

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF BAHA'IS IN POST-REVOLUTION IRAN

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ANKITA SANYAL



Centre for West Asian Studies

School of International Studies

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

New Delhi 110067

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Centre for West Asian Studies
School of International Studies
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
New Delhi - 110067, India

Email : ramki@mail.jnu.ac.in
ramakak@gmail.com
Tel : +91-11-2670 4372
+91-11-2670 4454

DATE: 17/07/2017

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "Educational Status of Baha'is in Post-Revolution Iran" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

Ankita Sanyal

ANKITA SANYAL

CERTIFICATE

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

Aswini Kumar Mohapatra
Prof. Aswini Kumar Mohapatra
(CHAIRPERSON, CWAS)

P. R. Kumaraswamy
Prof. P. R. Kumaraswamy
(SUPERVISOR)

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Dedicated to Maa and Baba

ABBREVIATIONS

BIC	Baha'i International Community
BIHE	Baha'i Institute of Higher Education
CIEI	Council of Islamising Educational Institutes
EMEO	Educational Measurement and Evaluation Organisation
FRDE	Fundamental Reform Document of Education in Islamic Republic of Iran
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
LMO	Literacy Movement Organisation
MET	Ministry of Education and Training
MSRT	Ministry of Research and Training
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoIS	Ministry of Intelligence and Security
NSA	National Spiritual Assembly
RRM	Recognised Religious Minorities
SCCR	Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution
TVE	Theoretical and Vocational Stream
UNSR	United Nations Special Rapporteur
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

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Chapter One

Introduction

The 19th century Iran saw two movements which ultimately led to the inception of Baha'ism. Shaikh'ism, founded in 1844 under the leadership of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsai (1753-1826), was a movement whose proponents expected the return of the hidden Imam, the *Mahdi*. Out of Shaikh'ism, emerged Bab'ism when its leader Seyyed Ali Muhammad Shirazi (1819-1850), also known as the Bab, declared himself to be the "Gate of the Imam" and later as the Imam himself in 1848 (Martin, 1984:7). This new revelation had revolutionary impacts, posing great threat to the state due to its militant nature and the Shi'i clergy, who considered Bab as an imposter. Bab'ism did not last long as the Qajar government managed to eliminate its proponents with the Bab himself being publicly executed in 1850 (ibid).

Baha'ism emerged from Bab'ism when one of the Bab's followers, Mirza Hussein Ali Nuri, also known as Baha'ullah (1817-1892) informed his close followers in 1863 that he was the messianic figure promised by the Bab or 'He Whom God Shall Make Manifest'. In 1867, this declaration was made public and soon Baha'ism spread rapidly outside Iran mainly in the West Asian region and to Europe and North America (Sansarian, 2004:50). In the early 21st century the worldwide Baha'i population is estimated to be between five to six million (Khanam, 2005:89), although the Baha'i claims the number to be 6 to 7.2 million. The largest Baha'i population is found in India, being 4,572 according to the 2011 census report, although the Baha'i claim is 2.2 million. One of the seven existing Baha'i temples (*mashriq al-adhkar*) is in New Delhi, India.

The majority of the adherents of Baha'i faith belong to non-Muslim background, making the Baha'i faith an independent religion and not a sect or a reform movement within Islam (Sansarian, 2004:51). Rather, the adherents of this faith believe in progressive revelation, that is, the belief that God has been sending manifestation through prophets or messengers since the inception of human race, and would continue to do so in future. Therefore, Baha'ullah recognised Moses, Christ, Muhammad and other prophets, like himself, to be the historical manifestations of God (Hartz, 2009:14). This idea of progressive revelation is in contradiction

with Islamic belief that Muhammad as the last prophet. Baha'is believe that the cycle of prophecy has been not ended with Muhammad and with Bab's proclamation a new cycle was inaugurated, known as the 'cycle of fulfilment'.

There are similarities between Quran and Aqdas, the holy books of Islam and Baha'i faith respectively. The former believes in the submission of the individual to the will of the God by prescribing a number of responsibilities. These form the necessary conditions in the concept of "brotherhood" among the believers and for Baha'i faith, on the other hand, the definition of unity is inclusive and not based on race or religious affiliation, but on the oneness of humankind. Baha'ism emphasises on universalism and peace on earth, kindness, education and science, just rule and protection of subjects from oppression and injustice, political quietism and loyalty to the state through the holy book, *Kitab-e-Aqdas*.

Religious groups whose faith is based on the revelatory tradition are recognised in Quran as *ahl al-kitab* or the *People of the Book*. This includes Jews, Christians, Sabaeans and Zoroastrians. The status of the *People of the Book* and their treatment are mentioned in Quran and Sunnah as the *dhimmi* whereby the latter are given limited protection in exchange for their complete submission to Muslim rule. Under the Covent of Omar, *dhimmi*s are guaranteed protection of their life, body, property, freedom of movement and religious practice and in return they are required to observe the *dhimmi* regulations closely. The attitude towards the *People of the Book* is characterised by a degree of inconsistency of both amity and tolerance and respect. This Quranic concept laid the foundation for the recognised religious minorities (RRM) in the Islamic Republic of Iran and rights of the Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians are guaranteed under the 1979 constitution. On the contrary, Baha'is are considered as *murtadd*(apostate), who were not recognised as *dhimmi* and are not given any protection and hence whose blood can be shed and whose property belonged to no one and thus can be plundered.

The 20th century Iran underwent important political changes when an army officer named Reza Shah (1878-1944) seized power from the last Qajar ruler Ahmad Shah (1898-1930) and crowned himself the Shah of Persia in 1925. Determined to reduce the power of clerics and the ancient Arabic-Muslim culture, Reza Shah introduced modernisation programme that sought a revival of the ancient Persian heritage and weakening the influence of Islam. Reza Shah's modernisation efforts led to discontent of the clerics, including Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989), who later

became the leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. During the Second World War, Reza Shah showed his support for Germany to the displeasure of Russia and the Great Britain that controlled the vast oil fields in Iran. As a result, Reza Shah was forced to abdicate and flee the country in 1941 and the throne was left to his 20 year old son Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1919-1980).

The inexperienced and weak ruler Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, was pro-British while most Iranians opposed Great Britain. In 1951, Mohammad Mossadegh (1882-1967) was elected as the prime minister who promised to free Iran from foreign domination. Perceiving Mossadegh as a threat, Great Britain sought help from the United States and President Eisenhower directed Kermit Roosevelt, grandson of Theodore Roosevelt and officer of the newly created Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to go to Iran. With the help of the Iranian army, he removed Mossadegh from office in 1953 and put pro-British and pro-US general Fazlollah Zahedi (1892-1963) as the new prime minister. This act of removing Mossadegh by the United States left a bad impression on the Iranians who perceived this as a plot to destroy their country's independence.

The second Pahlavi ruler with time became a staunch ruler, having his control over every aspect of the public life, from elections, participation of the political parties and to censorship in newspapers and magazines. Dissent against the ruler of any form or in any place, was strictly prohibited and the Shah even appointed a secret police service called SAVAK to check any form of 'disloyalty' towards the government. Like Reza Shah, Mohammad Pahlavi, too, celebrated the ancient Persian heritage. These changes that intended to improve the citizen's life is known as the White Revolution. On 22 March 1963 in Qom, Shah's soldiers arrested a dozen of students belonging to a theological school during a clash and also killed two students. This resulted in a verbal attack against the Shah by Khomeini, following which the Shah ordered for Khomeini's arrest. Three days of violent unrest followed which was severely suppressed. On 4 November 1964, Khomeini was banished from Iran who went into exile in Najaf, a holy city in neighbouring Iraq.

During his exile, Khomeini continued to voice his opinion against the Shah and the government in lectures where he also envisioned his vision of merging Islam and state through the re-creation of *velayat-e-faqih* (Rule of Islamic Jurist) that was later published as a book under the title of *Velayat-e-Faqih* (first published in 1970). Khomeini gradually gained a number of followers

during his exile. In 1971, the Shah celebrated 2,500 years of undisputed monarchical rule in Iran. The lavish spending (estimated at about US\$300 million dollars) during this celebration was vehemently criticised by Khomeini and common Iranians also had a glimpse of the extravaganza. Iran, being a part of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), gained enormous wealth from in the wake of the oil crisis of 1973. Shah decided to spend the newly acquired wealth on expanding infrastructure projects and military with the help of Western Europe and the United States and about 60,000 foreigners (of whom 45,000 were Americans) who came to Iran, created deeper gulf between the ruling elites and the commoners (January, 2003:33) Shah's modernisation attempts on expanding the military and industry greatly affected Iran's resources and by late 1976, Iranian economy had weakened. Despite Shah's efforts for modernisation, corruption, inflation and the rich-poor income gap ensued and these led to greater public dissatisfaction (Curtis and Hooglund, 2008:46).

The protests gained momentum in January 1978 when a state-sponsored newspaper *Ettelaat* published an article raising questions on Khomeini's piety and also calling him a British agent (Curtis and Hooglund, 2008:47). This article was denounced not just by senior clerics, but also by Khomeini's followers. Students of the seminary protested in the streets of Qom that was met with brutal clash by Shah's police forces, resulting in the killing of a number of demonstrators. Forty days later on 18 February 1978, as per Shi'i custom, people held demonstrations in several cities in to honour those who were killed and in Tabriz, these demonstrations took a violent turn. Anti-government riots prevailed in several towns and cities, targeting and destroying anything that represented objectionable features of the regime, like nightclubs, cinema halls, banks, offices of the pro-regime *Rastakhez* (Resurgence Party) and police stations. The protestors, in their posters and slogans, demanded the removal of the Shah and the establishment of an Islamic state as their ideal, called Khomeini as their leader (ibid:48). Protests reached the universities as well where female students wore traditional Islamic *hijab* (shawls and head coverings) as solidarity and in protest against the imposed western dress code that banned *hijab*.

In August 1978 a fire broke out in Rex Cinema in Abadan in which about 400 people died. Rumours spread that the theatre was set ablaze by Shah's security forces through the persuasion of Islamic militants. Anti-government protests soon followed, martial law was declared by the

government in Tehran and 11 other cities and in Tehran's Jaleh Square the official estimates put the number of demonstrators killed at least 87. This day is known as the historic "Black Friday". The movements were further radicalised as a consequence and crowds demanded the return of Khomeini. Seeing this situation, the Shah pleaded Saddam Hussein of Iraq to expel Khomeini from Iraq, who then settled in Paris. This gave Khomeini a better chance to air his opinions and communicate them to his followers through international press and media (Curtis and Hooglund, 2008:49).

It was from Paris that Khomeini ordered the workers in Iran to call for a strike against the oppressive Shah rule. In September 1978 the workers in the public sector, including the most critical oil industry, adhered to his call and demanded improved salaries and benefits. The strike quickly took the shape of a larger demand for changes in the political system. Iran's major cities faced shutdown and Shah's security, who previously acted against the protestors, now began to side with the protestors by the fall of 1978 (January, 2008:41).

On 2 Dec 1978, the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Muharram, Shah ordered curfew that was defied by millions of Iranians who crowded the streets and chanted "God is great—Khomeini is our leader". It was clear to the Shah that his 38 years of rule was ending. On 16 January 1979, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi boarded an airplane and left the country and celebrations of the end of Shah's rule broke out. After 15 years in exile, on 1 February 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini returned Iran to become the Supreme Leader of the new Islamic Republic (January, 2008:45).

Education plays the central role in the Baha'i faith as it believes in both material and spiritual progress, and education is the precondition to attain this goal. From the Baha'i perspective, knowledge and fear of God is the starting point of all effective education. Since Baha'is have no concept of clergy, they put out most emphasis on the need for education through which the believers can read the sacred writings of their faith, understand and follow them. *Kitab-e-Aqdas* makes education a sacred obligation for Baha'i parents to their children and in case of their inability to do so, entrusts the task to the elected Baha'i councils in each locality, the House of Justice. The importance of education also lie in the "oneness of education", that is, the need for one curriculum for both men and women. Education, therefore, becomes a part of the religious duty for Baha'is.

The political turmoil of Iran during the 19th century provided an impetus for the Baha'i community to lend their hand in the reform process, especially in education. Therefore, it can be said that Baha'ism had a major role in the modernisation process of Iran. Education during the Qajar regime (1785-1925) was mostly traditional wherein the clerical-controlled and enjoyed a monopoly over education at both elementary and secondary levels. Schooling, at this time, was mainly in the form of *maktabs* and *madrassas* where religious texts and Persian language were mostly taught. However, no compulsory education existed and education was out of the purview of the government control. Compulsory education was introduced at the beginning of the 20th century.

The initial efforts for Baha'i education were informal and individual, in the form of *maktabs*(classes) for both boys and girls, in many villages and they also provided moral education. The reason for employment of private tutors during the Qajar period was because Baha'i children were not permitted to attend any kind of schools. However, not all could afford private tutors, making it difficult to inculcate the compulsory Baha'i religious education. It was under the leadership of Abdul Baha, Baha'ullah's successor, that the situation changed and Baha'i schools (*mahfil-i-dars-i-akhlaq*) were opened and these were gradually recognised by the Qajar regime. Small village-level schools were started by Baha'is in the late 1870s and early 1880s followed by primary and secondary schools in urban centres like Tehran, Hamadan, Qazvin, Kashan and Barfurush. Such was the Baha'i influence on modernisation of education that by 1920, nearly 10 per cent of the estimated 28,000 primary and secondary schools in Iran were run by Baha'is, while the Baha'i population stood at one to two per cent. As many as 25 schools for girls were established by Baha'is.

Formal schools were established with the opening of the *Tarbiyat* School for Boys in 1899 and the *Tarbiyat* School for Girls in 1911 in Tehran, both being one of the first modern schools in the country. Soon after Baha'i schools sprang up in numerous places and were known for their efficient modern education and remarkable infrastructure. Baha'i commitment to its education is reflected by the fact that by 1973, they were the first to have achieved a literacy rate of 100 per cent among women under the age of 40, despite the national literacy rate being only 15 per cent.

At the same time, the government permission to Baha'i schools that emerged in the mid- 19th and early 20th centuries were given to individuals who were Baha'is and not to the collective Baha'i

community. Moreover, official documents did not mention the religious identity of the individuals to whom the permission was granted for opening of Baha'i schools even though not just Baha'i children but also children belonging to all religious groups, including Muslims, were admitted into these Baha'i schools and were imparted a modern educational curriculum which was otherwise absent in the Iranian educational system at that time. One can say, it was due to this reason the Baha'is were able to carry on their programmes amidst oppositions, mainly from the Shi'a clerics and local religious leaders.

In order to mitigate such oppositions, the Baha'i schools followed the curriculum outlined by the Ministry of Education, which includes courses on Arabic, Quran and Islam. At the same time, in line with modern European education of that period, it also included subjects like mathematics, physics, chemistry, physiology, botany, geography, history and foreign languages like English and French. New developments like physical activities, art and music were included as a part of the curriculum. The Baha'i schools were the first in the country to introduce innovations and new amenities such as blackboards, benches and desks, laboratories, libraries and geography maps, thus making students of Baha'i schools privileged, receiving highest standard of education available at that time in Iran. The schools did not have any classes on Baha'i faith but rather separate religious class were held outside school on Fridays which was a holiday for Muslims. The opening of Baha'i modern schools thus became a means for their social mobility along with asserting visibility of their existence in the Iranian society. However, the situation of the Baha'is which improved under Pahlavi rule (1925-79) did not survive for long and the Shia *ulamas* who had control over education, had always been a major source of opposition to Baha'i schools.

The 1979 Revolution and its aftermath reflected the worst scenario for the Baha'is of Iran, with which it is still coping. Soon after the revolution, Baha'is were accused of being spies of countries like Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Spain and Israel. According to CIA estimate in 2011, Baha'is are the largest non-Muslim minority in Iran, with an estimated adherents of 300,000-350,000 out of the total population of 80.8 million. However, no official Iranian estimates of Baha'is is available, since they are not given official status of RRM. Rather, they are perceived as a "political sect", having ties with Zionism, Shah regime and an associate of the notorious SAVAK (National Intelligence and Security Organisation of the Shah regime).

Since 1979 all the Baha'is institutions and their properties in Iran were looted and confiscated, government employees were dismissed from their jobs and were forced to pay back the salaries received during their employment, their pensions were cancelled, Baha'i businesses were boycotted and individual Baha'is and their properties are subjected to harassments. In 1979, the Revolutionary Guardsmen destroyed the House of the Bab in Shiraz, one of Baha'is most holy sites and the demolition of other holy places were also carried out. The offices of the National Spiritual Assembly (NSA) were raided where the membership lists and other information were confiscated. All the nine members of NSA were arrested on 21 August and are assumed to be killed. The Baha'i institutions were formally declared illegal in August 1983 which still remains in force.

The worst effect of the revolution was on the situation of Baha'i children, affecting their educational conditions. Baha'i children were expelled from schools and universities following the revolution and were asked to recant their faith as a condition for admission in schools. The Islamic Republic does not recognise the Baha'is as a religious minority and therefore, the latter does not receive the privileges that other protected minorities get. In a situation like this where the Baha'is are not recognised as legal citizens of Iran, it is important to see how the Baha'i children and youth are receiving their education in the face of state-sponsored discrimination in Iran.

Review of literature

Recognised Religious Minorities in Iran

According to the *International Religious Freedom Reports* published by the US State Department, out of the 80.8 million population of Iran, 99 per cent is Muslim (90 per cent Shi'a and 9 per cent Sunni), and the rest are Baha'is, Christians, Jews, Sabean-Mandaeans, Zoroastrians and Yarsanis. The largest non-Muslim population in Iran are the Baha'is, Christians and Yarsanis. Article 13 of the constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran refers to religious minorities recognised by the state, namely Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian Iranians. These RRMS, "within the limits of law", are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affair and religious education. Religious activities are closely monitored by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (*Ershad*) and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MoIS). The *Religious Freedom Reports* state that non-

Muslims may not engage in public religious expressions, persuasion or conversion of Muslims and such activities are considered as proselytising which is punishable by death.

The Constitutional Revolution (1905-1907) marked an improvement in the legal status of the minorities. The Supplementary Fundamental Laws of October 7, 1907 in Article 8 declared equality of the people of the Persian Empire before the law and for the first time recognised the status non-Muslims as equal to the Muslims. However, this was in contrast to Article 58 which made it clear that none other than a Muslim can attain the rank of a minister. The New Election Law of July 1, 1909 secured one representation for each of the religious minorities recognised by Shi'i Islam- Armenians, Assyrians, Zoroastrians and Jews but not for the Baha'is (Tsadik, 2003:408). The *jizya* tax was removed, and Shi'i concept of uncleanness of non-Muslims was abandoned as well (Price, 2005:45).

Mohammad Reza Shah's aim to weaken the influence of the religious clergy led to transformation in the *dhimmi* contract whereby protection of the minorities came to be secured not only by the constitution, but also by the personal engagement of the Shah (Goldstein, 1981:93). Modern schools were established by religious minorities in the 19th century which played a significant role in the modernisation process in the following century. However, this continued until the 1930s when the government established national school system (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 1997a).

Under the Islamic Republic the RRM's are given representation in the 290-member *majlis* (Parliament); according to Article 64 of the Constitution five seats are reserved for them, namely, two for Armenian Christians, one for Assyrian Christians, one for Jews and one for Zoroastrians. It is important to note here that Christians, Zoroastrians and Jews who constitute less than one per cent of the population has been given representative in the Parliament whereas Baha'is who are the largest non-Muslim religious minority are not given official recognition in the constitution and hence no representation in the parliament. However, members of RRM's are barred from seeking high public office in the executive, presidential or judicial or legal branches of the government, which are exclusively reserved for the Muslims. Moreover, they are barred from serving in the Assembly of Experts, Expediency Discernment Council, Council of Guardians of the Constitution and Supreme Leader (Choksy, 2012:274).

Nevertheless, non-Shia religious minorities suffer officially sanctioned discrimination in employment, housing, education (US, 2014:6). RRM's are also barred from holding senior government posts and public sector employment. Sunni Muslims have been prevented from building their own mosques in Tehran and conducting separate Eid prayers (HRW, 2016:9). The same practice of restrictions remains in the field of military service where minorities cannot be career military officers, even though in practice, no religious minorities were exempt from military service (US, 2010:3).

Following the Iranian revolution, education of the RRM group underwent changes and difficulties owing to the government policy in 1981 which intensified in 1983, creating the relationship between the state and the religious minorities as one of compartmentalisation and segregation (Sansarian, 2004:76). Changes like appointment of Muslim principals, teachers and clerics to minority schools, time reduction or elimination of teaching of languages other than Persian and direct interference in minority schools impacted the RRM education, especially for Armenian, Assyrian and Chaldean communities where language and religion are intertwined (ibid:82)

A formal directive issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (MET) in 1983 produced a series of texts for the religion for minority students, called *talimat-e mazhabi vizheh-ye aqaliathaye mazhabi* (Religious Studies Specifically for Religious Minorities: Jews, Zoroastrians, Christians), after consultation with the leaders of each faith. This text became the only course on religion available in RRM schools (Shorish, 1988:62). The directive made it clear that religious education must be in Persian, a single religious text written by the authorities for all RRM's must be taught in all schools where the RRM's were viewed as "evolutionary transients on their way to becoming Muslims" (Sansarian, 2004:83). Schools must seek permission for conducting any ceremonies, including religious ones, female teachers and students must observe the Islamic dress code, and teaching of Assyrian language must be reduced to two hours per week (Sansarian, 2004:80).

