledge which they then take back to their villages and teach to others. The skills taught at these institutes include literacy, rural technology, health and hygiene, and crafts for women to enable them to earn a living. The participants are also taught about the Baha'i teachings and the functioning of Baha'i communities. Similar institutes have been used in a number of other places such as Kivu province in Zaire and among the Guaymi Indians in Panama.

Because of the emphasis on education in the Baha'i teachings, many Baha'i projects have been in the form of schools. One model is that of the tutorial school, where one or two teachers, who have been specially trained for this work, conduct classes for children and adults, often in the open air. Subjects taught include reading, writing, character training, and other elementary subjects.

This pattern has been successful in countries as diverse as India, Zaire, Bolivia, and the Philippines. As of 1992, there were 116 Baha'i academic schools, 62 kindergartens, and 488 tutorial schools throughout the Baha'i world, a total of 666. The vast majority of these were in developing countries, serving largely rural areas or small towns.

In view of the Baha'i teaching that it is necessary to advance the social role of women, many Baha'i projects are oriented towards women. In India, for example, the Baha'i Vocational Institute for Rural Women at Indore offers village women residential courses on literacy, health care, and income-generating skills. Its success has been widely recognised and it won one of the Global 500 Environmental Action Awards that were awarded at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janiero in 1992.

All Baha'i projects are open to all the inhabitants of the area in which they take place, both to participate in and to benefit from. Neither the schools nor other projects are ever conducted to benefit Baha'is or any other special segment of the populace only. This is in keeping with the Baha'i ethos of the oneness of humanity. The Baha'i youth have contributed in an important way to many projects around the world. Giving up a year or more to service to the Baha'i Faith and to humanity as a whole has increasingly become a standard part of the lives of Baha'i youth when they finish school or university.

The Baha'i world today is a community that is extremely diverse in its ethnicity, its social class composition, and the cultural and religious background of its adherents. Despite its diversity, it is managing to work together in pursuing goals of international co-operation and development. The expansion of the Baha'i Faith takes place mainly through the person-to-person contact of individual Baha'is with their neighbours and friends. Those who express an interest are invited to a "fireside", an informal gathering usually held in the home of one of the Baha'is. In some countries, however, especially in the villages of the poorer countries of the world, the Baha'i Faith has been proclaimed and accepted by large numbers of people at one time.

There is no ritual or ceremony of conversion. If someone accepts the claims that Baha'u'llah has made about his station and mission, agrees to follow the Baha'i laws, accepts the station of Baha'u'llah's successors, `Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, as well as the authority of the Universal House of Justice, which was ordained by Baha'u'llah, then that person is a Baha'i. In order to become part of the world-wide Baha'i community, however, it is usually necessary to register with one's local Baha'i community.

The spread of the Baha'i Faith from one country to another usually occurs through the movement of individual Baha'is called "pioneers". There are no professional missionaries, and Baha'iswill usually take up employment or start a business in their new location. The spread of the Baha'i Faith around the world has been

organized through a series of systematic plans begun under Shoghi Effendi and continued by the Universal House of Justice.

Currently there are Baha'i communities in every country in the world except the Vatican. This makes the Baha'i Faith the second most widely spread religion in the world, after Christianity; a statement that is supported by authoritative publications such as the *Britannica Book of the Year* and the *World Christian Encyclopedia*. Organized Baha'i communities exist in most countries, except where persecution and official prohibition of the Baha'i Faith make this impossible.

The Baha'i community has had a close relationship with the United Nations ever since its formation. Baha'is do not consider the present structure and constitution of the United Nations to be the best possible. They, nevertheless, consider its ideals to be close to those of the Baha'i Faith and therefore worthy of full support. Over the last few decades, the Baha'i International Community has been one of the most active of the non-governmental organizations at the United Nations. It has had consultative status with many of the subsidiary organizations of the United Nations (such as ECOSOC, UNICEF, etc.) and also a significant presence at all of the major United Nations conferences. It has presented position papers and seminars at most of them. In addition the Baha'i community has supported the various campaigns and special years that the United Nations has launched. With the establishment of an Office of the Environment (in 1989), and an Office for the Advancement of