The textbooks in certain non-religious subjects like history, Farsi and social studies, make mention of the existence of religious minorities in Iran. In religious education, the Sunnis have their specially designed religious instruction where the textbooks make mention of the unity of Shi'as and Sunnis although all historical, social and religious issues are interpreted from the

perspective of Shi'ite traditions and beliefs. For this reason, the Sunnis encounter a contradiction as even though they are familiarised with the fundamentals of their own beliefs, the other textbooks have Shi'ite perspective, but prefers using terms like "Muslim" or "Muslims" instead of "Shi'ite" and "Sunni" (Paivandi, 2008:39). In case of RRM, the state religious education aims at bringing unity among all monotheist religions, emphasising the commonalities and ignoring the acknowledged diversity and differences among them. Besides Jews and Christians, other religious groups in Iran are ignored in the school books (Mehran, 2007:99). The university entrance examination requires applicants to mention their religious affiliation and also to sit for the compulsory religious exam whereas the RRM's are exempt from sitting on Islamic religion exam but sit for their respective religious examinations (Sakurai, 2004:395).

Baha'is in Iran

Since the inception of the Babi and Baha'i movements in Iran in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, its followers became the victim of state-sponsored persecutions, not for personal gain, but to curtail the threat to its power and influence. Some improvement in the Baha'i situation was seen during the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) where they were given position in the services of the government due to their higher education, non-partisan attitude and being natural allies of the regime (Moghaddam, 2016:127). During the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1941-1979), Iran faced acute political instability due to which the Shah gave certain powers to the *ulama* and a free hand to the further persecution of Baha'is. In 1950s, the Hojjatiyeh society was formed as a Shia reactionary movement, known especially for its anti-Baha'i campaign. It carried out surveillance and anti-Baha'i propaganda on national radio stations and official newspapers and indulged in violence against Baha'is from the country and these had the passive backing of the Shah and covert aid from SAVAK (Lorentz, 2007:125).

The Islamic Revolution merged the state and the *ulama*, making Iran closer to theocracy which affected the already discriminated position of the Baha'is through of non-recognition, systematic persecutions, arbitrary arrests, confiscation and destruction of Baha'i properties and torture and executions (Warburg, 2012:198). The attitude regarding Baha'is is best reflected in an interview that the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, gave in December 1978 to James Cockroft of Rutgers University. Upon being asked whether there would be either religious or political freedom for Baha'is under an Islamic government, Khomeini replied that they are a

“political faction”, who are “harmful” and thereby, “cannot be accepted”. Regarding the question of the freedom of religious practice, Khomeini replied a strict “no” (Yazdani, 2012:593). This attitude is reflected from the non-recognition of Baha’is as a legitimate religious group. From this angle, Article 167 of the Iranian Constitution which is more frequently applied against the Baha’is, states, “The judge is bound to endeavour to judge each case on the basis of the codified law. In case of the absence of any such law, he has to deliver his judgement on the basis of authoritative Islamic sources and authentic fatwas”.

Since 1979, there were systematic persecution, harassment and discrimination of Baha'is on the basis of their religious belief and at least 201 Baha’is were killed with 15 others disappeared and presumably dead (UNGA, 1994: 144). Moreover, Baha’i-owned holy places, historical sites, cemeteries, administrative centres and other assets were seized, confiscated or destroyed. Baha’is are not permitted to mark the graves of the dead (ibid: 150).

Under President Mohammed Khatami (1997-2005) Iran saw slight improvements in the conditions of the Baha’is due to his reform process. Restrictions on obtaining food-ration booklets and access of Baha’i children to public and elementary schools were eased. In 2000 Baha’i couples were allowed to be registered as husband and wife without the requirement of identifying their religious affiliation, which in effect, permitted the registration of Baha’i marriages. This also saved the Baha’i children who were considered illegitimate and were denied inheritance rights (US, 2004-05). There was a drop in the number of Baha’i prisoners, easy obtainment of business licenses that were previously denied and easy obtainment of passports to travel abroad (Moghaddam, 2016:136).

Ahmadinejad presidency (2005-2013) intensified the persecution of Baha’is and 200 members of the Baha’i community were imprisoned along with the arrest of seven national leaders of the community on charges related to national-security (UNGA 2011a: para. 60). In 2006, Amnesty International disclosed a secret letter from the Iranian military headquarters issued to various Revolutionary Guard police that called on the latter to “identify” and “monitor” Baha’is around the country (BIC 2008a:11). According to the United Nations General Assembly Special Rapporteur, Baha’i students were alleged to be forced to identify their religious affiliation and were insulted, degraded, threatened with expulsion and in early 2008, 150 such cases were reported (UNGA2008a: para 121).

One of the earliest discrimination on grounds of education can be seen in the 1981-82 school year that required students to complete an application that had questions like whether the applicant or his or her family were Baha'i, and if so, whether he or she was willing to recant (Astani, 2010). Those who affirmed their Baha'i faith were prohibited from admission. A decree issued in September 1981 identified membership in "misled and heretical sect" of the Baha'i faith as a "crime" and prohibited Baha'i professors and students from working for or attending colleges (IHRDC, 2006:46). Moreover, when Muhammad Ali Rajai became Minister of Education in mid-1979, he issued a circular to get rid of the Baha'i teachers from all educational sectors and required them to repay all of the salaries earned (Afshari, 2008:235). It should be noted that Rajai was an ex-member of the Hojjatiyeh society known for its anti-Baha'i activities established in the early 1950s. During 1983-2004, Baha'i students were denied the opportunity to sit for the university entrance examinations (AI, 2014:27).

In 1990, a secret memorandum was drafted by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (SCCR) on the "Baha'i Question" and it referred to the general status of Baha'is in the country, their cultural, educational, legal and social status. Regarding educational status it maintained that Baha'is "can be enrolled in schools provided they have not identified themselves as Baha'is; preferably should be enrolled in schools which have a strong and imposing religious ideology and must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once their Baha'i identity is known. It also talks about forming a plan must "to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country" (Tahririha-Danesh, 2001:225). A handwritten note by Ayatollah Khomeini at the bottom of the document endorsed this policy (Kazemzadeh, 2000:554). When this memorandum was disclosed in by the United Nations Special Rapporteur (UNSR) in 1993, the Iranian government claimed this document a forgery, though various international human rights organisations and the UN have verified its authenticity (US, 2001:4).

The Iranian attitude is also formulated in the school textbook where Baha'is are mentioned as a "false sect" and as a tool in the hands of foreign powers. A lesson in the History textbook for Grade 8 titled "Sect-building by Colonialism", mentions Bab'ism and Baha'ism as false religion, a creation of Russian and British governments aimed at destroying Muslim unity. It also

mentions about the Bab's claim of calling himself the 'Promised Mahdi' as "Bab conspiracy" (Paivandi, 2008:44).

These ban and restrictions, however, could not prevent the Baha'i from accessing education. In 1987, the Baha'is established their own education institution known as Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) that offered classes on variety of courses in private homes throughout Iran offered by volunteers from both within and outside the county. The private homes have facilities of laboratories, libraries and photocopy machines. At its peak, the institution enrolled more than 900 students (IHRDC, 2006:54). However, the BIHE was shut down through a series of government raids in 1998 that also included the arrest of at least 36 members of the faculty, and staff and destroying and confiscating of properties. This drew considerable international attention. Nevertheless, some 140 students graduated from this "Open University" in the 1990s (Cole, 2005:154).

Acting on the reports and assessment of Baha'i communities in Iran and elsewhere the UN has been pressurizing Iran to relax its restrictions upon its Baha'i citizens. Partly in response to such pressure, the Iranian government dropped religious affiliation from applications for national university entrance examination in 2003 (BIC, 2005:8). As a result hundreds of Baha'is took the examination. Applicants have to sit for a compulsory religious paper, option being Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism (the four officially recognised religions). Due to the familiarity with the religion, most Baha'is opted for Islam as their option. The successful Baha'i applicants found that the registration cards issued in the summer of 2004 identified themselves as "Muslims" (Momen, 2005:239). When complained to the officials at national Educational Measurement and Evaluation Organisation (EMEO), Baha'is were told that "incorrect religion would not be corrected". Moreover, even though 800 Baha'i applicants passed the examinations, only ten names were published in the EMEO bulletin for admission in 2004. The ten students refused to take admission out of solidarity for the rest of the Baha'i students who were not given admission (BIC, 2005:12). In 2008, 94 out of 178 Baha'i students accepted in universities were reported to be summarily dismissed (UNGA 2008a: para. 121).

Discrimination over the right to education still persists. More than 300 cases of denial of education of the Baha'is have been reported in the academic year 2014-2015 (BIC 2015a:10). The official policy for the enrolment and participation in the national university entrance

examination in 2015-16 mentions that “a belief in Islam or in one of the recognised religions (Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians) in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran” is a general requirement for enrolment in the universities, thereby excluding the Baha’is (ibid: 11).

Islamisation of Education

Education is one of the basis for any nation-building and Iran is not an exception. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups...” (UDHR, 1948:7) The education system being an apparatus of influence as well as manipulation of society has been used by regime both before and after the Iranian revolution to strengthen their legitimacy. The 19th and 20th century Iran saw a transition, from traditional system to modernisation, reaching its peak during the Pahlavi reign, with education becoming a constant element of continuity in the modernisation project (Khaki & Baht, 2014:134). According to Fundamental Reform Document of Education in Islamic Republic of Iran (FRDE), “education is an edification-seeking, interactive, gradual and integrated process, based on the Islamic norm system to instruct the individuals to be prepared for consciously and willingly achieving the stages of *hayate tayyebah* (the ideal Islamic life) in all its aspects and to pave the ground for an on-going evolution and promotion of their identity to shape and advance the Islamic society” (FRDE, 2011:10).

Iranian education system, however, is not devoid of its discriminations. Gender discrimination is a major concern in the courses and textbooks which justifies the inequality between men and women on grounds of theological vision, whereby men are viewed as “superior” and “dominant” as compared to women who are “inferior” or “second” in both social and private lives. Moreover, the women, rather than being perceived as an autonomous individual, are referred to as mother, grandmother, sister and wife of a man (Paivandi, 2008:20). There has been reports of restriction of women’s admissions in specific university programmes implemented by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, making their accessibility to higher education difficult (HRW, 2012). Discriminatory educational discourse is also found in its perception of the ethnic and religious minorities in the country. Shi’i Islam forms the major theme in non-religious books as well. Non-recognised minorities are referred to with terms such as “*kafar*”

(heather), meaning a person who is the enemy of religion. Through this discriminatory discourse, Iranian education system seeks to make the differentiation among people natural and legitimate (Paivandi, 2008:21). Increasing threat in the academic freedom of expression and association on campuses is another concern pertaining to the education system. Applicants in graduate programmes and in higher education teaching posts are scrutinised for their ideological views. To deter any dissent on campuses, the Supreme Council for the Cultural Revolution has set ideological and political requirements for students seeking admission in higher education, thereby violating Article 3 of the Iranian constitution which guarantees right to education for all its citizens. Iranian students and teachers have been periodically threatened, suspended, arrested and prosecuted on the basis of their opinions, gender, religion and ethnicity (HRW, 2012).

One can notice the changing trends before and after revolution where education institutions were utilised by the authorities to impose and make-belief their mode of government as the righteous one. In this matter there seem to be not much disparity between the pre- and post-1979 state system. During the Pahlavi regime, religious education has been devalued, Islamic values censored and western secularism has been emphasised to facilitate the modernisation process (Rucker, 1991:457). Westernisation, the main aim of the Pahlavis, were sought to be channelized through education. For this, serious attention has been paid towards elementary and higher education and devising a uniform school curriculum, to establish a strong centralised government in achieving Reza Shah's three broad goals, namely, nationalism, secularism and education (Khaki & Baht, 2014:135). Focus on adult education programme is another policy during this period to bring about the national consciousness of the new emerging nation of Iran. In 1936, 22 secondary schools were opened for adult education programme. Another major development in the field of education was the widespread education of women with more opportunities to pursue studies at secondary and university levels (ibid: 136).

The name of the schools reflected the superior influence of the monarch where students were made to pay homage to the Shah and his family before starting of the classes. The modernisation efforts in education system also opened the door for increasing operation of private schools as well as the establishment of foreign schools, with the aim of weakening the strong religious beliefs of the students and to convince them of the righteousness of the Shah regime. For example, "major goal of teaching history at schools is to strengthen the students' feelings for the

royalty and nationalism as well as patriotism” (Mohsenpour, 1988:79). Nevertheless, religion managed to retain its stronghold among Iranians, especially in the rural areas where the modernising efforts could not reach the lowest section of the population, leading to the ultimate overthrow of the Shah regime in the revolution of 1979, where students had a significant hand (Rucker, 1991: 458).

Under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran quickly indulged in changing and “purifying” the whole society. This process was reflected in the reforms in major institutions like judiciary and education. The modern, secular and westernised educational system of the Shah regime was replaced and “Islamisation” (*islami kardan*) became the dominant discourse of the education system. As a result, de-secularisation of schools followed and schools were re-named with names of religious leaders, dedicated people, teachers and students who sacrificed and contributed to the revolution. Students were demanded to recite Quranic verses and pray for the victory of Muslim throughout the world before starting their classes. All foreign schools were abolished (Mohsenpour, 1988:81).

In the period from 1980 and 1982, also called the Cultural Revolution, the Ministry of Education brought about a new innovation in the education curriculum and textbooks that was deemed to play an important role in the official transmission of acceptable social and political values (the Quran, Shia Islamic doctrines and the Constitution, to be precise). Soon after the Islamic revolution, Khomeini advised fundamental changes in school textbooks with the aim to “demonarchise” the curricular content and eradicate pro-western and anti-Islamic messages of the pre-revolutionary book (Mehran, 1989:37). The “demonarchiation” was reflected not only in the school curriculum, but also in the examination process, renaming of schools, imposition of Islamic dress code and in all other spheres of the education system.

One of the major reforms was the creation of a new body of “Educational Affairs” (*omour tarbiyat*) responsible for installing Islamic culture among students and designing a political officer in every schools to monitor the teachers and students and to evaluate the former’s knowledge of Islam. The “Goals and Responsibilities of the Department of Education” adopted by the Parliament in 1987 provided that the most “sacred” mission of the school is to form the “new Muslim man”, a virtuous believer, conscientious and engaged in the service of the Islamic society (Paivandi, 2008:21). The national university entrance examination, called *konkur*,

became a tool for the government in selecting only those students who are committed to the ideology of the revolution. This was done through intensive scrutiny of their social and political background, thus leading to “Islamisation of the university” (Sakurai, 2004:387). The FDRE envisioned the mission of its educational policy is to achieve *hayate tayyebah* (the ideal Islamic life) at individual, family and global dimensions in a systematic, general, equitable and compulsory method, based on the philosophy Islamic-Iranian education (FDRE, 2011:20).

Definition, Rationale and Scope of the Study

The proposed study is an attempt to understand the situation of the Baha’is in the light of the Iranian revolution, especially in the educational arena. The study of Baha’is as the largest non-Muslim religious minority, that too, unrecognised, has been a paramount example for understanding the condition of human rights of the minorities in Iran. The available literature do provide analysis of the persecution and discrimination of the Iranian Baha’is in education, but there is a disconnected analysis of how the international community and the Baha’i community worldwide have helped the Baha’is in Iran to continue their education amidst the continuation of the discriminatory practices. An attempt, therefore, has been made here to have a comprehensive assessment of those events. The proposed research would analyse the condition of Baha’is and the discrimination faced in the field of education.

Research Questions

1. What is the status of Baha’is following the Islamic revolution in Iran?
2. How did the Iranian Revolution transform the education system especially with regard to the minorities?
3. How did the Baha’is manage to survive the ever-increasing discriminatory attitude of the Iranian government in terms of educational access?
4. How is the international community helping the Baha’i community to pursue its educational needs?

Hypotheses

1. The education conditions of the Baha’is in the Islamic Republic of Iran have been adversely affected by their non-recognition as a religious minority.
2. Despite state discriminations, the Baha’i education system has been sustained by the backing of the international community and Baha’is worldwide.

Research Methodology

The research will be analytical and deductive in its approach. It would be based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources will include reports and letters published by the Iranian government, United Nations, and Religious Freedom reports of the US States Department. The secondary source will include studies published by Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, Amnesty International and also books, journals, news reports, etc.

Chapterisation

The Second Chapter on *Education System in Iran* examined the overall education system that prevailed in Iran during the Pahlavi era and the changes brought about following the 1979 revolution in terms of structure, reforms in the curricula, and gender disparity. Besides focusing on the primary and secondary education system, this chapter also analysed the changes brought about in higher education, particularly the reforms made post 1997, and the intensification of Islamisation of universities following President Mohammed Khatami's tenure. The chapter concludes with an analyses that the Pahlavi regime's education system focused on blind imitation of the West that resulted in mass illiteracy as education failed to reach the masses, especially the rural population. On the contrary the Iranian Revolution of 1979 has brought about significant changes in its education system through newer mechanisms to bridge urban-rural gap and mass illiteracy. The revolution, through the system of *velayat-e-faqih*, has aligned religion and politics, which is reflected in every sphere of the Iranian education system. Notwithstanding the changes, the education system in post-revolution Iran is an essential tool for the authorities to maintain its legitimacy, much like what the Pahlavi regime has done.

The Third chapter on *Primary and Secondary Education of the Baha'is* examined the ways Baha'i members carried out their education in absence of any formal education, their silent contribution in the modernisation process in the 19th century, especially in the field of education through the opening of schools run by the community during the Qajar rule. It outlines the innovations brought about in those schools—be it in terms of curricula, extra-curricular activities to schools for girls—that gave the Baha'is an access to social prominence, and the subsequent closing of all Baha'i-run schools in the Pahlavi regime. The chapter then looks at the scenario after the Iranian Revolution where through decrees, directives and a secret memorandum, the authorities have aimed to systematically deny the Baha'is access to primary and secondary

education. Not just the systemic means of denial, the chapter also examines the prevailing methods of discrimination, harassment and intimidation that education authorities, including the teachers and staff, carry out against the Baha'i students, due to their religious affiliation. Discrimination is not just reflected in the attitudes of the authorities, but also gets reflected in the school textbooks that has wrongly given a deceptive picture of the Baha'i community. The chapter concludes with the analyses that while Baha'is access to formal education was never a smooth journey, the same has attained a systematic discriminatory role by means of institutionalisation following the Iranian Revolution.

This Fourth chapter on *Baha'i and Higher Education and the Role of International Community* examined the transformation brought about in the higher education system of the Islamic Republic through Islamisation process carried out during the Cultural Revolution (1980-1982) when Baha'is in higher education—from faculty to students—were expelled. The chapter also examined the functioning of the national university entrance examination called *konkur* that was used by the authorities as another tool to keep the Baha'is off higher education, the changes made in *konkur* after 2003 that allowed Baha'is to sit for the examination for the first time since 1979 and newer ways and means the authorities exercises to hinder Baha'is either from sitting in the entrance examination or by expelling Baha'i students if their religion gets disclosed. The chapter then examines the responses from non-governmental sources like *ulamas*, activists, scholars and intellectuals, who have raised their voice on the plight of the Baha'i situation in Iran, thus deviating from the official position. The chapter then analyses the alternative means Baha'i members have found to provide higher education to their members through an informal network called Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), which has now got global recognition, even though it is not recognised in Iran itself. Lastly, the chapter analysed the different reports and resolutions from the international community, including the United Nations that refer to the Baha'i situation in Iran and the responses from the Iranian authorities. The chapter concludes that even though Iran has repeatedly refused Baha'is as a religion and referring to the Baha'is as a “misguided sect” and an ally of Israel, the international community has kept its constant watch on Iran and its human rights situation. Therefore, Baha'is now are getting university admission. However, one can notice that only those Baha'is who has never revealed their religion continue their education while those Baha'is whose faith is revealed face expulsion.

The last chapter summarised the research findings and tested the hypotheses outlined in the research.

Chapter Two

Education System in Iran

Education is one of the basis for nation-building and the root of empowerment for any society and it “is a process of attracting and internalising the norms and values of political system in the society” (Saeidi, et al, 2016:409). Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups...” (UDHR, 1948:7). The education system, being an apparatus of influence as well as manipulation of society, has been used by regimes both before and after the Iranian revolution, in order to strengthen their legitimacy.

The roots of modern education in Iran can be traced to the Constitutional Revolution in 1906. The traditional education system in the form of *maktabs*(single classroom) and *madrassas* (religious college) focused mainly on religious education. Children, both boys and girls, in *maktabs* were taught basic literacy, numeracy and religious education that included the recitation of the Quran in Arabic. Only those boys who went for the further study of religious science studied in *madrassas*(Sakurai, 2013:58). This traditional education system that was solely under the clerical monopoly was gradually challenged and fully replaced by state-controlled modern schools with the coming of Reza Shah into power in 1925.