Women (in 1992), the Baha'i International Community has been able to devote greater attention to these areas of concern.
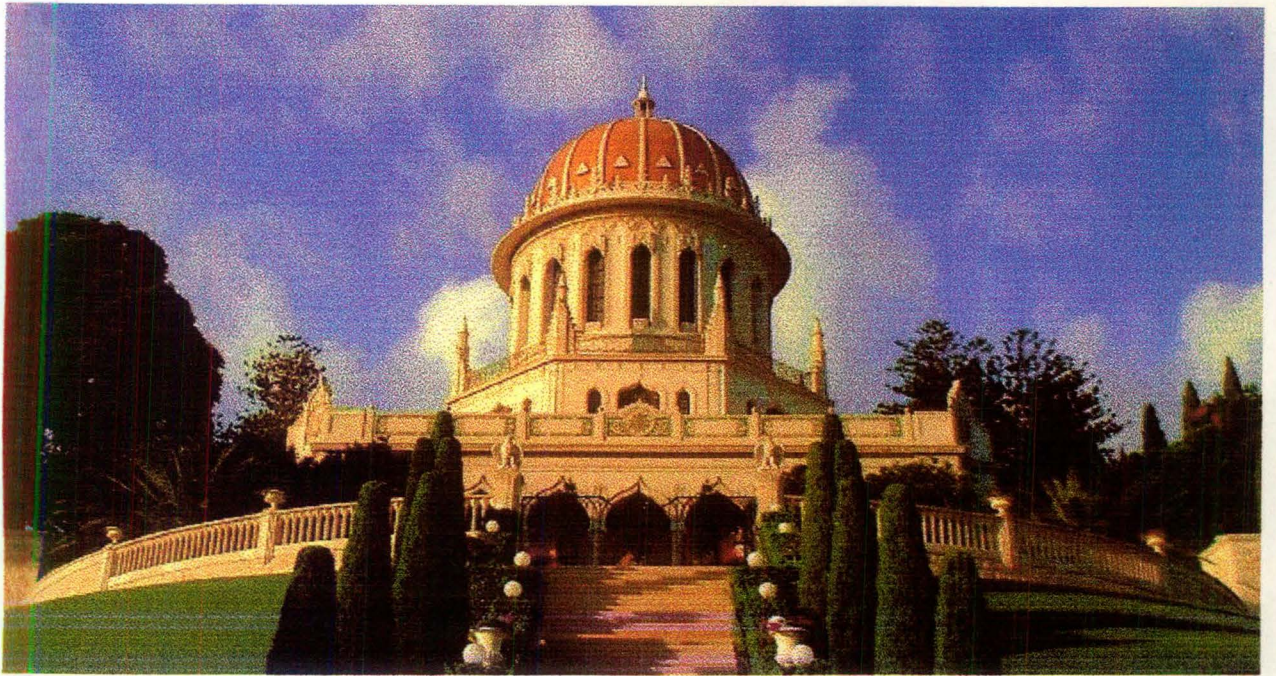
Appendix

BAHA'I SHRINES AND TEMPLES

The most important Baha'i holy places are in the Acre (Akka) Haifa area in Israel. They are:

1) The **shrine of the Bab**, half way up Mt. Carmel in Haifa. In the traditional levantine style building, Bab's remains are placed. Abdu'l-Baha himself was buried there in 1921.

2) The **Monument gardens**, also in the area of the shrine are the white marble tombs of several members of Abdu'l-Baha's family.

3) The **International Baha'i Archives** built above the shrine of the Bab by Shoghi Effendi in 1954-57 to exhibit historic relics and documents.

4) The seat of the **Universal House of Justice**, a large columned white-marbled building of classical style completed in 1983.

5) The **mansion of Mazra'a**, 6 km north of Acre, a house used by Baha'u'llah in 1877.

6) The **mansion of Bahji**, Baha'u'llah moved to this house in 1879 and remained there the rest of his life.

7) The **shrine of Baha'u'llah**, a small stone building next to the mansion of Bahji.

Bab's Shrine at Haifa ,Israel (from http://www.bahaipictures.com/intro.htm)

Baha'u'llah's Shrine at Acre , Israel (from http://www.bahaipictures.com/intro.htm)

The two other sites of Baha'i pilgrimage are no longer in Baha'i hands – the **house of Baha'u'llah** in the Kark district of Baghdad and the **house of Bab in** Shiraz.

The Baha'i temple is designated in Baha'u'llah's *ketab al-aqdas* as m*asreq al-adhkar.* Baha'i laws prescribe that a temple be built with the utmost possible perfection in each town and village, and emphasize that its doors be open to all. As stipulated by Abdu'l-Baha's, the essential architectural character of the temple requires a nine-sided circular shape. It has been advanced that the number nine as the largest single digit representing comprehensiveness and unity, stands as the numerical value of the Arabic word 'Baha'.

At present, there are eight temples - **Ashkhabad**, (Turkmenistan), **Wilmette** (USA), **Kampala**(Uganda), **Sydney** (Australia), **Langenhain** (Germany), **Panama City** (Panama), **Tiapapata** (Western Samoa) and **New Delhi** (India) and over hundred others are under construction. But, there is no temple in Iran because of local antagonism.

Baha'u'llah's House at Acre (from http://www.bahaipictures.com/intro.htm)

Baha'i Temple at New Delhi (from http://www.bahaindia.org)

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