The Pahlavi rule’s main focus was on its education system to implement its aim of modernisation and westernisation. With Reza Shah (1925-1941) coming to power, education became state-controlled which involved the development of modern education. The legal framework of modern education is reflected in Articles 18 and 19 of the Supplementary Constitutional Law of 1907 that made the establishment and funding of schools a responsibility of the government through the Ministry of Science and Arts and later of the Ministry of Education when it was established in 1910 (Sakurai, 2013:58). The Fundamental Law of Education of 1911 made public education compulsory (ibid:59). Through these legislations, the Pahlavi rule, in the 1920s, gained controlled of all schools in the country, including the religious ones(Rucker, 1991:457).

The modernisation of policy under Reza Shah was based on his emphasis on bureaucracy and centralisation that reflected in the new education system as well. It was based on the modernity of the west, in line with rationalism, rule of law, individualism, freedom, civil rights and democracy (Saeidi, et al, 2016:407). The new education system was structured along the French model. In 1921, the higher education council was established based on the European model that paid attention to the European school curricula in the preparation of the curriculum for teacher training centres (ibid: 410). Public education for children were introduced at the age of seven and school education comprised of six years each of primary (*debastan*) and secondary (*dabirestan*) schooling which taught reading, writing, basic mathematics and social sciences. High school initially consisted of five years and in the 1950s, got extended to six years, with the last two years divided into three branches namely, mathematics, natural sciences and literature (Rucker, 1991:458).

To achieve modernisation, by a 1938 decree, Reza Shah abolished Islamic dress code (*hijab*) for female teachers and students within the school premises (Mohsenpour, 1998:77). Socialisation process in the educational institutions was to induce loyalty towards the state and the ruler that was mainly reflected in courses like history, geography and social sciences which taught the notion of “good citizenship” in line with this loyalty (Khaki and Baht, 2014:135). The predominant presence of western culture in the educational institutions was also visible in the stories, activities, games in schools, including the toys and dolls used in kindergartens (Mohsenpour, 1988:77).

The making of a centralised government was manifested through the promotion of patriotism, loyalty to the nation, national unity and national independence. Students were made to pay homage to the Shah and his family before starting their classes (Mohsenpour, 1988:76). Attention has been paid towards elementary and higher education through devising a uniform school curriculum in 1928 along the lines of the French model (Saeidi, et al, 2016:410) and was implemented in both public and private educational institutions (Khaki and Baht, 2014:135). Another policy to bring about the national consciousness and patriotism of the newly emerging nation of Iran was the focus on the adult education programme. In 1936, 22 secondary schools were opened towards this end. To bring about social transformation, in 1937 the Ministry of Education established the department of public enlightenment with the declared aim of providing

“moral education” (*tarbiyat-i-ma’navi*) to strengthen national pride and patriotism (ibid: 136). The result of this new education policy was the growing bureaucratic control over the education system and in this turn led to the emergence of a number of new professional and intellectual class (ibid).

Reza Shah’s successor Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979) followed the same modernisation process like his father, however, he made some changes in the education policy. The educational reforms during the second Pahlavi rule were to transform Iran as a secular state like western countries (Sakurai, 2013:63). Unlike his father’s policy of basing the education on the French model, the second Pahlavi ruler opted for the American model, mainly because of the “Americanisation of Iran” in place during this era (Hamdheidari, 2008:20). The escalation of oil prices, especially from the 1973 oil crisis, led to the opening of new universities, both in Tehran and in provincial cities (Sakurai, 2013:59). The regime generated over \$US10 billion annually through energy revenue and consequently the education budget was doubled (Rucker 1991:458). Both public and private education through high school was state funded, including for college students attending foreign universities. From 1960-1978, there was an increase in the number of Iranian colleges and universities which grew from 48 to 148 and the number of university students doubled (ibid).

In order to publish standard textbooks, the Organisation for Iranian School Textbooks (*sazman-e ketabha-ye darsi-ye Iran*) was established in 1963 under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (MoE). These textbooks also sought to implement loyalty towards the monarch through the display of pictures of the Pahlavi monarch and his family, emphasis on the Farsi language and glorification of the pre-Islamic Persian emperors and the authority of the monarch (Sakurai, 2013:63). The curriculum formulated was to seek full submission to the royalty by portraying the righteousness of the Shah regime. Although the school textbooks were based on western model, it nevertheless, sought to justify monarchical rule by portraying Shah as the light of God and monarchy as a divine gift by God to the Shah, even though democracy was described to be the best form of government. Of the major goals of history lesson at schools mentioned was the strengthening the students’ feelings for the “royalty and nationalism as well as patriotism” (Mohsenpour, 1998:79).

Secularisation in the education system was aimed at limiting the religious influence in the educational institutions and to curb the influence of the *ulamas* in education. For this purpose, the Shah established theological schools (Khaki and Baht, 2014:137). Along with limiting the religious influence was the censorship on the publications of religious instructions textbooks (Mohsenpour, 1988:78). An example of enforced secularism can be seen in second-grade sociology textbook for secondary schools published in 1975. In this textbook religious was considered as something that is not innate but rather as something which is imposed and outside human being's consciousness (ibid). Moreover, it equated the primitive religious beliefs with superstitions and the first prophets as magicians (ibid).

Concentrating mainly on higher education, Mohammad Reza Shah focused on the expansion of education along the western model. For this purpose, about 59 American universities were asked to advice the Iranian universities and colleges (Hamdhaidari, 2008:18). As part of the then US President Truman's Point-Four programme, in the early 1950s Iran receive assistance from the US in building its education system which had the involvement of American and other professionals from the West (Rucker, 1991:458). The total number of students in colleges and universities increased from 3,367 in 1941-42 to 154, 215 in 1976-77 (Sakurai, 2013:59).

Another major development in the field of education was the widespread education of women who had more opportunities to pursue studies at secondary and university levels. Women's position in the society improved rapidly in the 1960s with them having a prominent presence in all sectors, namely, factories, offices, banks, technicians and engineers, social workers, etc. (Khaki and Baht, 2014:137). Women played their role almost in every sphere of life social, educational and economic participation in the rural development process. These educated women played a very important role in village improvement, teacher training, health and education and agriculture. In 1964 eighty women were the members of parliament and senate (Khaki and Baht, 2014:137). Nevertheless, their literacy rates remained limited as compared to men. In 1976 women constituted only 30 per cent of students in higher education (Shirazi, 2014:36).

Notwithstanding these developments in the field of education, formal education reached only the urban areas of Iran. Eighty per cent of the Iranian population were rural habitants who did not have access to formal education as all the educational institutions were placed in urban areas,

thus making a large the population illiterate (Rucker, 1991:458). Moreover, modern education during the Pahlavi rule concentrated mainly on the quantitative development, rather than qualitative improvement (Sakurai, 2013:65). The quantitative development failed to bring about creativity, applicability and practicality of knowledge as the dominant mode of learning was rote learning and memorising (Hamdhaidari, 2008:27).

The Pahlavi ruler's attempt to impose westernisation and modernisation in Iran through the suppression of religious influence, however, resulted in serious setback since the influence of religion retained strong enough over its population, especially among the illiterate rural masses (Rucker, 1991:458). The higher educational institutions, like the universities, amidst all the Shah's modernisation and westernisation programmes, also remained a main centre of opposition of Shah's policies, to the extent that the universities were called *sangar-e azadi*(bastion of freedom) (Hamdhaidari, 2008:17). The lack of flexibility in higher education and dictatorial oppression in universities have led to the emergence and cultivation of revolutionary ideas that ultimately led to the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime in the Iranian Revolution of 1979 where students played a significant role (ibid).

With the advent of the Iranian Revolution (1979), there has been a total re-examination of the policies, strategies and objectives of the education system. Under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran quickly involved in changing and "purifying" the entire society. This process was reflected in the reforms in major institutions like judiciary and education. Ayatollah Khomeini, in his first published work *KashfolAsrar (Unveiling of Secrets)*, discredited modern schools as being "the hub of immorality and corrupt attitudes, and for infusing innocent Muslim youth with alien and unsound ideas imported from the decadent West", for according to him, "the modern educational system was the fulcrum of a cultural dependency which was ruining the Islamic tradition of the country" (Nafisi, 1992:112).

The Council for Fundamental Change in Education, established in 1986 as an affiliation to the Higher Council of Cultural Revolution, was given the responsibility to reform the upper-secondary education system and to propose an education system that would be in line with Islamic doctrines, along with the new social, economic and political needs (WDE 2006:2).

The modern, secular and westernised educational system under the Shah regime was replaced and “Islamisation” (*islamikardan*) became the dominant discourse of the education system. The four ideological pillars of the IRI—inseparability of religion and politics; Islamic revival; Islamisation of society and the creation of a committed Muslim—were incorporated as primary objectives of the education of the new Republic (Arjmand, 2008:123). The Fundamental Reform Document of Education in Islamic Republic of Iran (FRDE) describes education to be based on the Islamic norm system in order to achieve in all aspects of human life, the ideal Islamic life (*hayate tayyebah*) that would pave the way for the advancement of the Islamic society (FDRE, 2011:10).

The Cultural Revolution of 1980 was the first step in Islamisation of education by reviving Islamic values and returning to one’s Muslim identity. In the education system, the Cultural Revolution penetrated in areas like curricular and textbook content, teacher training and student recruitment, higher education, female education and so on. The closing of institutes of higher education for three years from 1980 to 1983 gave the opportunity for the authorities to “purify” and Islamicise the education system. All “anti-Islamic” and “counter-revolutionary” faculty members were expelled and dissident students were purged during this time period, giving rise to shortage of educators at that time (Mehran, 1992:13).

Education process in the Islamic Republic

In terms of its format, the pre-college education system of IRI retained the pre-revolution education system based on the French model which consists of one-year pre-primary education at the age of five; five years of primary education from age six to eleven; three years of lower secondary or guidance school from age eleven to fourteen and three years of secondary school up to the age of seventeen. The only medium of instruction at all levels is Farsi. Education at all levels until the age of eleven is both free and compulsory, in line with Article 3 of the Islamic constitution that establishesthe goal of “free education and physical training for everyone at all levels, and the facilitation and expansion ofhigher education.” Moreover, Article 30 requires thatthe government “to make available, free of charge, educational facilities for all up to the close of the secondary stage, and to expand free facilities for higher education to achieve self-sufficiency for the country.” All the textbooks are to be prepared and approved by the Ministry of Education (MoE).

The aim of the one-year pre-primary education is to contribute to the overall growth of young children, namely, physical, mental, emotional and social, in line with the religious and ethical principles. The curriculum thus includes basic life skills like hygiene and literacy, natural sciences, history (including religious history). Specific focus is also given to the promotion of Farsi language, especially among children in non-Farsi speaking provinces and for preparing the children to adapt Islamic principles, both in personal as well as social lives (Ferguson, 2002:619).

The primary education is compulsory for all Iranian citizens and lasts for five years. The main objectives include providing a favourable atmosphere whereby students can develop in moral and religious spheres, talent development, creative abilities and physical strength; teaching reading and writing ability which would improve their memory skills; and training proper social behaviour (WDE 2010:7). The general curriculum followed is Farsi language, study of the Quran, natural science, mathematics, arts, social studies and physical and health education (Kamrava and Dorraj, 2008:175). After the completion of five years, a national entrance examination is administered at regional and provincial levels and upon passing which students are given the certificate of completion of primary level studies.

The lower-secondary education or the guidance cycle, is the stage of preparing students' transition from general knowledge to an area of specialisation. This stage adds new subjects to the curriculum, like foreign and Arabic languages, history, geography, vocational training and defence preparation. The objectives in this stage include the development of students' moral and intellectual abilities; strengthening discipline; and increasing their general knowledge and scientific imagination (WDE 2010:9). In the religious course, the recognised religious minority (RRM) groups have the choice to opt for their courses in their respective religious education. The successful completion and passing of all subjects in a regional examination leads to students getting the Certificate of General Education or General Certificate of Guidance Education (Ferguson, 2002:619).

At the upper-secondary level, students are given the choice to pursue either of the two courses of study, namely, the theoretical branch and technical and vocational stream (TVE). The aims of this three-year study are promotion of general and cultural knowledge; identification of students' attitudes and aptitudes; guidance into their area of specialisation; and finally, preparing them for

university education (WDE 2010:10). The theoretical branch consists of general academic disciplines in which students choose their field of specialisation from the disciplines such as, mathematics, physics, empirical sciences, social sciences and economics. The assessment system is credit-based. In the theoretical branch, the general studies is comprised of 66 units (where 1 unit is equal to 30 hours), whereas depending on the area of specialisation, the rest units vary. For example, humanities and literature comprise of 27 units; mathematics and physics of 26 units and experimental sciences of 24 units. In the technical and vocational branch (TVE), out of the 96 units, about 58 of them are common whereas the rest of the units vary among courses like, industry, agriculture and service (WDE, 2010:10). At the end of the course, students receive *diplome motevaseteh* (High School Certificate) following a national examination.

The technical and vocational stream (TVE), on the other hand, may be a five-year programme following lower-secondary. Students in this stream get an integrated associated degree including technical, business, agricultural and other professional programmes (Kamrava and Dorraj, 2008:176). The aim of the TVE, besides the one mentioned in theoretical courses, is to prepare students and train them in applied science courses (Ferguson, 2002:620). Girls are exempted from defence preparation, which comes under one of the courses in general studies and in its replacement, they have to undertake one of the elective or special required units of other branches.

The *Kar-Denesh* (work and knowledge) branch is a five-year integrated associate degree following the lower-secondary level that aims to train semi-skilled and skilled worker, foremen and supervisors which covers 400 skills. The education is computer-based where modular education method is applied. Successful students are awarded a first degree skill certificate called National Skill Standard I; a second degree skill certificate called National Skill Standard II, or a diploma. Students have the choice to opt for pre-university education after three years in the programme.

In order to pursue university education, students are required to take a one-year pre-university training which prepares them to pass the national university entrance examination called *konkur*. Students must have their diploma to opt for higher education at universities. In this course, students are required to complete 24 units according to their fields of study namely, mathematics,

experimental sciences, humanities, art and Islamic culture (WDE 2010:10). Moreover, if any Muslim male student fails to pass the *konkur*, he is required to join the military service (Kamrava and Dorraj, 2008:176).

Besides all these, non-formal education is also available, such as, the Literacy Movement Organisation (LMO) established in 1984, to curb the illiteracy rate among the population. Its main functions include adult education; adopting textbooks in line with the Islamic faith and revolutionary commitments; and to train committed teachers (Kamrava and Dorraj, 2008:176). Adult literacy rate of male (15-24 years) during 2008-2012 was 98.9 per cent while for female it was 98.5 per cent (UNICEF 2013).

The literacy education is divided into two cycles—introductory course and complementary or final course. The former includes reading, writing, dictation and arithmetic, and the latter includes the study of the Quran, Islamic culture, composition, mathematics, experimental science, social science, dictation and Farsi language (Ferguson, 2002:622). Adult education is provided for citizens, above the age of 18 to those who were unable to finish their studies before the Revolution and is mainly handled by the LMO (*ibid*). Iran also has facilities for distance education like *payam-e-noor* (PNU), established in 1987, which offer non-formal high education programmes in 147 centres throughout the country, which lasts between five and eight years (Kamrava and Dorraj, 2002:178). It functions under the supervision of Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) and offers education to high schools graduates. Multiple fields are covered by the PNU and students are awarded Associate or Bachelor degree.

The IRI places high priority to teacher training through training centres (*daneshsaraye rahnamai*). The primary and lower secondary schools teachers are trained for a period of two years during which they obtain an associate's degree (Kamrava and Dorraj, 2008:16). Teachers, in TVE, are selected from technical and vocational schools. For upper-secondary level, selection is through a national entrance examination upon successful completion the teachers are given a bachelor's degree after a four-year course (*ibid*). The training programme is carried in specific universities like the Tarbiat Moallam and the University for Teacher Education, both located in Tehran. In case of higher education, faculty members and researchers are trained in different scientific fields and Tarbiat Modares University has been established for this purpose (Ferguson, 2002:623).

Reforms in Textbooks and Curricula after 1979

The Cultural Revolution which lasted for two years was aimed at bringing about a new innovation in the education curriculum and textbooks, having disregard to any non-Islamic values. The revision of textbooks reflected the ideology of the Islamic Republic, especially in courses like humanities, social sciences and religion (Sakurai, 2013:64). Soon after the Islamic revolution, Khomeini advised fundamental changes in school textbooks with the aim to “demonarchise” the curricular content and eradicate pro-western and anti-Islamic contents of the pre-revolutionary textbooks (Mehran, 1989:37).

This was reflected not only in the school curriculum but also in the examination process, renaming of schools, imposition of Islamic dress code and in all other spheres of the education system. A body in Ministry of Education (MoE) called the Organisation of Textbook research was formed, composed of 20 research groups who were members of religious authorities (*ulama*). It was entrusted with the task of revising the ideological content of the elementary and secondary school textbooks and for teacher training institutions (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 1997b).

Textbooks became an apparent source of official transmitters of acceptable social and political values namely, the Quran, Shia Islamic doctrines and the Constitution for IRI. It also emerged as the major means of introducing the ideals of the revolution for the development of a “thoroughly committed individual to one God”. The revised textbooks, therefore, were to reflect the views of the Iranian revolution to develop the ideal “Islamic person” (Shorish, 1988:60). As a result, religious studies, Islamic ethics, Arabic and the study of Quran became the predominant theme of the pre-collegiate textbooks, besides other themes that were dealt like the Iranian identity, cultural heritage and nationalism. Only those students who understood the “true meaning of Islam” were ensured to pursue their education beyond the elementary level (Arjmand, 2008:125).

The common characteristic in all the textbooks of pre-collegiate education system is the inclusion of the portrait of Ruhollah Khomeini, founding father of the Islamic Republic, at the beginning. They contain his messages, speeches and writings and include of Islamic concepts of the Shi'ite sect (such as concept of martyrdom, birth and deaths of imams, shrines of imams, fasting, verses of Quran, etc) and direct and indirect reference to Islamic and Shi'ite teachings (SAIC, 2007:5). In the process, sacrifice and blind obedience to the Supreme Leader and to the regime are given precedence as a requirement than critical and creative thinking which are given

limited focus. Same was true during the Shah's regime but only the venerated personality changed.

Interestingly, non-religious subjects, also contain religious contents and references, especially subjects like social science, history and Farsi. The obvious aim here is to de-secularise and de-westernise the curriculum, by emphasising on the Islamic history, Islamic ethics and values. For example, in the texts of the Farsi language, the most important subject during the elementary and junior high school, religious subjects have a dominant presence. In about 38 per cent of the lessons, Islamic topics like God, the prophets and religious personalities, appear (Paivandi, 2013:90). Out of 412 lessons on poetry, literary subjects and classical Farsi literature, 50 lessons are about God, while another 65 lessons cover the Prophets of Islam, Shi'ite Imams and other historical and contemporary Islamic personalities (ibid).

In history textbooks the analysis of the transformation of human society is based on religious and religious movements and as a result religion and religious timelines form the basis of historic events in formulating students' opinions (Paivandi, 2013:91). In social science textbooks, a number of social and political topics are discussed within the Islamic viewpoints; for example, "social science textbooks of Grade IV and V discusses the prophets, the advent of Islam, Prophet Mohammad's life, the battles fought by the prophets, the mosque, *ummat* (the community of Muslims), the prerequisites for becoming an Islamic leader, revelation, different rituals and rules of Islam, and the people's responsibility in an Islamic society" (Paivandi, 2013:91).

The textbook on Social Teachings for the Fifth Grade of primary school, as reported by the Science Applications International Cooperation (SAIC), notes that "The Islamic government is *velayate faghih* (government of the Supreme religious-Islamic-Shiite leader)" and further indicates that "the only legitimate definition of Islam is the Shiite definition and that the main task of the government is to protect Islam" (SAIC, 2007:6) The textbooks glorify martyrdom and urges children to welcome it as the "highest degree of sacrifice" (Social teaching textbook for the Fifth Grade of primary school) (ibid). Along with child martyrdom, the inevitability of need for *jihad* finds repeated mention and glorification in the curricula. *Jihad* which in the Iranian curriculum means warfare, is described as a defensive struggle for the Muslims and the oppressed, a continuous war with the rest of the world, until a "just rule", as determined by the Supreme Leader is established (Pardo, 2016:16)..

This further explains the line of difference propagated by the regime, between good (Iran) and evil (the West). Students are encouraged to wage *jihad* so as to prepare the ground for the re-appearance of the hidden *Mahdi* (the Shi'ite *messiah*). The period of waiting (*entezar*) for the *Mahdi* is not an idle one, but rather an engagement in reaching one's society to perfection while at the same time fighting other non-Islamist regimes (Pardo, 2016:18).

Another important feature in the curricula has been increasing the time for religious studies in schools. It is estimated that 24 percent of primary and 26 percent of secondary school time is spent on religious education, if one also takes into account the religious topics present in non-religious subjects like Farsi language, history, social sciences, Arabic, etc (Paivandi, 2012). The increasing time of religious studies, led to shift in the focus from pre-Islamic heritage to more concentration on Islamic faith (about 39 percent) and Allah (about 24 percent) in non-religious subject like Farsi language (Nafisi, 1992:116). Secular figures like scientists, writers, poets and political personalities are not promoted as role models in the school textbooks. Rather, religious figures—prophets like Moses, Jesus, Mohammad and the Shi'i Imams—are featured. Religious influence also became dominant in the extra-curricular activities and practices like recitation of Quranic verses; praying for the victory of Muslims throughout the world in the morning prayers; imposition of Islamic dress code like *hijab* for female teachers and students; school competitions which included recitation of the Quran; and participation in ritual prayers in congregation in guidance cycle and higher secondary schools. All these efforts were to attain the goal of *islami kardan* (Islamisation).

The education of the Recognised Religious Minorities (RRM) too underwent changes and difficulties following the Iranian Revolution. A formal directive issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (MET) in 1981, which got intensified in 1983, made changes like the appointment of Muslim principals, teachers and clerics to schools run by the minority communities; time reduction or elimination of teaching of non-Farsi languages; and direct government interference in minority community-run schools. These changes of the minority-run schools following 1979, especially in the time reduction of teaching of languages other than Farsi, had a profound effect on the RRM education, especially for the Armenian, Assyrian and Chaldean communities for whom language and religion are intertwined, thereby creating the

relationship between the state and the religious minorities as one of “compartmentalisation and segregation” (Sansarian, 2004:82).

A directive issued in 1983 produced a series of texts on religion for minority students, called *talimat-e mazhabivizheh-ye aqaliathayemazhabi* (Religious Studies Specifically for Religious Minorities: Jews, Zoroastrians, Christians), after consultations with the leaders of the respective faiths. The single textbook became the only course on religion available in RRM schools and emphasises on the idea of the unity of God and the concept of prophethood (Shorish, 1988:62). The directive made it clear that Farsi should be the only medium of religious education, all schools must teach the single religious text for all RRMs prepared by the authorities. Moreover, any conduct of ceremonies, including the religious ones, by the schools must have the authority’s permission and schools must have observance of Islamic dress code by thenon-Muslim minority female teachers and students. The teaching of Assyrian language was reduced to two hours per week (Sansarian, 2004:80).

The textbooks in certain non-religious subjects like history, Farsi and social studies, do make mention of the existence of religious minorities recognised in Iran. Nevertheless, RRMs face contradiction as the textbooks mostly portray Iranian society as belonging to the Muslim people, emphasising on the Islamic-Iranian identity. The religious education of the Sunnis emphasises on the unity of Shi’as and Sunnis, although all historical, social and religious issues are interpreted from the perspective of Shi’ite traditions and beliefs. For example, the Islamic Culture and Religious Studies textbook for Grade VII says:

Although Shi’ites and Sunnis have differences of opinion on the issue of the succession to the prophet and certain jurisprudential issues, they are both Muslim, have the same religion and prophet, and they both pray towards Mecca. Their religious and divine book is the Koran. They are brothers, united, and they cooperate with each other for the sake of progress and greater glory of the country of Islam and the victory of Islam over blasphemy (Paivandi, 2008:40).

What happens, as a result, is that the Sunnis encounter a contradiction. The history of these two sects—beginning with the period immediately following the death of the Prophet of Islam—and the fact that the entire emergence of Shi’ism has been its opposition to the Sunnism is an important contradiction that the Iranian textbooks were unable to resolve (Paivandi, 2008:40).

Even though they are familiarised with the fundamentals of their own beliefs, the textbooks are based on Shi’ite traditions and beliefs. For example, while in Sunni Religious Studies textbooks,

the four caliphs are mentioned as the only successors to the Prophet, other textbooks portrays the belief in the re-emergence of the Twelfth Imam and the establishment of a world government by Shi'ites. The textbooks make frequent references to important historical Shi'ite figures and their lives, at the same time avoid mentioning similar cases or topics for Sunnis (Paivandi, 2008:41). In non-religious textbooks, Sunnis figures are portrayed in a neutral manner, at times even, in a negative one. For example, Grade VII of history textbook says:

... the enrichment of those around Osman [the third Sunni caliphate] and the improper actions of the government agents had caused the discontent of many people. In 35 AH [656 AD], a group of people from Iraq and Egypt came to Medina in order to lodge complaints against Osman's agents... Osman became fearful and asked Imam Ali for his help (ibid).

To avoid the differences between the two sects, the textbooks further prefers to use terms like "Muslim" or "Muslims" instead of "Shi'ite" and "Sunni" (Paivandi, 2008:39). The religious studies textbooks focus on the unity among all monotheist religious by trying to teach children of the commonalities between the three religious (Mehran, 2007:99).

According to Eldad J Pardo (2016), "while accepting Christians into the fold (provided they fulfil part of the Islamist-Khomeinist agenda), the Iranian curriculum sows the seeds of suspicion against Christians and Jews, having a policy of trust but verify" (Pardo, 2016:56).

The dear Prophet of Islam, as well, presented himself, in the time of his appearance [*zuhur*], as continuing and completing all the prophets, and asked the Jews and the Christians to believe in him. This time too, however, some of the Christian and Jewish leaders, regardless of the fact that the coming of the Prophet of Islam had been promised in the Torah and the Gospel, rejected his prophethood and rose up to fight. Had this clique [*dasteh*] of Jewish and Christian leaders accepted the prophethood of the Holy Messenger in that day, this difference would not have arisen.

The Holy Quran explains that the source of this discord and difference of religions is that clique of religious leaders who wanted to keep their own position, status and interests. [They] withstood against the preaching [*da'vat*] of the new Prophet, rejected his prophethood and caused the difference and division of the disciples of the prophets into a number of groups (Pardo, 2016:57).

More so, in the religious education, the RRM's are viewed as "evolutionary transients on their way to becoming Muslims" (Sansarian, 2004:83).

The textbooks refuses to accept people with no specific religion or sect and considers it either impossible or a form of "abnormality". According to Saeed Paivandi (2013), the norm is connecting with one of the officially recognised religions, while those who do not fall into any of

these are perceived to be deviant. In this context, the textbooks make mention the term “*kafar*” (heathen) which applies to any person who is an enemy of religion or a “person who denies the existence of God or does not accept the mission of the prophets” (Paivandi, 2013:95). In this way, a differentiation is established among natural and legitimate people in the educational discourse.

Gender discrimination in Education System

The Iranian Revolution, for most of Iranian women, has been the beginning of the expansion in their status in the public sphere. According to Alex Shams (2016), a political boundary between “revolutionary religiosity” (*mazhabi-yi enqilabi*) and “ordinary religiosity” (*mazhabi-yi ma`muli*) got revealed during the revolution which challenged the patriarchal restrictions like women’s traditional role in the private sphere, especially the public presence and mobility of the religious and middle-class women (Shams, 2016:126). Revolutionary religiosity” emerged in three ways: reducing the public-private space of the gendered boundaries, whereby women who have previously been obliged to fulfil family duties, are now obliged to fulfil “national duties”; “homosociality” that emerged through gender segregation, created a new security discourse that eliminated threats of “secularised heterosociality”; and provided opportunities to challenge exclusion and marginalisation faced previously by the religiously active women, and negotiate for higher education and universal literacy through campaign (Shams, 2016:127).

Nevertheless, in the sphere of education, like every other social sphere, gender has been used as a tool of politicisation and Islamisation to train the “new Muslim women”– the ideal female citizen of the IRI. According to Golnar Mehran (2003), Islamisation, within the Iranian context, refers to the implementation of Islamic laws and regulations and integration, in all spheres of life, of religion and politics, though deliberate means, in both private as well as the public domain. Politicisation, on the other hand, is the transformative process through which Iranians become “the soldiers of the revolution” and contribute to the establishment of the Islamic society through religio-political leadership and loyalty (Mehran, 2003:7).

This new Muslim woman has dual role of co-existence with tradition and modernity; she is expected to fulfil her traditional role at home (a dedicated wife, an affectionate mother; and the source of stability and tranquillity in the family) while simultaneously being an active member of

the revolutionary society through employment in social and economic activities (Mehran, 2003:9).

Since the Revolution, female education received considerable attention. The Islamic Republic's revolutionary ideology is based on three pillars, namely, Islamisation, politicisation, and equalisation. These have been the source of major beneficiaries for girls and women, especially in the field of education since in the revolutionary ideology, education is viewed as an equaliser (Mehran, 2003:11). The Islamic Republic sought to impose gender restrictions and segregation in society. This was the case in educational institutions as well. Veiling was made compulsory for all women; co-education was banned, except in universities, where rooms were segregated according to gender (Tazmini, 2012:211).

After a resolution was passed by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (SCCR) in 1987, the rules and regulations set up that virtually enforced total male-female separation, and required the students to sit and attend classes separately, even eat in separate canteens, including in the accessing of laboratories, workshops, libraries, computer rooms, reading rooms, dormitories, sports centres and other facilities wherever possible (AI, 2014). "Mingling" of students of opposite gender was restricted in medical schools, where the attached hospitals had separate wards in operating theatres for male and female. Segregation encompassed in all spheres namely, from separate corridors, noticeboards and employment of secretaries in order to keep males and females apart.

Textbooks underwent to a through revision to eliminate the illustrations of unveiled women. Moreover, female students were barred from pursuing certain fields of specialisation and in 1983 the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (SCCR) barred women from studying engineering, science, technology, and agriculture in universities while male student so were barred from pursuing certain fields like gynaecology. This restriction denied women the right to enter 91 out of a total of 169 courses available in higher education (AI, 2014:21). However, the Supreme Council abolished these restrictions in 1989 following lobbying by the Council for Policy Making and Co-ordinating Women's Cultural and Social Problems, established in 1987 under the auspices of the SCCR (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 1997c). The national literacy campaign established by the government between 1980 and 1988 to facilitate education growth among its citizens, saw higher participation and success rate of women than men. This campaign has

resulted in increased female literacy rates which from 24.42 percent in 1976 to 83.18 percent in 2015 (UNESO 2017).

The Iranian curriculum, too, does not lag behind in justifying gender discrimination. According to Saeed Paivandi (2008), a form of “gender ideology” exists in the textbooks where inequality between men and women are not only preached but also justified through religious frameworks and both are assigned distinct and separate gender roles in the social and private lives. Grade VIII textbook on Islamic Culture and Religious Studies explains gender inequality through the religious framework.

These differences do not mean that one is intrinsically better than the other, but they exist so that men and women perform their complementary roles in family and society, on their basis of their biological and psychological characteristics and appropriate utilisation of their different capabilities.

The shared lives of Imam Ali and Her Holiness Fatima Zahra provide an interesting example of relationships in a holy, honourable, and exemplary family which serves as a model of family life. The Prophet had divided the household chores among these two; Ali was responsible for matters outside the house and Fatima was responsible for those inside. Fatima was very pleased with this division of chores and said, ‘I was very happy that the responsibility of working outside the house did not fall onto me...’(Paivandi, 2008:20).

The curriculum also assigns gender roles to men and women, apparently complementary to each other, in their social and private lives. Men and women are presented as two different social individuals, in which the former are defined as the “superior sex” and the latter as the “second sex” (Paivandi, 2012:6). The martyrdom of girls is also introduced in the Iranian curriculum, deviating from its long-standing revolutionary tradition, although “male remains the quintessential martyr, while women mostly continue to be devout and veiled”(Pardo, 2016:23).

Nevertheless, there is also a low depiction of female personalities in the textbooks. A study of 3,115 textbook pictures of the academic year 2007-2008 conducted by Saeed Paivandi reveals that only 37 percent of the images are of women, though most of them appear in group pictures (Paivandi, 2012:6). While women of lower age groups (below 18 years of age) have higher presentation than women of higher age groups. There is also absence of women in individual portraits, including in those of scientific, historic, cultural and political personalities. On the other hand, there is wide presence of women portraits in home and ‘neighbourhood’ backgrounds, thus making the gender segregation quite evident (ibid). This has failed to provide

much influence for its female students in the socialisation process, unlike the male students who are exposed to a wide array of male personalities in the textbooks.

The 1990s was the period of preponderant changes in the attitudes towards women. Women were encouraged to pursue their education and profession, however, within the boundaries of restrictions in dress and movement, along with the fulfilment of their expected traditional roles in the family. Thus, it attempts to maintain a balance between the two ideals inherent to the Shi'a faith—the conservative values and the pursuit of knowledge (Ferguson, 2002:623). To this effect, specific institutions have been established to address gender equality in the field of education. For instance, the First Economic, Social, Cultural Development Plan of the Islamic Republic (1989-1993) and the Second Development Plan (1994-1998) addressed female education. The Third Development Plan (1999-2003) document reflected a major change by addressing gender gap reduction in the field of science, mathematics and applied sciences, in order to engage girls in traditionally “male-oriented” fields of study like in technical-vocational fields (Mehran, 2003:14).

The resurgence of Islamisation process in the universities after 2005 presidential election which saw the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, intensified gender segregation. The authorities renewed efforts in reducing women's access to certain fields of study to increase the admission of the overall proportion of male students in the universities. The Ahmadinejad government introduced quotas to limit admission of female students to specific degree courses, like mining engineering, as it was perceived that such courses were suitable only for male (HRW, 2012).

Moreover, in an effort to revise humanities and social science courses, women studies were reformulated in 2000, deviating its focus from women's rights and international law. Claiming Women Studies to be in contradiction with Islam, the Specialised Council for Transforming Humanities of the SCCR, replaced this course with Family Studies and Women in Islam. This course brought the attention back to women's “traditional” roles and responsibilities in the family as wives and mothers, alongside emphasising on the “Islamic values” as a determinant factor of women's position in the Iranian society (AI, 2014:37). Therefore, even though female literacy rate has increased after the revolution, frequent restrictions such as these have been a major hindrance in women's right to have equal access to education.

Reforms in the Higher Education

The strongest effect of Islamisation of education was their denial at the higher educational institutions like the universities. Student groups and associations, since the Pahlavi era, have been a major source of protest movements against the government and its policies and they played a key role the 1979 revolution to overthrow of the Shah regime. For example, the student demonstration in Tehran University in 1972 against the then US President Richard Nixon's visit to Iran which consequently led to the death of three students, emerged to be the symbol of the anti-Shah student movement (Hamdhaidari, 2008:18). Moreover, student activism reached its turning point during the revolutionary crisis of 1977-1979, that resulted in the defeat of the 2,500 years of monarchical rule in Iran, and universities became the centre of political activism, being instrumental in all-encompassing change that occurred in the revolution (ibid:19).

It was, therefore, Khomeini's apprehensions that post-revolution universities would also voice protests against the new Islamic government. This led him to seek immediate reforms of the universities following the revolution. With the aim of modelling educational institutions as reflections of the policies of IRI, a "purification" process was set in motion. Ayatollah Khomeini in his speech to the nation, on 21 March 1980, warned that failure in acquiring correct knowledge of the Iranian Muslim society by the university-educated intellectuals has been the reason of Iran's backwardness (Kamyab, 2014:257). Therefore, he ordered Cultural Revolution to be extended to the universities as well.

In another speech in the same year on 26 April on "The Meaning of Cultural Revolution", Khomeini warned that Islamic Revolution would fail to reach its ideals lest the anti-Islamic elements of foreign influences are purified from the campuses of the universities (ibid). To this effect, the Headquarter of Cultural Revolution, a seven-member body, was established by Khomeini in March 1981, to determine and design the cultural policies of Iran's educational institutions. This was promoted to the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (SCCR), comprising of 40 members and in December 1984, it took over the role in the supervision of the universities and the nature and contents of education that they provide. Though it did not have formal legislative powers initially, in February 1985, the resolutions made by the SCCR were declared binding by Khomeini (AI, 2014).

One of the first steps of “purification” of universities was the establishment of a new body, “Educational Affairs” (*omourtarbiyat*), in 1980 by Ayatollah Khomeini to determine cultural policies among students based on Islamic culture (Golkar, 2012:2). It operated along two branches namely, executive and planning branches. The executive branch had one Committee for Selection of Professors that would select lecturers who are believers of Islam, *velayat-e-faqih* and are committed to the revolution. The other branch, Tarbit Moders School was to train Islamic professors committed to the Islamic regime’s ideology. Another Committee for Selection of Students (*hayat-e-gozinesh-e-danshjou*) was formed which would select only those students committed to the Islamic ideology and expel the ones who did not embrace the revolutionary principle. The planning branch, on the other hand, engaged in revision of curricula and syllabi. For this revision, textbooks had to be newly translated and “purified” and this was done by the Centre of Academic Publication (*markeznasher-daneshghai*), established in 1981 (ibid).

The adoption of “Goals and Responsibilities of the Department of Education” by the Parliament in 1987 provided that the most “sacred” mission of the school is the creation of the “new Muslim man”, a virtuous and conscientious believer, engaged in the service of the Islamic society. The objectives of education in the first article as per 1987 law were “the promotion and reinforcement of religious and spiritual foundations through teaching the principles and laws of Shi’ite Islam”. The second article defines nine out of 14 objectives as “to promote moral virtues and respect for religious traditions, to promote the purification of the spirit, to learn and understand the Koran, to learn Islamic culture, to encourage understanding of moral and religious values, to reinforce the belief of God, to develop religious obedience, and to understand the obligation of religious practice” (Paivandi, 2008).

In April 1988, the Selection Committee was prohibited to collect information from candidates’ neighbours and was asked to only check the morality and political records of the candidates solely by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Information and Public Prosecutor respectively (Sakurai, 2004:393). The 1987 law developed by the MoE and the SCCR becomes the legal basis of all educational policies in Iran.

Even before the Revolution, the national university entrance examination called *konkur*, has been an exhaustive method of selecting qualified students for university education. What used to be a

unified method of taking the same test for everyone and admission based on scores secured has been changed following the revolution by introducing newer methods of selection, like the preferential quota system. The quota system, needless to mention, was to intensify the Islamisation process in the universities whereby candidates whose ideological commitments are pro-revolution would be selected while those who are not would be excluded. Under the supervision of the Higher Council of Cultural Revolution, a Selection Committee was formed, to collect background information about the candidates' and his/her family's moral and political records. After prolonged protests, in April 1988, the Selection Committee was prohibited from collecting information from candidates' neighbours and was asked to only check the morality and political records of the candidates solely by the MoE and the Ministry of Information and Public Prosecutor respectively (Sakurai, 2004:393). The university entrance examination now requires applicants to mention their religious affiliation and also to sit for the compulsory religious exam; but the RRM's are exempt from sitting on Islamic religion exam but have to sit for their respective religious examinations (ibid:395).

The quota system had a dual role namely, social and political. The social role was to bring about equalisation of educational opportunities by providing 35 per cent "area quota" for candidates from rural areas from the 1982 academic year, along with 35 percent of "free quota" for candidates completing their high school education from Tehran province and other provincial capitals. Another reason for preferential quota was to increase candidates from a socially disadvantaged background as they were considered to be more religious and supportive of the Islamic government. The political role was to give preferences to war veteran and martyr's families. In 1982, 30 per cent was reserved for candidates of such background and was called "revolutionary quota". The "revolutionary quota" increased in the 1980s during the period of Iran-Iraq war, though the same was reduced in masters' and doctoral courses in 1992 (Sakurai, 2004:394). Thus, *konkur* became another instrument of Islamisation of universities.

Educational reforms post 1997

The victory of Mohammad Khatami in 1997 presidential elections brought the second rounds of reforms in the education system since the revolution. Ahmad Siddiqi (2006) mentions that President Mohammad Khatami (1997-2007), came with the promise of social justice, individual freedoms, political tolerance, greater women's rights, rule of law and increasing economic

opportunities for the Iranian youth (Siddiqi, 2006:1). Though a reformist who regarded democracy as the best form of government, Khatami acknowledged that the ultimate source of authority over humans lay on the rule of God and it is to whom that humans should only surrender (Mehran, 2003:315). The development of human beings, he believed, can be materialised only through culture, education, science and knowledge, whereby knowledge and science are interlinked to morality, spirituality, and virtue (ibid). Khatami has also been an advocate of Iranian-Islamic identity whereby seeking of Iranian identity while denying Islamic identity and vice-versa was condemned by him.

The failure of Iranian students in the international competitive arenas was the source for the reformist government's call for reform in education (Arjmand, 2008:129). Criticising the first post-revolutionary reform, Khatami's Minister of Education argued that it imposed a system "based on traditional, non-scientific and ineffective methods... [in which] the reality of the Iranian educational situation was ignored ... [education was] overemphasizing theoretical and abstract knowledge ... [and] the actual usage of education in the real life was neglected" (ibid). Pointing to previous education reform based solely on ideological commitments, the Khatami government proposed reforms which would have a theoretical footing based on scientific principles in order to "adjust them to the cultural, social and religious requirements of the Iranian-Islamic society" (Arjmand, 2008:130).

The aim of educational system was flexible and tolerant, based on mutual respect and understanding between the teachers and students, whereby the former would help in the latter's character-building through the inculcation of religious, intellectual, spiritual, moral, cultural and political values (Mehran, 2003:323). With this in mind, the schools of the Islamic Republic were assigned the tasks of creating the ideal student which, Khatami aimed, would be both religious and a political one, having the morality and self-reliance, belief in themselves and taking pride in their religious, cultural and national heritage. This according to Khatami, is needed to curtail anything that are incompatible with the religious and national criteria (Mehran, 2003:323).

Deviating from his predecessors, Khatami called for decentralisation of the education system by bringing reforms in the structure of the education. The secondary education underwent substantial changes. Unlike the 5-3-4 pre-collegiate education system based on the French model, the new government changed it to 5-3-3, reducing a year of the upper secondary

education and introducing one year of pre-university training for those willing to opt for university education. Education is now composed of three phases, a five-year primary schooling, aiming at basic socialization and knowledge skills; a three-year lower secondary general education known as guidance phase, aiming to recognise the academic potentials of the pupils and prepare them for specialised higher secondary schools. These two phases are compulsory. The three-year upper secondary education is divided into theoretical branch, technical branch and vocational branch where students have to earn minimum credits to earn a diploma (Arjmand, 2008:135). The year-based assessment system in the lower secondary was also changed to a credit-based system.

For the first time since the revolution, the Ministry of Education proposed a delegation of leadership of the educational institutions so as to engage private sectors in the education. This, however, was met with criticisms, mainly from the religious conservatives who regarded it as the failure of the government to provide education for the citizens while others saw it as a sign of growing injustice in Islamic Iran (Arjmand, 2008:139). To cope with this, Khatami introduced a quota system in private educational institutions to avoid discrimination towards the socially and economically disadvantaged classes. Consequently, one-third of the seats in the schools were reserved for those students belonging to disadvantaged families and were enrolled free of charge. Within the remaining two-thirds, discounts in tuition fees were given to children of state employees and MoE employees (Arjmand, 2008:139). Nevertheless, the proportion of private educational institutions remains much lower than the public ones and private institutions could attract only children of well-off families due to its high costs.

As mentioned earlier, an ideal student for Khatami is the one who is both religious as well as political. Therefore, one of Khatami's calls was 'politicisation of students'. With this aim, Islamic Associations and Disciplinary Committees were established in schools and colleges to monitor the political activity and moral behaviour of the students (Mehran, 2003:324). However, politicisation received a backlash in 1999 when students protested against the closure of the reformist newspaper *Salam*. The protest eventually escalated into student riots on 8 July when students were violently attacked by the police and hard-line vigilantes, in university dormitories, triggering a wave of street protests by students (Siddiqi, 2006:7).

Conservatives became apprehensive of the reformist changes brought about by Khatami in the education system. Ayatollah Khamenei's (Khomeini's successor as Supreme Leader) call for re-Islamisation of the education system in the early 1990s was felt strongly at this time. The Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (SCCR) established a new council, the Council for Islamising Educational Institutes (CIEI) in 1997, which ratified many documents and regulations to bring forth changes to suit the conservative's needs. For instance, in December 1998, CIEI ratified "Principles of Islamic Universities" which called for Unitarian belief as the goal of Islamic universities, instruction and learning (Golkar, 2012:4). In another document called "Strategies of Policies for Islamising Educational Institutes" ratified on 13 May 2000, stratified its policies into professor, students, curriculum and syllabi, cultural programming, educational programming and school management (ibid: 5).

It also called for re-evaluation of the employment of academic staffs on the basis of their belief and ideological commitment; improving Islamic conviction among high school students; strengthening Islamic morals and values among university students; and improving pre-university educational and religious programmes (ibid). To increase the presence of clergy in the universities, the CIEI passed ideological laws during Khatami's second term (2001-05), like the creation of the Committee for Organised Prayer in Educational Institutes; ratification of unification strategy between universities and the *Hawzeh* or Islamic schools; and the establishment of training centre of religious subjects (Strategic document university and seminary, 2003).

Notwithstanding these efforts, the CIEI failed to implement any of the laws. The reformist administration provided more autonomy to the educational institutes through decentralisation, and the years between 2003 and 2005 saw presence of reformist scholars and teachers in universities. The enrolment of female students also increased during this period, to the extent that in 2000, the rate of enrolment for girls was 97.8 percent at the primary level, 90.3 percent at the lower-secondary level, and 69.1 percent at the upper-secondary level (Kamrava and Dorraj, 2008:179). However, amidst these developments, Khatami government suffered from many challenges in the educational arena. De-centralisation plan failed to be implemented properly and the structure of the education system remained intact. The lack of qualified teachers to teach the

reformed curricula, did not meet the desired changes, leading to major challenges and resistance in schools that Khatami had to face.

Islamisation of Universities after Khatami

A new wave of “Islamisation of universities” re-surfed during the tenure of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) who succeeded Khatami. Being a hard-liner himself, he abolished all sorts of relaxations that were brought about by the previous reformist government and introduced a third round of reforms in the education system. In all spheres of education, from curriculum to recruitment of lecturers to the educational environment, strict imposition of Islamic doctrines was maintained along with surveillance of the government authorities. Tougher restrictions on academic freedom were imposed following mass protests against Ahmadinejad’s disputed re-election in 2009 in which students took a significant part (AI, 2014:36).

In the sphere of curriculum, the new government aimed to reduce the number of undergraduate students in the humanities courses and by 2009, it decided to even reduce the humanities and social science courses in universities to curb “western thinking”, values and secularism. The Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei in August 2009, voiced his concern about studying humanities courses. He believed that humanities courses are based on materialism and Western worldview which, in effect, have induced scepticism and belief in Islamic and divine teachings among the youth (Golkar, 2012:13)

The new government was firmly committed to bringing about the Islamisation of the universities and this was reflected in the reducing the intake of graduate students in humanities and social sciences fields, thereby stopping the expansion of these disciplines in universities (Golkar, 2012:13). The general courses, in all disciplines of the university, had mandatory courses on Islamic knowledge, the Quran and Islamic morals which were updated after Ahmadinejad came to power. During his tenure, additional courses were included like one on family morality and holy defence in reference to the Iran-Iraq war (ibid:14). Soon, the SCCR commissioned the Tehran-based research center—the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Science—endorsed by the Ministry of Science—for revision of humanities courses. In its report, the director mentioned about many topics which remained unchanged for 20 years and which “were not directed at Iranian-Islamic culture”. It revised 380 subjects and set out to prepare 58 new textbooks (AI, 2014:36).

Another step was the establishment of the Committee on Promotion of Human Sciences Textbooks, under the control of the CIEI, to “purify” the textbooks. In September 2010, the Ministry of Science which is in control of all the admissions to state-run universities announced that in 13 humanities courses students would not be given admission in that academic year because the curriculum was going through revision. Its programme engaged in inducing government-defined Islamic ideology in certain fields like law, women studies, human rights, management, arts and cultural management, sociology, social sciences, philosophy, psychology, and political science (HRW, 2012:6). The purpose of this process of education was to make it compatible with the Islamic norm system in all realms of education—ideological, divine, ethical, socio-political, environmental, physical, aesthetic, artistic, economic, vocational, scientific and technological (FDRE, 2011:16). In November 2011, cases of revision of 38 undergraduate humanities courses were reported, including philosophy, journalism, psychology, economics, and political and social sciences by the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies (AI, 2014:36).

The 2009 protests over Ahmadinejad’s re-election led to an intensification of administrative control and stricter surveillance to uproot any form of dissent. Disciplinary Committees were established to keep a check on politically active students, thereby, increasing their scrutiny powers on campuses. For example, *harsat*, a covert surveillance apparatus, was positioned in each department of universities, responsible for monitoring and recording student activities. In fact, a system called “starred” students was formed to exclude students from pursuing their higher education when they failed to adhere to the desired behavioural codes and dresses and came under official suspicion (Golkar, 2012:12). The disciplinary penalties ranged from suspension, expulsion from universities to being detained and arrested. However, incident of violations of the rights of students and education personnel on the basis of their opinions, gender, religion and ethnicity seem to be ceaseless (HRW, 2012:4).

Applicants in graduate programmes and in higher education teaching posts are scrutinised for their ideological views. To deter any dissent on campuses, ideological and political requirements for those seeking admission in higher education were set up by the SCCR, thereby violating Article 3 of the Iranian constitution which guarantees free education for everyone at all levels, including the facilitation and expansion of higher education.

Similarly, university lecturers were also not exempt from the strengthening administrative grip. Academic staffs and lecturers suspected of being “reformist” or having different ideological views were dismissed from their jobs or forced into early retirement, more so after 2009 protests, on charges of having different political beliefs or for being pro-students in their protests. It was reported that since the 2009 election, over 100 academics were dismissed from their posts due to their political views and dissent (HRW, 2012). The Lecture Selection Committee became active during Ahmadinejad’s tenure and in 2007, the SCCR upgraded its rules in the recruitment process by establishing an Executive Committee for Hiring of Professors in each university (Golkar, 2012:9). The certain degree of autonomy long enjoyed by the university in appointing their own academic staff and professors was withdrawn by the Minister of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) and the authority was brought under its direct control. The Ministry also ensured that lecturers were recruited from Basij militia background (AI, 2014:7) and were assigned to positions in top universities while putting apolitical ones to lower ranked universities in poorer provinces.

The commitment towards Islamisation further reflects in the *Fundamental Reform Document of Education in Islamic Republic of Iran* (FDRE) of 2011 which envisioned an education policy to achieve *hayatetayyebah* (the ideal Islamic life) at individual, family and global dimensions in a systematic, general, equitable and compulsory method, based on the philosophy Islamic-Iranian education. The Islamic life (*hayatetayyebah*) as described in this document is “an ideal condition for all dimensions and stages of human life, based on Islamic norm system, realisation of which shall lead to the ultimate goal of life, that is, to draw near to God.” (FDRE, 2011:13).

Conclusion

Among the many faults the Pahlavi regime committed that led to its downfall was its education system. Mere imitation of the West did not cater to the needs of the society, and education did not reach to the majority of its citizens, especially the rural population. This resulted in widening gap between the urban and rural societies and between the secular and the traditional (religious) schooling. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 tried to pacify this urban-rural gap by establishing a state-controlled education system which made school education free and compulsory for all through constitutional means as well. Moreover, by introducing new mechanisms like the establishment of LMO, adult education programmes, teacher training and distance learning, it

increased not only the child literacy rate, but also the literacy rate of its youth. This, indeed, is a success for a country where youth comprises the majority of its population.

One of the major turning points in the post-revolution Iranian education system is its alignment of religion and politics. Since the early stage of their schooling, students are introduced to the Islamic values and principles and the Islamic ideology of the government that covers all aspects of a student life—from school prayers, Islamic dress code, school and university infrastructure, curricula to the admission process—and are subjected to ideological and moral screening by the authorities. The authoritative administrative control and scrutiny in higher education are connected to the Iranian government by the concept of *velayat-e-faqih*.

This political control over the education system seems to be a necessity for the Iranian revolution and its Islamic ideology to sustain and maintain its legitimacy. Interestingly, this approach is no different than the one practiced by the Pahlavi regime. The monarchical regime, through changing its education system, tried to oust the monopoly of the *ulamas* in the education system. This monopoly was a threat to the Shah whose main goal was to bring about secularisation, westernisation and modernisation in Iran. Therefore, the education system reflected these visions and aims of the Pahlavi regime to eliminate any sort of religious influence from it. Likewise, no challenges or voice of dissent to the authority, both before and after the Iranian revolution, are entertained and any attempt of threat to the authority has been uprooted strongly. In its higher education, Iran is facing increasing student protests and any such activism, even though peaceful, are met with regressive measures by the authority.

Chapter Three

Primary and Secondary Education of the Baha'is

During the early 19th century, the education system in Persia (whose official name was changed to Iran the Reza Shah in 1935) was primarily traditional and was associated with religious institutions. The youth were taught basic literacy of Persian literature and fundamentals of religion by the clergy in local schools called *maktab*. Those wanting to continue further received advanced education in religious college or *madrassa* where all fields of religious science were taught (Metz, 1987). Since compulsory education did not exist before the 20th century, it was only the political elites and those who could afford these *maktabs* and *madrassas* had education. However, external military interventions, especially by Russia in 1804, exposed the vulnerability of the Persian regime and its Islamic army. Therefore, from mid-1850s, there was a growing realisation among the Iranian intellectuals regarding the need for reforms, not only in areas such as science, technology and modernisation, but also in the sphere of education, especially, modern education (Shahvar, 2009:6).

Education is one of the cardinal principles of the Baha'i faith. Since the concept of clergy is absent in the Baha'i faith, along with the emphasis on the need for independent reasoning by its followers, the only way for practicing and sustaining it has been through education and the ability to read the holy book *Kitab-e Aqdas* by oneself. Bahau'llah (1817-1892) in *Kitab-e Aqdas* has made repeated references to education, making it of paramount importance for the children to know the oneness of God and the laws of God. The importance behind opening up of schools, therefore, lays in training children the principles of religion (Baha'i Library Online, 1991:3). In the sacred writings, education is also emphasised as the key to material as well as spiritual progress and prosperity of the human race (BIC, 2005:16). Baha'ullah, in *Kitab-e Aqdas*, makes it a sacred duty for the parents to provide education to their children in arts, crafts and sciences.

Abdul Baha (1844-1921), Baha'ullah's son and successor, is of the opinion that the primary cause of oppression and injustice in world has been people's lack of understanding of religion and the fact that they were uneducated. Education is of three kinds, namely, material, human and spiritual. True education lies in the attainment of spiritual or divine education which also is the

goal of world humanity (Baha'i Library Online, 1991:10). In case of the inability of parents to provide for the expenses of their children's education, Abdul Baha says that the responsibility of providing education to those children falls upon the community. Since education is given such primary importance, the role of teachers in the training of the children were given outmost respect. Abdul Baha says, "When there are no educator, all should remain savage, and were it not for the teacher, the children would be ignorant creatures." (ibid:12). Education, thus, becomes a religious obligation. Moreover, Abdul Baha writes that the result of teaching would attract the blessings of God and enable manifestation of the perfections of humanity (Baha'i Library Online, 1991:18).

The initial efforts for Baha'i education, much like traditional education in Persia, were informal and individual, in the form of *maktabs* (classes) for both boys and girls which was established in many villages. These *maktabs* also provided moral education. The informal education was carried out through employing private tutors as in the Qajar period (1785-1925), Baha'i children were not permitted to attend other kinds of school (BIC, 2005:17). However, not all could afford private tutors, making it difficult to inculcate compulsory Baha'i religious education. Against this background and changing domestic scenario (the reformist movements) in Persia since the mid-19th century, Baha'is were seeking access to modern education and paved the way for some of the pioneering efforts in that direction.

Soli Shahvar (2009) opines that the Baha'i faith had a role in reform and modernisation in Iran because of the faith's reformist ideas (Shahvar,2009:6) which are central elements of Baha'i faith and its teachings. However, the transition towards these reforms was not a smooth process as the traditionalists, constituting the majority of the Shi'a *ulama*, were against reform movements (Paivandi, 2013:83). It is important to note here that *ulama* during this period presided not only over religious institutions, but also over the judiciary and education in Persia (Shahvar, 2009:6). Therefore, the reform movements were seen as challenges to *ulama's* monopoly over these institutions. Circumstances finally led to wide and popular anti-absolutist and pro-reform movements, which reflected in the opening up of modern schools in Persia, in complete contrast to the old *maktab-khanihs* and *madrasas* (Paivandi, 2013:80).

Opening of Baha'i schools during Qajar rule (1785-1925)

It was during the reign of Muzaffar al-Din Shah (1896-1907) that the Baha'i community experienced certain degree of relaxation to propagate its faith. The opening of Baha'i modern schools in Persia during this period testifies to such relaxations from the regime, although it cannot be said that there was no episodes of Baha'i persecution during this time (Shahvar, 2009:63). Shah's support for the opening and recognition of Baha'i schools in Persia came from his own pro-reform stance and adoption of European institutions, thus paving the way towards modernisation and westernisation (ibid). Along with this was the increasing demand for modern education which the Shah had to face. Moreover, Abdul Baha's connections with western countries like Britain, which had influence over Persia, boosted the regime's support (ibid:62).

The earliest existence of Baha'i schools is said to be found in the village of Mahfuruzak in Mazandaran where in the late 1870s, the local religious leader who became a Baha'i, Mullah Ali and his wife Alaviyyih Khanun, established two separate schools for boys and girls. Soon in 1882, the neighbouring religious leaders denounced Mullah Ali who was taken to Tehran where he was arrested and finally executed (BIC, 2005:17).

Since 1897, in the Sar Qabr Aqa district of Tehran, a small school for boys had operated under the name *Maktab-i Mirza Aqa Baba Mu'allim*, in the form of a traditional *maktab*. Later it was relocated and transformed into a modern school along Western educational lines and was renamed as the *Tarbiyat* school (Momen, 2000: 359). Being the first modern Baha'i school, the *Tarbiyat* school obtained government recognition in 1903 (Momen, 2008:98). Known for being one of the best schools in the country, the *Tarbiyat* school was among the first schools in 1905, besides the schools established by American missionaries, to offer mathematics and English language courses every day. Students, moreover, were given lessons based on their ability (BIC, 2005:17).

One of the noteworthy features of the Baha'i schools during the early 20th century was their access to girls' education. The importance of education for the Baha'is also lie in the "oneness of education", that is, the need for one curriculum for both boys and girls. The Constitutional Revolution of 1905 and Abdul Baha's letters to the Persian Baha'is, calling for the importance of girls' education and the opening up of Baha'i schools for girls, set the stage for girls' education. For example, in his letter to the Baha'is of Hamadan in late 1905 Abdul Baha emphasized that

schools for girls shall take precedence over the one for boys and called for the mandatory need for the girls to have complete skills of knowledge in the various fields in science and arts (Momen, 2005:361). The reason for giving such high importance to the female education is because the Baha'i faith believes the mother to be the child's first educator who plays the role in establishing the character and conduct of the child and trains it towards the ways of perfection. Therefore, in order to facilitate the mothers to educate their children, young girls should be trained in character and good morals and with all the virtues of the humankind (Bahai Library Online, 1991:27). Truly progressive at its time, the Baha'i faith, in essence, advocated for the equality of the sexes.

However, Baha'i girls' school opened at a time when girls in Iran had very limited access to educational opportunities, mainly because of the unfavourable attitude towards female education as a result of the domination of the Shia clerics. The efforts towards opening up girls' school had to face a lot of challenges not only due to the opposition of the Shi'a clerics, but also in terms of human resources and finances (Moghaddam, 2012:519). The Baha'i girls school, nevertheless, helped to increase awareness about the importance of female education at a time when girls had limited access to educational opportunities along with the inadequate public school system for girls' education. In some places the experiences of quality education received in the Baha'i schools paved the way for the opening of other girls' school in Iran (Moghaddam, 2013:274). Like boys school, girls' school for the Baha'is began in the form of informal *maktab* in Tehran, perhaps as early as 1899 (Momen, 2005:360). However, the first modern-style Baha'i girls' school was established in 1909 in Qazvin called *Tavakkul* (Moghaddam, 2012:516).

In Tehran, the Baha'is opened three schools for girls namely, the *Sar-i Qabr Aqa* School in 1910, *Dushizigan-i Vatan* and the *Tarbiyat* in 1911. Replacing the traditional Baha'i *maktab* in the Sar-i Qabr Aqa district, the *Sar-i Qabr Aqa* School was the first modern-style Baha'i school in Tehran established in 1906/7. In 1911, the school had 48 students who were taught reading, writing, arts, crafts, arithmetic, geography and English (Moghaddam, 2013:283). The school continued for some years after the opening of the *Tarbiyat* School. The *Dushizigan-i Vatan* had 70 students by 1913, out of which 27 were scholarship holders before it closed down in 1918 (ibid). In 1911, the *Tarbiyat* Girls' School was established with 30 students, with Lillian Kappes as its principal. This school was known to be one of the first to be offering physical activity

classes like gymnastics, much before the government schools allowed the same for girls (BIC, 2005:17).

During the academic year of 1930–31, the school offered a full secondary programme that consisted of five grades, the only Baha’i school to offer a full secondary education at that time (Moghaddam, 2013:285). At the end of the 1932–33 academic year, 46 percent of all females in accredited Baha’i schools were enrolled in *Tarbiyat* girls school (Moghaddam, 2013:276) The *Tarbiyat* school’s curriculum offered courses on both domestic sciences, such as child-rearing, housekeeping, and cooking, as well as academic sciences English, geography, anatomy, physiology, and first aid (Rostam-Kolayi, 2008:64). For several years, the *Tarbiyat* was the largest girls’ school in before its forced closure in 1934 (Moghaddam, 2012:517). *Tarbiyat*’s popularity in the country rested on the fact that along with its academic excellence, the staff also provided for character development of the students (Moghaddam, 2013:290).

Following the *Tarbiyat* School in Tehran, other Baha’i schools also sprang up in various towns and villages of the country where a significant number of Baha’is resided like in Mashhad, Yazd, Qasvin, Kashan, Hamadan and Saysan. The first Baha’i school in Qazvin was called *Tavakkul* and was opened in 1908 under the financial support of leading Baha’is such as Mirza Musa Hakimbasi (Hakim Elahi) and Mirza Reza Khan Taslimi and was under the management of Haji Ebrahim Waez. In 1909 in Hamadan, the *Tayid* School for boys and *Mauhibat* School for girls were opened through the efforts of Mirza Aqa Jan Tabib b. Harun, which got the official recognition in 1913. In Kashan, a school was formed in 1898 through the efforts of Kaja Rabi and was named *Vahdat-i Bashari* after getting official government recognition in 1910. Starting with six grades, the school added a seventh grade in 1913.

In the village of Najafabad, private classes were organised by the Baha’is of the local spiritual assembly which later established as a school, as a branch of the Tehran-based *Tarbiyat* School in 1912. In the beginning the school offered four grades, but in 1919, the school took the name *Saadat* and added six grades, finally getting official government recognition in 1931. A *Saadat* school for girls was established in 1928 starting with three grades, and later offering six grades in 1930. It got official recognition in 1929 (Encyclopaedia Iranica 1988). The majority of the girls in the Baha’i community attended *Saadat* (Moghaddam, 2012:517).

The official recognition of these Baha'i schools was not a permission given to the Baha'i community as a collective. Rather, the permissions to open such schools were given only to Baha'i individuals without any reference to their religion in the official documents. For example, the *Tarbiyat* Boys School in Hamadan was registered at the Ministry of Education (MoE) under the name of Haji Musa Mubin and the *Tarbiyat* Boys School in Yazd (1927) was registered under Khusrau Haqq-Pazhuh's name (Shahvar, 2009:75). It was within state's knowledge as to whom the permission for opening up of private schools has been sought, it was granted to the founders of these schools (Shahvar, 2009:78). Another important feature of these Baha'i schools was the concealment of its true (Baha'i) identity, as compared to any other modern schools in the country, from teaching staff to the pupils. Indeed, Baha'i schools were open to pupils of all religious faiths and these schools had large number of non-Baha'i students as well staff (Shahvar, 2009:75).

For example, the *Tarbiyat* Boys School in Tehran in 1911 had a total of 371 students in eight grades (in 11 classes), 18 faculty members, and four staff. By 1932, it offered six preparatory grades and four intermediate grades. There were 20 Baha'is out of a total of 26 teachers, and 339 Baha'is out of 541 students, which included 175 Muslims, 21 Christians, four Jews, and two Zoroastrians (Encyclopaedia Iranica 1988). The *Tarbiyat* Girls' School in 1921 that offered 11 grades had 359 Baha'is out of 719 students, of whom 352 were Muslims, and eight were Jews (ibid).

Known for their efficient high quality modern education and infrastructure, Baha'i schools had certain unique facilities like blackboards, geography maps, benches and desks, laboratories and libraries, which were the first in the country (Shahvar, 2009:81). They imparted a modern educational curriculum, which was otherwise absent in the Persian educational system at that time. In order to mitigate oppositions, the Baha'i schools followed the curriculum outlined by the Ministry of Education, which includes courses on Arabic, Quran and Islam. At the same time, in line with modern European education of that period, it also included subjects like mathematics, physics, chemistry, physiology, botany, geography, history and foreign languages like English and French. New developments like physical activities, art and music were also a part of the curriculum.

The schools did not have any classes on Baha'i faith but rather separate religious classes were held outside school on Fridays which is a holiday for Muslims (Momen, 2008:104). Such was the Baha'i influence on modernisation of education that by 1920, nearly 10 per cent of the estimated 28,000 primary and secondary schools in Persia were run by the Baha'is, while the Baha'i population stood at one to two per cent. As many as 25 schools for girls were established by Baha'is (BIC, 2005:18) and the ten state-accredited Baha'i girls schools, located in Tehran, Hamadan, Yazd, Qazvin, Kashan, Najafabad, Abadih and Usku had a total enrolment of 1,458 females, that corresponded to four per cent of all females in state accredited schools in 1933 (Moghaddam, 2012:517). The Baha'i schools in Najafabad and Usku were the only girls' schools in their localities (Moghaddam, 2013:292). In the academic year 1932-33, there were 1,458 girls and 1,431 boys who were enrolled in accredited Baha'i schools, with females making up to 50.5 percent of the total enrolment in these schools and also constituted four percent of all females in the country's accredited schools. In the secondary education, the number of Baha'i pupils in the accredited Baha'i schools was 124 females and 125 males with females constituting 4.5 percent of all females in secondary education in Iran (Moghaddam, 2013:303).

Another unique feature of the Baha'i school was the establishment of character training classes (*kelasha-ye dars-e aklaq*), conducted in Tehran and other Baha'i centres on Friday mornings since 1898. A community leader Sayyed Hasan Hasemizada (known as Motawajjeh) inaugurated this at a gathering of Baha'i children from South Tehran. With the aim of advancing children's education, these classes taught the memorisation of prayers as well as short excerpts from Baha'i and other sacred texts. Considerable focus was given in expanding children literature and therefore, the curriculum of these classes included the *Dorus al-Diyana* (Lessons of Religions) written by Mohammad-Ali Qaeni, Baha'ullah's *Kitab-e Iqan* (The book of certitude) and *Kitab-e Aqdas* (the most holy book); Abdul Baha's *Maqala-ye Saks-i Sayyah* (A Traveler's Narrative); *Mofawazat* (Some answered questions) and the Persian translation of J. E. Esslemont's *Bahauallah and the New Era* (Encyclopaedia Iranica 1988).

In addition to character training classes, summer schools were also introduced and the first summer school was held in Hajiabad in 1939, consisting of a 10-day session of three where about 214 Baha'is participated. This practice continued in various locations before Baha'i institutions were closed down in 1979 by the government after the Islamic Revolution (ibid). The

opening of Baha'i modern schools thus became a means for their social mobility along with asserting the visibility of their existence in the Iranian society. The high standards of Baha'i educational institutions and their secular curriculum attracted non-Baha'i children from influential and aristocratic backgrounds. Farideh Diba (1921-2000), mother of Farah Pahlavi, the future queen of Iran (1959-1979), Sattareh Farman Farmaian (1921-2012), daughter of a prominent Qajar prince and son-in-law of Muzaffar al-Din Shah, studied at *Tarbiyat* (Moghaddam, 2013:288). The son and daughter of Reza Shah, too, had studied in this school (Momen 2008:109).

The growing influence of the Baha'i faith coincided with a period when Iran was preparing for Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911). Baha'ullah had been an ardent supporter of a constitutional form of government which reflected in his *Kitab-e Aqdas* (1873) where he envisioned a legislative function for parliament (*majlis*), one which was adopted in Iran in 1906 (Milani, 2008:142). Abdul Baha, Baha'ullah's successor, in his *Risala-yi Madaniyya* (The Secret of Divine Civilisation) (1875), too, outlined reformist and modernising agenda which included an Iranian bureaucracy, military reforms, fair judiciary, separation of powers and an elected legislature (ibid:143).

Consequently, these principles of Baha'i faith found a similarity with the pro-reformist/constitutionalist's demands, which made it easier for the anti-constitutionalist forces like Shaykh Fazlollah Nuri to accuse the former as "Bab'is" (Momen, 2012:328). The complexity added to this situation draws from the Azali conspiracy (Azalis were the ones who rejected Baha'ulla's leadership and were followers of the Babi leader Mirza Yahya Azal). Azalis, due to their hatred for the Baha'is, spread the rumour that the Baha'is constitute the constitutionalist forces (Momen, 2012:331). Abdul Baha disallowed Baha'is from interfering in politics and Baha'is maintained their non-participation in the social unrest from 1905-107 to alleviate the anti-Baha'i rhetoric of the anti-constitutionalist forces (Milani, 2008:147).

Nevertheless, this period was not without instances of Baha'i persecution. The massacres of the Baha'i sect (1901-1903) in the city of Yazd demonstrated the interaction between the *ulama* and the incited mob with only minimal interference from the civil authorities (Martin, 1984:14). The Babi-Baha'i threat, thus, served as a catalyst to strengthen the bonds between the State and the *ulama* at all levels (Amanat, 2008:178).

The Constitution of 1909 retained ongoing discrimination of the Baha'is whereby they were devoid of any legal recognition, thus making them "non-persons" in Iranian public life (Martin, 1984:14). The New Election Law of 1 July 1909 secured one representation for each of the religious minorities recognised by Shi'a Islam namely, Armenians, Assyrians, Zoroastrians and Jews, though it provided no legal recognition to the Baha'i community (Tsadik, 2003:408). In addition, Baha'i marriages were not recognised; they had no right for court redressal; their literature was censored; and they were refused the right to operate schools (Martin, 1984:14). In short, the Baha'i community, even under the new constitutional government, was once again exposed to the vulnerability of its oppressors.

Closing of Baha'i schools during Pahlavi rule (1925-1979)

Reza Shah Pahlavi's (1924-1941) ascendancy to the throne as the Shah of Iran witnessed the introduction of modernisation programmes with the aim to weaken the influence of the religious clergy in every position where earlier it had its dominance. The notion of *millet* (national identity) started to acquire roots gradually by replacing the religious identity of *ummat* (body of believers) (Rabbani, 2009:2). The breach in the ranks of the clergy during the revolution along with the spread of nationalist and secular sentiments had significantly contributed to a weakening of clerical power (Moghaddam, 2012:518). By 1921, the education system still retained the traditional curricula under the control of the Shi'a clergy. Therefore, one such reflection of Shah's modernisation programme in the drastic reform in the education system by introducing secular schools (Shahvar, 2009:108).

This measure was complementary to the Baha'i faith which put education as its central theme. Under the Shah's reign, the social status of the Baha'is improved relatively. The Shah even appointed Baha'is to important positions of civil administration, particularly finance (Higgins, 1984:54). The intensity of Baha'i persecution during his reign was also, to an extent, reduced and the Baha'is were granted the permission to open schools. With the rapid popularity and reputation of these schools, the monarch, too, enrolled his own children in the Baha'i school (Martin, 1984:18).

Reza Shah instituted a policy of standardisation and "Iranisation" of all social institutions which had its effect upon the schools operated by the foreign missionaries and the minorities, including the Baha'is. For example, in 1928, Reza Shah instructed the American missionary schools and

all the foreign schools to conform to the curriculum set by the Ministry of Education (Momen, 2008:112). Moreover, he nationalised all foreign primary schools by 1937 and the secondary ones by 1939. The indigenous Baha'i schools, too, came under much of its scrutiny (ibid).

By 1934, all the Baha'i schools were ordered to be closed down by the government. This happened against the background of the closure of Baha'i schools on their holy day of the anniversary of the martyrdom of the Bab. This day, that is, 6 December 1934 was a Thursday which was not an official holiday. Therefore, when the students, teachers and staff of the *Tarbiyat* School of Boys returned to their school on Saturday 8 December, they found a notice from the Ministry of Education which "nullified the license of that school" (Momen, 2008:113). The sudden closure of Baha'i schools on a non-official holiday might have been interpreted by Reza Shah as a challenge to his uniformity in education system that followed only government-accredited holidays. Baha'is adherence to the order of Shoghi Effendi (the Guardian and appointed head of the Baha'i faith) to shut down Baha'i schools on a day observed by them as holy was also perceived to be a sign of disloyalty to the state and disobedience to national unity (Shahvar, 2009:137). Within a year following this order, all the Baha'i schools, especially in cities and towns, were closed down by the government (ibid).

However, some Baha'i schools continued to operate even after the 1934 government order. For example, the Baha'i Girls School in Sangsar continued to function unofficially and same was the case for schools in Arabkhayl, Sisan, and Yazd (*Tarbiyat-i Dushizihgan*) which continued to operate after the closure order of 1934 (Shahvar, 2009:130). This was partly due to the government's failure to recognise these schools as Baha'i schools, or because of the unavailability of any replacement of such schools in the villages like in Mazandaran. In these villages, Baha'i schools did not close down but were simply handed over to the government to be operated as government schools (Momen, 2008:115). Nevertheless, the literacy rate among the Baha'is still remained high amidst all the emerging obstacles. Baha'i commitment to its education is reflected by the fact that women of Baha'i faith under the age of 40 were the first to have achieved a literacy rate of 100 per cent by 1973, when the national literacy rate remained at only 15 per cent (BIC, 2005:16).

The closure of the Baha'i schools set new hardships for the Baha'i children in getting access to education. Whereas non-Baha'i students who were studying in these Baha'i schools had smooth

transfer to other national and private schools, the Baha'i children faced obstacles in getting admission to these schools. Muslim schools refused to admit Baha'is unless they recant their faith, which they refused and hence, they were denied admission (Shahvar, 2009:134).

For example, the non-Baha'i students of the Baha'i school in Kashan, *Vahdat-i Bashari*, were admitted to the local state school, while the Baha'is had to wait a year until the local branch of *Alliance Israelite Universelle* (AIU) accepted them. In Yazd, the Baha'i students were mainly admitted to the local Zoroastrian and English missionary schools (ibid). Besides, private classes by the local Baha'i communities were organised in smaller towns and villages of Shahbad, Khalajabad and Shahzand, where schooling continued unofficially. Ironically at times, non-Baha'i children also attended these private classes that acted for the benefit of Baha'i children (Momen, 2008:116).

With Reza Shah's departure and coming to power of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi during the World War II (1941-1979), the policy of *ummat* once again entered the political discourse of Iran. Joined by the ruling class, the Shi'a clergies enforced its ecclesiastical order in every aspect of society, from forcing women to wear *chadors* (large piece of cloth worn especially by Muslim women to cover the head and upper body) and veil and to the closure of all mixed-gendered schools (Rabbani, 2009:4). Their official non-recognition made the Baha'is being subjected to discrimination even on an individual basis as it became difficult for them to register marriages and births, publish religious literature, or run their own schools. .

The new Shah followed a policy of appeasement towards the Shi'a clerics to consolidate his position and the regime-*ulama* rapprochement emerged. For this purpose, the regime was willing, on occasions, to sacrifice Baha'i interest (Higgins, 1984:53). This reflected mainly in the resurging Baha'i persecution in the 1940s, a period that saw episodes of physical violence towards the community. The deceitful belief that any non-Islamic idea is a "foreign creation" was spread by the clergies, resulting in the creation of the "internal other" in the minds of the common Iranians to everything that was not Islamic (Rabbani, 2009:5).

One such incident of Baha'i persecution was the 1955 attacks when the renowned preacher Hujjatu-l Islam Muhammad-Taqi Falsafi, with the prior consent of the *marja-i taqlid* (highest ranking authority of the Twelver Shi'i community) Ayatollah Borujirdi, issued anti-Baha'i

sermons in a Tehran mosque, calling for the suppression of the “false religion” which was portrayed to be dangerous for the welfare of the people (Martin, 1984:22). Soon active anti-Baha’i propaganda started through national radio and official newspapers. The result was intense raiding, plundering, destroying and burning of Baha’i houses by incited mobs, which amounted to killing and raping of Baha’is. Many were forced to recant their faith after they were taken to the mosques which others were forced to publicly declare their recantation in the press. Some children and youth were also expelled from schools. Many Baha’i government employees were also fired (Yazdani, 2017:10).

Moreover, in Tehran, the Chief of Staff of the Army General Batmanghelich and military commander of Tehran General Taymour Bakhtiar were active participants in demolishing the holy dome of the Baha’i centre with pickaxes in front of domestic and foreign reporters (Rabbani, 2009:9). This showed the backing of the regime for such attacks on Baha’is. These incidents caught the attention of the international community and the Baha’i community of other countries, who strongly condemned the incidents of persecution and reminded the Shah regime of its gross violation of human rights in spite Iran being a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (ibid). The international pressures finally bore fruit and the persecution receded thereafter.

Following the 1955 attacks, the physical violence on the Baha’is came to a halt, although it did not bring about an end to their sufferings. To avoid any criticisms from the international community, the Pahlavi ruler gradually moved to consolidate its power. By 1957, the SAVAK (National Intelligence and Security Organisation of the Shah regime) was set up as chief organ of state control (Martin, 1984:23). As a result, fundamental changes were brought forth in the bureaucracy, law and order, secularisation of the education system and increasing demand for trained personnel. Baha’is, due to the importance of education (especially, education of sciences) attached to their faith, naturally became the resource pool for the required trained professionals. Thus, in the early 1950s, Baha’is gained prominence in self-employed professions, complementing the Shah’s modernisation campaign. Subsequently, their number in government employment during the Shah tenure multiplied (ibid:26).

On the other hand, the religious clergy intensified their accusations against the regime by calling Baha’is as the “favoured elites”. The revolutionary propaganda in the late 1970s accused the

Shah of being pro-western. Since some of his advisors were Baha'is, the clergy portrayed the Baha'is as economic threats, supporters of the West and Israel since the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the world Baha'i community, is located in Haifa which is in present-day Israel. Haifa and Western Galilee in present-day Israel are the two most holy places for the Baha'is where the Shrine of Baha'ullah in Acre and the Shrine of the Bab in Haifa is located. These resulted in the increased social hostility towards the Baha'is once again (Khaki & Hussain, 2014:266).

With its increased involvement in modernisation and secularisation programmes, new economic pressures at home and new foreign policies, Mohammad Reza Shah wanted to avoid any attacks or criticisms from the Shi'i clergy. Therefore, one way to divert its attention was found in scapegoating the clerical enemy at home namely, the Baha'i community. Avoiding any direct targeting of the Baha'i community, the regime ratified the Civil Employment Act in 1966, which explicitly mentioned that lack of prior "convictions for espousing corrupt beliefs" was a condition of application for employment in governmental jobs. Further, the basic precondition for applying for governmental jobs included belief in one of the four "official religions of the country: Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism", thereby excluding the Baha'i faith even to apply for the same (Yazdani, 2017:16). In 1965, the government orders issued to remove from history books, all events associated with the Baha'i faith. So much so, that the regime spokesperson in the United Nations, Teimourtash, denied that the Baha'i community existed in Iran (Martin, 1984:26). In some sectors like the army or in primary and secondary education, the employment of Baha'is was particularly restricted.

The year 1975 brought the ultimate isolation of the Baha'i community when the Shah regime announced the formation of a new single-party, *Rastakhiz* or Resurgence Party, to curtail any political opposition and made it a condition for all to join the party. Any refusal to join would require justification and subjection to review by courts (Martin, 1984:26). The Baha'i community, whose religious belief prohibits any form of political participation, wrote formally to the Shah about its religious obligation and its refusal to join the party, making the isolation of the Baha'i community complete (ibid).

The Iranian Revolution and Baha'i access to primary and secondary education

The Iranian Revolution of Iran in 1979 ushered in new range of discriminations and persecutions upon the Baha'i community through measures like kidnapping, imprisonment, disappearances, mob attacks, forcing to recant their faith, confiscation, looting and destruction of property, expulsion of Baha'i teachers and students from school and barring from being admitted to the same (Warburg, 2012:198) According to Higgins (1984), conditions such as Baha'is earlier cooperation with the Pahlavis, their western-style beliefs and their international orientation, along with being considered as a "heretical" faith-- have consequently made them the "internal enemies" of the state (Higgins, 1984:54). In 1979, the Revolutionary Guardsmen destroyed the House of the Bab in Shiraz, one of Baha'is most holy sites, and the demolition of other holy places were also carried out. The offices of the National Spiritual Assembly (NSA) were raided in Tehran where the membership lists and other information pertaining to about 90,000 registered believers were confiscated (Cole, 2005:137). All the nine members of NSA were arrested on 21 August 1979 and assumed to be killed by the authorities. The Baha'i institutions were formally declared illegal in August 1983, disbanding all administrative organs and public meetings of the Baha'is which still remains in force (Afshari, 2008:254).

Baha'ism, being a non-clerical faith, is heavily dependent on the national and local spiritual assemblies for carrying out the proper conduct of their faith. The absence of these institutions as a result of the 1983 ban thus became a threat to the existence of the community (UNECOSOC 1996:para. 59). In his interview with Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution, Professor Cockroft of Rutgers University asked whether there would be "either religious or political freedom for Baha'is under an Islamic government." Ayatollah Khomeini replied, "... they are a political faction; they are harmful. They will not be accepted." When Cockroft further asked, "How about their freedom of religion practice?" "No," said the Ayatollah (Yazdani, 2012:593). This position of the Islamic government towards the Baha'is not only reflects in its attitude but also in its legal enforcement.

The new constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) was adopted through a popular referendum held on 2-3 December 1979. Article 13 specifies Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians as the only recognised religious minorities "who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters

of personal affairs and religious education”. Thus, the Baha’i community has been denied any sort of legal status or recognition by law. Under Article 4 all “civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria.” Article 19 states, “All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege.” Important to note here is the absence of “religion” in this article.

According to Milani (2016), Article 4 and Article 19, taken together, indicate that any discrimination against the Baha’is on the basis of religion and Islamic law, in particular, is acceptable (Milani, 2016:138). Article 167 of the Iranian Constitution states, “The judge is bound to endeavour to judge each case on the basis of the codified law. In case of the absence of any such law, he has to deliver his judgment on the basis of authoritative Islamic sources and authentic fatwas”. This law has been used quite frequently against the Baha’is (ibid).

In addition to the Constitution, the Citizenship Rights Charter (translated by the Human Rights in Iran Unit, New York) released by President Hassan Rouhani in 2013 has retained its discriminatory attitude towards the non-recognised religious minority. Article 1 of the charter states that citizenship rights, including the foreseen guarantees in rules and regulations, are enjoyed by all Iranians, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, wealth, social class, race, etc.“ Important to note in this particular article is the deliberate omission of religion is intended to harass the Baha’is. The article further states that the charter aims to recognize the duties of the Iranian government within the framework of the Iranian Constitution, Sharia law, and other regulations and that the provisions of this charter “does not intend to create new rights or duties,” but the government “will formulate and pursue the adoption of legislation” In case of non-recognition of certain rights by the existing laws. Therefore, the Citizenship Rights Charter remained stagnant, without any attempt of change or challenge, on the discriminatory policies already present in the Iranian Constitution that are heavily loaded against the Baha’is (Milani, 2016:140).

Nevertheless, the recent Charter on Citizen’s Rights, signed by Iranian President Rouhani and released in December 2016, has made an attempt to bridge the gap that was prevalent in the 2013 charter. While referring to the “Rights of the Nation” that the government is under obligation to observe, this 2016 charter has actually made mention of non-discrimination even on the grounds

of religious belief, something that was absent in the previous charter. Article 8 of the charter has forbidden any sort of undue discrimination to citizen's access to public services like health and educational opportunities. Article 25 guarantees its citizens the freedom of thought, whereas strictly forbidding inquisition and prosecution merely for one's beliefs. On the right to education, Article 110 mentions that "no one shall have the right to instil tribal, religious and political hatred in children's mind." Since the 1979 revolution, Baha'i children were not spared from the anti-Baha'i campaigns. The country saw wide scale expulsions of Baha'i children from schools and universities immediately after the revolution. Students were told to return their scholarships, their diplomas were denied even after completing their studies and training and about 70,000 Baha'i children were expelled from schools (Hoonard, 1982:7). The expulsion of Baha'i teachers and students coincided with the Cultural Revolution (1980-1983) where plans were made to reinforce Islamic principles in educational institutions (Astani, 2010:4).

Former members of the *Hojjatieh* society, known for its notorious anti-Baha'i propaganda, were recruited in top government ministries, including education. Mohammad-Ali Rajai, the Minister of Education (1980-1981), who was said to be one such member of this society. Through an edict after the fall of the Barzagan government in 1979, he not only dismissed all Baha'i teachers, but also ordered them to return their salaries (Sansarian, 2004:120). The new minister said that the coming into being of the Ministry of Education is a result of the blood and martyrdom of thousands of Muslims, which cannot tolerate Baha'i followers in the educational unit as their presence would "defile and deviate the minds and thoughts of innocent students" (Martin, 1984:46).

For the school year of 1981-1982, there was a requirement for the students to complete an application form issued by the MoE in order to enrol in schools. The form included questions about whether the applicant or his/her family member follows the Baha'i faith and his/her willingness to recant, if so. Those who affirmed their Baha'i faith were denied admission in schools. In case of *Pishahang* High School, the school authorities distributed instructions in July 1979 that the students willing to apply "must be followers of one of the official religions of the country, that is, Muslim, Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian"(IHRDC, 2006:46). Baha'i students also received individual letters about their expulsion which cited their faith as the reason (ibid). Similar incidents occurred in 2007 when the Education Department Management Security Office

in Shiraz circulated a form requiring detailed information about all students “who belong to religious minorities and the perverse Baha’ist sect” and also information about their siblings (BIC, 2013:23).

Until 1981, schools operated by religious minorities continued smoothly due to the credit of Mehdi Barzagan (Prime Minister in 1979), Mohammad Beheshti (Chief Justice of Iran 1980-1981) and Mohammad-Javed Bahonar (Prime Minister in 1981). However, changing scenarios such as the Iran-Iraq War led to the removal of Barzagan and June-August 1981 and bomb blasts in the parliament killed Beheshti and Bahonar. These incidents effected in changes in the education of the minority communities in the country. The new government policy of 1981, with its intensification in 1983, made education (more so, religio-education) highly politicised (Sansarian, 2004:76). In 1983, the government circulated a 20-page document justifying its treatment of the Baha’is (Cole, 2005:138) and depicted that the Baha’i faith was a political movement started by the powerful anti-Islamic colonial forces, such as the British, and supported by neo-colonial forces like Israel, and have been a pillar of the overthrown Pahlavi regime (ibid).

By the mid-1980s the discrimination towards the Baha’is became institutionalised. The Baha’is were prohibited from exercising every social and religious activities—from displaying their religious faith, maintaining places of worship, holding public meetings, circulating their literature and teaching their faith in an open manner to their children in their own schools (Afshari, 2008:256). Members of religious minorities now cannot become principals of minority-run schools (US, 2001:3). Even the two companies, *Shirkat-i Nawnahalan* and the *Umana*, which provided valuable services to the Baha’i community ranging from importing goods, offering loans for houses and students’ education, assisting elderly and other charitable services, were taken over in early 1979 (ibid). In January 1991, the Ministry of Information ordered the closure of all Baha’i children’s classes throughout Iran (UN, 1993a: para 226).

Expulsion from schools made many Baha’i families to look for an alternative way to provide education to their children and prepare them for the state-administered examinations, offered periodically for those who missed regular schooling for any reasons (Afshari, 2008:260). Since open classes were not allowed to be publicly announced or held for the Baha’is, private classes began to expand and by late 1990s, the nominal ban on the Baha’i students attending primary and secondary schools was also disregarded (Afshari, 2008:264).

In 1991, the Iranian Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council (ISRCC) drew a memorandum on the “Baha’i Question” which referred to the general status of Baha’is in the country, their cultural, educational, legal and social status. Dated 25 February 1991, this document which was stamped “confidential” was drawn up at the request of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the then President, Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. At the bottom of the document was the signature of Hujjatu’l Islam Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani, Secretary of the Council, along with the approval and signature of Khamenei himself (Momen, 2005:227). The memorandum proposes reasonable ways to deal with the treatment towards the Baha’i community “in such a way that everyone will understand what should or should not be done” (Kazemzadeh, 2000:553).

Regarding the educational and cultural status of the Baha’is, the memorandum stated:

1. They can be enrolled in schools provided they have not identified themselves as Baha’is.
2. Preferably, they should be enrolled in schools which have a strong and imposing religious ideology.
3. They must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Baha’is.
4. Their political (espionage) activities must be dealt with according to appropriate government laws and policies, and their religious and propaganda activities should be answered by giving them religious and cultural responses, as well as propaganda.
5. Propaganda institutions (such as the Islamic Propaganda Organization) must establish an independent section to counter the propaganda and religious activities of the Baha’is.
6. A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country (Tahririha-Danesh, 2001:225).

This memorandum came to the attention of the international community in 1993 when it was disclosed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur (UNSR). However, the Iranian government claimed that this document was a forgery, though various international human rights organisations and the UN have verified its authenticity (US, 2001:4). Nevertheless, the revelation of this document has put Iran under greater scrutiny of the international community and the situation of the Baha’is since then, has somewhat improved, even though the memorandum still remains in force.

During Rafsanjani's tenure as president (1989-1997) some Baha'i students who were expelled earlier from state schools were allowed to resume their studies, even though in the mid-1990s, some were prevented from attending final year of high school (Cole, 2005:141). This policy is a direct reflection of the systematic expulsion of the Baha'i teachers and students (Tahririha-Danesh, 2001:226). In September 2001, the Ministry of Justice issued a report reiterating the government's policy of eventual elimination of Baha'is as a community. It also stated that admission of Baha'is in public schools should be permitted preferably in schools that have a strong religious ideology. The report further mentions that enrolment of Baha'i students in public schools should be on the condition that they do not reveal their faith (US, 2002:5).

Another attempt to vilify the Baha'i community was through its misinterpretation indoctrinated in the school textbooks. According to Leila Simai (2016), in countries where the official religion is amalgamated with the government, as in the case of Islamic Republic of Iran, the school system becomes the main societal institution where children are socialised about the "religious other" and where state-sanctioned information about the "religious other" is passed on as the "objective truth". In this light, history textbooks have been found to have distorted information about the Bab'i and Baha'i faith. The narrations in the textbooks have maintained its attitude towards "religious other" towards delegitimising and dehumanising them. The history is shown as one of animosity where the Baha'is are the "enemies of God" (Simai, 2016:95).

While the recognised religious minorities (RRMs) are mentioned of their historical existence in Iranian textbooks, the non-recognised religious minority, the Baha'is, is also mentioned, though not in the way the former's existence is acknowledged. Rather, the Baha'is are mentioned as a "false sect", accused of being an ally of the foreign powers. In fact, in Grade VIII of History textbook entitled *Sect Building by Colonialism*, one can get an explicit understanding of how school textbooks have portray the Baha'i community. It says:

The British and Russian governments were extremely afraid of the unity of Muslims in Iran. Thus, they strove to sow discord among the people and destroy their unity. One of their goals in showing discord was supporting new false religions. Among these false religions were Baabism and Baha'ism. At first, Seyed Ali Mohammad, the founder of the Baabi Sect claimed to be the Baab (according to Baabism, Baab was a person who was the medium for communication with the 12th Imam). Shortly thereafter, he called himself the 'Promised Mahdi' and, finally, claimed to be a prophet. Seyed Ali Mohammad Baab's claim caused an enormous disturbance known as the 'Baab Conspiracy' and established the Baabieh Sect, which was supported by Britain and Russia. Following this incident,

Seyed Ali Mohammad Baab was shot by order of Amir Kabir [a reformist prime minister under Qajar Dynasty in the mid-1800] and, after him, Mirza Hussien-Ali Nouri became the leader of the followers of Baab. After a short time, Nouri, who had given himself the title of 'Baha' claimed to be a new prophet and established the Baha'i Sect. This too was supported by Britain (Paivandi, 2008:44).

The textbooks also create binaries between a believer of Islam and a non-believer with terms such as *monafeghin* (hypocrites or people who pretend to be religious), *moshrekin* (people who doubt the official religion) and *kafar* (heathen), terms that are associated with the concept of "cleanliness". They also refer to the religious groups that are opposed to the Islamic Republic.

These terms, moreover, are adaptable concepts, having no basis of credibility from legal standpoint and can be used for an individual's political and religious interpretation (ibid). For example, Lesson 14 Grade VII textbook for *Islamic Culture and Religious Studies* textbook talks about *Cleanliness in Islam*. According to Islam, uncleanness includes:

... urine and feces; the corpse of an animal; a piece of skin or flesh of an animal or a man with blood still running through it; a dog or a pig living in land; wine, beer or any drink that makes one drunk; infidels – or people who do not either believe in God, or think that they share His divinity, or do not accept the prophethood of prophets. It is said that the items above are unclean inherently and cannot be made clean (Simai, 2016:101).

The textbook further mentions that it is this *monafeghin* that "brings corruption to the Muslim society" (Paivandi, 2008:44).

Moreover, in Grade VIII textbook one finds mention of the difference between heaven and hell where the former is reserved for the believers of Islam whereas God has prepared hell for oppressors, infidels and *moshreks*. In fact, it is their own misdeeds that are turned into a curse upon themselves (Simai, 2016:102). Naturally, since early schooling, the state indoctrinates the policy of "othering" through its curriculum and as in consequence, puts non-recognised religious minorities such as the Baha'is in poorer light and misinterpretation.

Apart from misinterpretation in the government-authorized school textbooks, incidents of secret monitoring as well as overt efforts of harassments and abuse by the school administration have been faced by the Baha'i children in primary and secondary schools. Teachers, especially those who teach religious studies, have called out Baha'i student(s) in front of others in the classroom and were made to hear verbal abuses and insults about their faith. Such an incident in town of Karmanshah was reported by the Baha'i International Community in September 2008. According to the October 2008 report of the UN Special Rapporteur:

Baha'i students in several primary, middle and high schools across the Islamic Republic of Iran were subjected to harassment, vilification and other forms of abuse by their teachers and school administrators. These Baha'i students have allegedly been forced to identify their religion and they were insulted, degraded, threatened with expulsion and in some cases, summarily dismissed from schools (UN b 2008: para 56).

Such incidents of insult, ridicule, harassment, intimidation and expulsion on the basis of faith of the Baha'i children in schools are quite frequent. Not just school teachers, Muslim clergymen were also invited on many occasions, into classroom in the town of Semnan in 2008-2009, to give lectures insulting the Baha'i faith (BIC, 2016a:2). Students were also repeatedly warned to not make attempt to "teach" or discuss their faith with other students (BIC, 2008a:20). Instances like segregation of Baha'i students and forcing them to sit separately and teachers encouraging Muslim students to physically hurt the Baha'i students were also reported (BIC, 2016a:2).

Baha'i students who responded to such vilification to defend their faith were, verbally abused and threatened with expulsion. In February 2009 in the town of Isfahan, the teacher in the Quran class of the middle school was providing misleading information about the Baha'i faith. When a first-year Baha'i student made an attempt to correct it, the response given by the teacher was "The Quran is enough and everything else is false." Outside class, the student was threatened with expulsion. When the student's father met the teacher and the principal of the school, he was told that they had followed the higher authorities' order of presenting misleading information about the Baha'i faith in the classroom (BIC, 2013b:21). During January-February 2007, some 150 such incidents were reported, whereby most of the reported attacks, that is, 68 out of 76 incidents, were directed against the female students (UNGA, 2008a: para 121). Baha'i students were also subjected to Islamic indoctrination and forced attempts were made on them to embrace Islam in public schools (US, 2007:3). More so, Baha'i girls were especially targeted, with the intension of creating tension between parents and children (ibid).

The school teachers are educated about the Baha'i faith in teacher-training seminars through materials constituting incitement, intolerance and hatred towards the community, very similar to the defamatory media propaganda. On 23 April 2007 as part of their in-service training organised by the MoE, a group of high school teachers from 14 provinces visited a centre in Qom for religious studies. This visit had a two-hour presentation of the Bab'i and Baha'i faiths by Seyyed Ali Musavi-Nejad, a member of the Scientific Institute and head of the Islamic Sects Group

which contained defamatory and mischaracterisation of the Baha'i history and beliefs (BIC,2013b:22). In May 2007, an 85-page booklet published in Tabriz and a CD on *Introduction to Baha'ism* was supplied to high school teachers which contained information about the role of the British and Russian colonialism in the formation and growth of the 'misguided' sect, its cooperation with Israel, and its support by the Americans, as reported by two online Iranian news agencies (ibid).

Recent incidents of targeting Baha'i schoolchildren involve disclosure of their Baha'i identity by the school authorities, upon the order from the MoE. Such disclosure of identities has been done through subtle and confidential ways. In November 2007, high school students in some cities were required to fill up a new form called *Form 201* before the starting of the school year in September. This document had a section on religion. More than 10 students who identified themselves as Baha'is were reported to be dismissed from senior high schools in Vilashahr, a small city in Isfahan province (BIC, 2013b:22). A new circular was issued by the school security office in some schools in Isfahan, Vilashahr, Tehran, Roudehen and Karaj, whereby the Baha'i parents were informed by the school principals about the circular's demand for disclosure of information about the family members of each of the Baha'i students. The circular also had official identity for students of other religions (ibid). A direction issued by the MoE in November 2011 also called for identification of the Baha'i pupils, which more explicitly included the pre-schools (Baha'is in kindergarden) (BIC, 2012c:9).

Since 2007, in schools in different cities, anti-Baha'i leaflets have been seen to be distributed. In May 2008 in Shiraz, a "gift" from a publishing company was given to every children of the primary school on their last day of school. This "gift" was a 12-page colour children's booklet which contained erroneous and misleading information about the story of Bab, that were presented in a mocking and degrading manner (BIC, 2008a:20).

Recent reports of the United Nations on the human rights situation in Iran mentions about the denial of Baha'i children's admission to specialised high and middle schools due to their faith. Accounts of harassments and attacks on the Baha'i children by school teachers and administrators were also reported. In the classroom, the teachers were reported to refer to Baha'i faith and its members as "sexually promiscuous, unclean, immoral, part of a foreign plot or

aesthetic” (UN, 2014a:para59). The Iranian authorities, in its response, however, has denied any such allegations (ibid)

Conclusion

The emergence and popularity of the Baha’i faith coincided with the changing trends in the Iranian domestic as well as foreign affairs. While persecution and discrimination towards the Baha’is goes back to the inception of its faith, events like the reformist movements and the Constitutional Revolution in the 19th century saw the impetus of the Baha’i faith to rise to its prominence, asserting its presence in the society and contributing to the modernisation process that Iran needed, especially in the field of education. Even though a number of scholars have in their writings acknowledged the Baha’i contribution in the modernisation process and the education system in Iran in their writings, it is beyond doubt that that they were one of the pioneers. It is also important to note that the principles of the Baha’i faith which gives importance to education, especially in the study of arts, crafts and sciences, have made immense contribution to bring forth modernisation in the education system of Iran which so long, was exclusively traditional dominated by religious studies. Baha’i schools with their modern and secular curriculum along with its character training programmes for its students made these schools not only popular but also one of the best quality schools in Iran. Through its all-inclusive approach in providing education not only for the Baha’is, but also for the non-Baha’is, these contributed in raising the educational standards of Iranian population in the 20th century before their forced closure in 1934.

Deprivation of educational facilities has been a major setback for the Baha’is whose sole survival rests on education. The Islamic Revolution of Iran has not only intensified the discrimination towards the Baha’is, but has also institutionalised it. Therefore, during the Pahlavi regime, largely due to its secular ruling, the Baha’is have had some relaxations in pursuing their education. However, the Iranian Revolution, through its Islamic governance, has put an end to such avenues. Continuation of education for the Baha’is in this Islamic rule largely depends on concealing one’s religious identity, since revealing of the same would lead to one’s dismissal from educational institutions. Subsequent are the discrimination that the Baha’i children face in schools, not only from the school authorities, but also in the government-authorised school textbooks which forms of the opinion about Baha’i faith in a young age. It is against this

background that the Baha'is, the largest non-recognised religious minority in Iran, are striving to pursue and facilitate school education for their children.

Chapter Four

Baha'is Higher Education and Role of International Community

Higher education was first introduced during the Pahlavi regime (1925-78) as a tool for carrying out the regime's policies. A modern education system was the prime target of this regime, which Reza Shah (1924-41) considered vital in achieving his stated goals of nationalisation, secularisation, and westernisation (Khaki and Baht, 2014:134). With Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-78) coming to power, the French model of education adopted by his father was changed to the American model with the aim of expansion of higher education in the country. Universities, however, became the main centre of opposition to the Pahlavi regime, contributing a significant role in the Iranian Revolution in 1979 (Hamdhaidari, 2008:18).

After the opening of Tehran University in 1935, higher education saw its expansion during second Pahlavi regime, for example, four new colleges—in Tabriz (1947), Mashad and Shiraz (both in 1949), and Isfahan (1950)—were opened and all were given the university status later (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 1997d). In spite of the student protests in the 1950s, more universities were opened—Jondisapur University in Ahvaz (1955), Melli University, the first private university (1960), Aryamehr University (1966), Farabi University (1976) and Wezarat-e Amuzes (1977). By the mid-1970s there was Azad Open University (1972), Tarbiat-e Mo'alleem (1974), Farah Pahlavi University (1975)—all in Tehran, Sepah-e Danes in Varamin (1974), Bauchestan University in Zahedan (1975), Bu-Ali Sina University in Hamadan, Gilam University in Rast, Kerman University in Kerman, Razi University in Kermansah and Reza Shah Kabir University in Babolsar (all in 1976). (ibid). Despite Shah's priority to higher education, the percentage of university graduates remained low—1.8 per cent men and 0.5 per cent for women (Encyclopaedia, 1997d). Gender disparity was equally stark, 31 per cent of the total 39, 608 university students were women (Povey and Roshtami-Povey, 2012:47).

The establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979 further transformed the higher education system to be in line with the Islamic teachings through the rejection of atheism, polytheism and westernisation (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 1997e). The aim was to restore the long lost Islamic

culture and civilisation. The higher education system of the Islamic Republic thus came to be based on its four ideological pillars namely, inseparability of religion and politics, Islamic revival, Cultural Revolution, and creation of the new Islamic person (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 1997e). In these changed circumstances, the largest unrecognised religious minority, the Baha'is, faced tremendous challenges in pursuit of their higher education, which continues even today.

Islamisation of Universities and its Effect

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 sought to pursue two inter-related goals namely, elimination of anyone, be individuals or political groups, who challenged the Islamic jurist's custodianship over people (that is, the establishment of *velayat-e-faqih*) and Islamisation of the society as well as the state. Success and survival of these two were co-dependent and survival of the Islamic state was, to Ayatollah Khomeini, the central issue of the revolution (Afshari, 2008:237). The effect of this Islamisation also reflected in its education system, especially in higher education.

One such step was the Cultural Revolution (1980-82) which aimed to "purify" anti-Islamic or Western elements within its educational system that ultimately shaped the subsequent Islamisation of universities. Measures were taken in these two years of "purification" period, like expelling all professors, staffs and students from the universities who did not adhere to the ideology of the revolution; admitting only those who conformed to the demands of the new Islamic government; judging the admission of candidates based on their social and political background; and reviewing and re-establishing the curricula on the basis of Islamic norms and values (Sakurai, 2004:387). In 1983 an announcement was published in a bulletin designating the category of students who would not be allowed to return to the universities for the continuation of their higher education. Including in this list of the category of students was "the misguided sects, which according to the consensus of Muslims, have abandoned Islam" (Yazdani, 2015:1). This clearly indicated Baha'i students and professors.

Through the formalisation of a decree issued in September 1981 by the Ministry of Education, the Baha'i faith was identified as a "misled and heretical sect" and its membership a "crime" and on this pretext Baha'i professors and students were expelled from working in and attending colleges respectively (IHRDC, 2006:46). About 700 Baha'i students were among the ones who were not permitted to enter the university during this period (AI, 2016:27). A Baha'i female student in her university in Mashhad received a letter in 1982 from the University Purge

Committee about her expulsion stating that the Baha'i faith has been considered a misguided sect by all sects of Islam, including the Shia because the belief, religious laws and regulations of the Baha'i faith are not derived from the Quranic tradition (IHRDC, 2006:46). Thus by the mid-1980s the discrimination towards the largest unrecognised religious minority, the Baha'is, became institutionalised.

Iranian students willing to pursue higher education have to sit for the mandatory national university entrance examination called *konkur*. The admission process undergoes three steps; applying for the nationwide entrance examination; applying for specific universities based on the result of the examination; and finally, enrolling for a particular programme providing admission. From 1983 to 2004, Baha'i students were systemically denied the opportunity to sit for the university entrance examination (AI, 2016:27). Applicants for *konkur* examination were required to fill a form that identified the four constitutionally recognised religions and thereby denying the Baha'i applicants. As their faith is not constitutionally recognised, they were unable to fill their application forms (ibid). The Baha'is are required not to lie or conceal their faith as part of their religious principle, and this often led them to keep religious identity column of the application form blank, therefore, subjecting themselves to exclusion (BIC, 2005:39).

The state authorities have undertaken many nuanced measures to deprive and exclude Baha'is from pursuing higher education. A report issued by the Ministry of Justice in September 2001 reiterated the government policy aimed at the Baha'is as a community and their eventual elimination (US, 2002:5). This is not the first government policy towards the Baha'is. Such discriminatory anti-Baha'i policies draw its source from the 1991 memorandum, popularly known as the "Baha'i Question" that explicitly outlined the general, social, legal, cultural and educational status of the Baha'is in Iran (Kazemzadeh, 2000:547). The mandatory requirement of identifying one's faith in the university entrance examination application forms was to bring the 1991 memorandum into effect as it clearly stated the expulsion from universities, either through the admission process or during their course study, of the Baha'is students, once their faith is revealed. This provided a leverage to the government authorities to exclude Baha'is from appearing for the entrance examination. Baha'is, therefore, for almost two decades since the Iranian revolution, were completely left out without any access to higher education (Yazdani, 2015:6).

However, the international criticisms and pressures on this situation forced the Iranian authorities to dilute if not change their overt anti-Baha'i policies. The application forms that were issued in late 2003 were amended and the section on applicant's religion was omitted (Momen, 2005:239). As a result, after a gap of two decades, young Baha'is could again sit for the entrance exam. Most of the Baha'i applicants in the paper on religion, which was a compulsory paper in the examination, opted for Islam due to their familiarity with it (Afshari, 2008:269). However, in the summer of 2004, the successful candidates, upon receiving their registration cards, were surprised to find that in the field of religion, theirs was mentioned as "Islam" (BIC, 2008a:39). When complained to the officials at national Educational Measurement and Evaluation Organisation (EMEO), Baha'is were told that "incorrect religion would not be corrected" (BIC, 2005:9).

The officials explained that the notation was based on the assumption of their choice of the subject test on Islam which they took as the defacto adherence to Islam. In protest, the Baha'i students sent a letter to the EMEO, expressing their objection to their religious assumption as Muslims when it was already provided that applicants' religion was not required to be stated in order to sit for the entrance examination (ibid). Government officials repeatedly maintained that the mention of "Islam" on the authorisation form was not to reflect the student's religion, but to mention the student's option of religion on which he/she was tested (US, 2007:5).

After prolonged tussle between the two, eventually, the authorities offered to give university admission to 10 out of the 800 Baha'i applicants who had passed in the entrance examination (Baha'i World Centre, 2007:169). The ten Baha'i students who were admitted in the university declared not to take admission, out of solidarity towards the remaining Baha'i students who were unjustly denied admission. As a result, for the academic year of 2004-2005, Baha'i youth once again were deprived of their access to higher education (BIC, 2005:12).

Nevertheless, by August 2004, pressures by the government authorities on the Baha'i community seem to intensify. Both individual members and the Baha'i community were threatened and suspension of all their community-related activities, including social and educational, was ordered. Further, merely introducing themselves as Baha'is was also considered as an attempt to teach their religion and therefore, would fall under the category of illegal acts (Baha'i World Centre, 2007:165). In this situation, the Baha'i community in Iran wrote a letter to President

Mohammad Khatami on 15 November 2004, highlighting the history of persecution of the Iranian Baha'i community. Outlining the relevant principles of the Iranian constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which Iran is a signatory and referring to pertinent verses of the Quran, the letter highlighted the basic principles of Baha'i faith, including its loyalty and obedience to the government (ibid).

Regarding Baha'is situation in the educational arena, the letter also addressed the duplicitous government actions in the university enrolment of the Baha'i youth by falsely recording them as Muslims, thereby, effectively excluding them from higher education. The letter argued:

Under the rubric of Cultural Revolution, the authorities of the [Ministry of] Culture and Education decided to expel Baha'i students, some of whom were completing their last term, from universities and other institutions of higher learning in which they were studying. Others were barred from entering these institutions solely because of their adherence to the Baha'i Faith. Then in 1369 [1990/91], the Council of Cultural Revolution, with reference to a well-planned agenda, openly deprived Baha'i youth from higher education, thereby denying a number of the youth of this land the opportunity to realize their potential. This situation continued for some 20 years until in Adhar of 1382 [December of 2003] "Peykesanjesh" (the publication of the Ministry of Science) officially announced that for the first time the religious affiliation of applicants would not be included in the application for the [university] national examination, and, instead, applicants would be asked to choose the subject of religious studies in which they would wish to be examined. Owing to the limitation cited in Article 13 of the Constitution, Baha'i applicants necessarily chose Islamic studies for this examination. Having received their entrance identification cards and subsequently taking this national examination, the success of Baha'i youth, based on the government announcement of results in the first phase, was significant in that some 800 students were qualified to choose their fields of study, of whom hundreds ranked in the one to four digit range [a ranking scale extending to 200,000]. After receiving their test result forms, however, the Baha'i applicants were surprised to see that their religion was specified as Islam. This duplicity astounded the Baha'i community. Alas, the joyful news that the question about the religion of the applicants had been omitted from the national university entrance examination, which was a reflection of freedom of belief and a sign that the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran was moving toward establishing the foundation of human rights and eliminating discrimination in education, was quite short-lived.

The Baha'i students whose successful passing of the entrance examination was announced in the first phase refused to select their fields of study and attend university because compliance with [the false information on their religious affiliation] in their test result forms would be tantamount to recanting their Faith. Instead, following the

procedure practiced in the Baha'i community, they chose to send letters of protest appealing to relevant authorities. Having received these letters, [authorities from the] Education Measurement and Evaluation Organization (EMEO) telephoned a handful of the students informing them that their appeals had been considered, and the reference to religion had been removed from their test result forms. The authorities asked them to inform other Baha'i students of the action taken, summoning them to the office of the EMEO in order that their test result forms be corrected and their fields of study chosen. Another glimmer of hope was thus kindled in the hearts of the Baha'i youth, who immediately proceeded to meet with the authorities in order to choose their fields of study. Again, with great regret, it was discovered that in the announcement to declare successful candidates, only a small handful of Baha'i applicants had been accepted in the field of English language, an action which seemed to have been taken as a deliberate ploy to appease the international community, whereas ample and indisputable documentation exists that reveals that most of the Baha'i applicants, who had been recognized to have successfully passed the National Entrance Examination, should have been accepted to enter universities in Iran (BIC, 2005:20).

In conclusion, the Iranian Baha'i community hoped that the authority would take immediate actions on constitutional basis, ensuring the emancipation of the Baha'i community in Iran by reinstating their human rights and restoring their deprived privileges. The letter was widely distributed to the government and non-government authorities and agencies throughout the country. Even though initially the governmental and non-governmental authorities reacted with sympathy upon receiving the letter, a number of Baha'is who distributed this letter were later arrested (Baha'i World Centre, 2007:166). In 2005, community leaders Mehran Kawsari and Bahram Mashhadi were sentenced to three year and one-year prison terms respectively, in connection with the circulation of the open letter (US, 2006:4).

With hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad becoming President in 2005, the discrimination and persecution of the Baha'is resurfaced and reached a new momentum. At the instruction of the Supreme Leader Khamenei, in a confidential letter dated 29 October 2005, the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces warned the Ministry of Intelligence, Revolutionary Guard, Police force and other officials about the reports "concerning the secret activities and meetings of the misguided sects of Baha'ism and Bab'ism, in Tehran and other cities in the country". Further, it stated that the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces have been given the mission to "acquire a comprehensive and complete report of all the activities of these sects (including political, economic, social and cultural) for the purpose of identifying all the individuals of these

misguided sects". All reports of these activities are to be reported in a highly confidential manner to the Command Headquarters (Moghaddam, 2016:137).

As a result, most of the Baha'i students who were given admission during Khatami's tenure, were forced out of the university when Ahmadinejad came to power (AI, 2014:27). Along with this, the government authorities issued a series of letters with the intention of preventing the Baha'is from continuing their higher education, while at the same time permitting some Baha'i students in the university admission process to avoid international criticisms. In 2006, a letter was sent from Asghar Zarei, the Director General of the Central Security Office of the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, to 81 Iranian universities, names of which are listed in the letter, under the subject "Banning of the education of Baha'is in universities". The letter explicitly mentioned that the Baha'i students, if they reveal their identity either during the enrolment or in the course of their studies, must be expelled from university and further mentioned that these universities should undertake necessary measures to prevent their further studies, besides forwarding a follow-up report to the said office (BIC, 2008a:9).

The letter was in accordance with decree number 1327/M/S, dated 6/12/1369 (Islamic year) (that is, corresponding to 25 February 1991 of the Gregorian Calendar), issued by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council which refers to the 1991 memorandum. The students, therefore, were required to declare their religion to enrol at these universities and during the academic year, the students were frequently asked about their religion by the university authorities (ibid).

Another confidential letter issued on 2 November 2006 from the Central Security Office of Payame Noor University to its regional branches, made similar claims. It stated that the enrolment of Baha'is in universities and higher educational centres, according to the Cultural Revolutionary Council's ruling and the Ministry of Information's and the Head Protection Office of the Central Organization of Payame Noor University's instructions, should be avoided, and those already enrolled should be expelled, and any such cases encountered should be reported (BIC, 2011b:10).

In a document dated 17 March 2007, it can be seen that the instructions have been implemented by the security office of Payame Noor University's regional branches. The letter, in pursuant of the November 2006 letter, requested for providing the necessary instructions for preventing the

Baha'i applicants to enrol in the *Faragir* (preparatory) courses which was about to commence in a days' time and also to submit the names of the Baha'i applicants to this office for its use (ibid).

Following the 2003 government announcement, the authorities have used some ploy or other to prevent Baha'is from enrolling into universities. To avoid international criticisms, the authorities did not completely exclude Baha'is from university enrolment. However, the denial of higher education was done in two ways: by barring few Baha'i students from accepting their admission forms or by randomly expelling Baha'i students once they do get enrolled in the universities. These ploys change with each academic year.

In the 2006-2007 academic year, over 800 Baha'i students sat for the university entrance examination, and out of which 480 passed the test. Only 289 were admitted and over half of these admitted students were expelled in the first academic year, while nearly the rest were gradually expelled over time (BIC, 2013d:9). Over 800 out of more than 1,000 Baha'i applicants who sat for the examination of the 2007-2008 academic year were informed about the authorities' inability to grade their papers due to "incomplete file". Of the 237 who received their results, only 121 who were eventually admitted, but were expelled since then (BIC, 2016b:35). The results of the university entrance examination in the academic year 2008-2009 were available only on website, where results of those who revealed their Baha'i identity previously at school or elsewhere were transferred to a page with the message "Error: Incomplete File..".¹ Only those Baha'is who never revealed their identity before could obtain their results and enrol (BIC, 2013c:10). Incidents of denial of Baha'i students to higher education to enrol or their expulsion during the academic period have become a constant feature of discrimination towards the Baha'i youth gaining in their access to university.

In the academic year of 2014-2015, there were reports of more than 300 cases of denial to higher education. However, unlike the previous years, this time the following was written in front of the Baha'i students' names: "*Please write to Post Office Box 3166-31635 Karaj, or go to the National Education Measurement and Evaluation Organization, Enquires Unit*" (BIC, 2015a:10). Upon visiting the referred office in Karaj in 2014 the person in charge showed the

¹http://82.99.202.139/karsarasari/87/index.php?msg=error_bah- (BIC (Baha'i International Community) (c) (2013), Report on the Background of the Nature of the Persecution against the Baha'is in Iran, January, United Nations Office: Geneva)

group of visiting students the page in the booklet of National University Entrance Examination which stated that only Muslims and officially recognised minorities were allowed to participate in the examination (ibid). The official position on higher education was published in a 50-page issue by *Sanjesh*, the national academic evaluation and measurement organization of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology called *A guide to enrolling and participating in the national entrance examination for the academic year 2015-2016*. In page four of 'General Requirements', it demanded "a belief in Islam or in one of the recognised religions (Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian) in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran" (ibid: 11). The exclusion of Baha'is from higher education was thus official.

According to Baha'i International Community reports, at least 240 Baha'i students have been directly expelled because of their beliefs since 2005 (BIC,2016b:32). In December 2016 itself at least 12 Baha'is were expelled from university (BIC, 2017:4). Reasons for all expulsions of Baha'is were solely their religious beliefs. Interestingly, the authorities have consistently maintained that Baha'i students were not given any written documents stating the reasons for expulsion and hence, there are no documentary proofs that Baha'i students were expelled because of their religious. The prolonged and systematic denial of education has majorly impacted Baha'is. In addition to demoralising the Baha'i youth, it also has pushed economic hurdles and impoverishment for its population in Iran.

Responses from the non-governmental sources

It was in the year 2013 that Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei issued a fatwa against the Baha'i community, calling it "deviant and misleading" and urged Iranians to avoid any dealings or association with the Baha'i members (Mamouri, 2013). While the official government policy towards the Baha'is seem to be unchanged, the responses from other sources, such as the *ulamas*, the Iranian scholars, intellectuals and activists have been diverse.

One of the first clerics of post-1979 Iran who spoke on the Baha'i issue was Ayatollah Montazeri (1922-2009), a high ranking cleric who was formerly designated as Ayatollah Khomeini's successor. Someone who wished to be remembered for making an attempt to change the Shi'a jurisprudence conducive to protection of the rights of the faithful and the citizens, Ayatollah Montazeri, in early 2009, issued a fatwa that called for respect of the Iranian Baha'is as citizens of the country, a historic statement that no other cleric before has dared to issue (Moin, 2009:3).

In 2008, he addressed the question of Baha'is where he viewed that Baha'is are a “wayward sect” (*ferqeh-ye zalleh-ye baha'iye*) like those not belonging to the heavenly faiths (*adyan-e asemani*). However, he advocated for the treatment of the Baha'is to be in accordance with Quran and the teachings of Imam Ali (Pistor-Hatam, 2017:6). Ayatollah Montazeri also opined that the human rights and civil rights of the non-Muslim Iranians have to be respected, implying that the Baha'is, too, have the same rights as other “religious minorities”. Though not regarded to be part of the “People of the Book”, the Baha'is are, nevertheless, Iranians who have the “same rights to water and soil” (Pistor-Hatam, 2017:7).

Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi (b.1935), a hardliner cleric, is known for his views of using force and violence against anyone, whom he believes, has not been behaving according to the expectations of the ruling cleric and called human rights which bans use of violence as anti-Quranic. His hardline ideology was partly behind the establishment of the *Hojjatieh* organisation in the 1960s and 1970s that emerged to fight Baha'ism in Iran (Mohammadi, 2015:143). Needless to say, he stood by his anti-Baha'i approach even after the 1979 revolution.

A strong advocate of using “sacred violence” against secularists, atheists, converts, dissidents to clean the society, Yazdi, also holds belief in the first and second order of citizenship. The first order of citizenship rests with true Shi'a Muslim men (as from the militarist point of view, Muslim women and non-Muslims fall under the second order of citizens), supporters of the Islamic government, the idea of the guardianship of the jurist consult and the existing ruling jurist while the rest fall under the second order of citizenship (Mohammadi, 2015:152). In short, non-Muslims, according to him, are not entitled to the same rights and responsibilities enjoyed by a Muslim in Iran. He also said that citizenship rights that gives equal rights to the Baha'is is unacceptable because the standard for citizenship rights rests in Islam, and therefore, equality between Baha'is and Muslims is unacceptable as it has no relation to Islam (Sen's Daily, 2014). The second order of citizens, he believes, deserve to be killed by a person who is loyal to the government” and in case the person “decides to kill someone who he thinks is a non-Muslim and does not obey the orders of a true Muslim, and carries out the execution himself, he shall be acquitted by the court” (Mohammadi, 2015:153).

Hassan Yousefi Eshakavari (b.1950), an Iranian cleric, researcher, journalist and reformist, who, for his progressive views, has been called an “unorthodox” and had been jailed for several years. He is one among the group of *ulamas* who writes on the civil and human rights of the Iranian Baha’i community. In regard to the question of the discriminations the Baha’is of Iran face, Eshakavari replied his helplessness to comprehend and respond to why Baha’is who “probably belong to the distant past and do not interfere in the affairs of the living, particularly the rulers, but who are nevertheless faced with attacks, destruction, and disdain.” (IPW 2009c). However, while addressing the Baha’i question later, Eshakavari stated that throughout the history of humankind, the “followers of the prevailing religion label heterodox thinkers who exit their religion as heretics and apostates and ultimately consider them as enemies of God, enemies of their prophet, and enemies of their legitimate devout governing bodies”, thinking of this as a religious obligation to attain God (IPW 2009e).

However, what at the beginning was a mere religious issue, gradually, with time, become a political, economic, social and even personal factor that lies behind the persistence of violence. The issue of Baha’is in Iran face similar case, too. Further, the reason behind the quietism on the Baha’i issue from the non-religious groups and researchers in Iran who do not address this question openly, is the result of a taboo. Besides, due to the ongoing wide scale censorship and boycott of Baha’i literature and teachings accurate and trustworthy information about the faith remain non-existent. Eshakavari mentioned that broadminded responsible Iranian people should forgo this boycott and censorship and researchers should “investigate Baha’i ideologies and to end this void and poverty of accurate information” (ibid).

The most unprecedented step, however, came from Ayatollah Abdol-Hamid Masoumi-Tehrani, who met Baha’i activists in 2013 following the murder of a Baha’i member Ataollah Rezvani in Bandar Abbas in southern Iran. He stated that no person has the right to deny any individual of his/her personal and social rights who “has not interfered with another person’s life, property, honor or reputation”. He argued that in today’s world, human rights is what every human being is entitled to, irrespective of belief, ethnicity or gender and it is the government’s responsibility to defend every citizen’s personal and social right without any exceptions (IHRDC, 2013). In April, 2014, Ayatollah Masoumi-Tehrani presented an intricate calligraphic work of a passage from *Ketab-e-Aqdas*, Baha’is holy book, as a gift to the Universal House of Justice, in support of

Iranian Baha'i community (Shahrabi, 2014). The gift, in his statement, is “an expression of sympathy and care from me and on behalf of all my open-minded fellow citizens who respect others for their humanity and not for their religion or way of worship—to all the Baha'is of the world, particularly to the Baha'is of Iran who have suffered in manifold ways as a result of blind religious prejudice” (ibid).

Of late, a few Iranian activists, scholars and intellectuals have also voiced their concerns about the Baha'i community. Nevertheless, there are many Iranian scholars who adhered to the official attitude towards the Baha'is and formulated conspiracy theories accordingly like, Amir Ali Hasanlu, Abd al-Qader Homayun, Abdullah Shahbazi and Maziyar Mo'meni, to name a few. Even if not all intellectuals adhered to the conspiracy theories, there has been total silence in addressing the question of the Iranian Baha'is, like in the case of Abdol Karim Soroush, an Iranian intellectual. He was behind the formulation of mystical-oriented Islamism that became prominent in the 1980s and 1990s in response to the *sharia*-oriented and clerical-dominant Islamisation process. However, his Islamisation discourse has been silent regarding the violation of religious rights of the non-Muslims in Iran as well as the atrocities meted out against them, especially the Baha'is. Soroush's idea of “democratic rights”, too, has not been meant for all Iranian citizens but only for what he call “insiders” (Mohammadi, 2015:137). He further stated that his tolerance is restricted only to divine belief systems and not to every religion and non-believers as “belief is a hundred times more diverse and colourful than disbelief” (ibid:135).

Amir Ali Hansalu, an Iranian religious and history scholar argued Baha'ism and Zionism are deviant sects of the Twelver Shia and Judaism respectively, and are products of colonialism and imperialism aimed at oppressing Muslims and destroy the Islamic world (Pistor-Hatam, 2017:8). Abd al-Qader Homayun, a religious scholar and an expert in comparative religion, in his articles in *Moballegan*, refuted the Baha'i sect as a monotheist religion as it claims. Citing that Baha'is turn to Akka, location of Baha'ullah's grave in present day Israel, while praying he alleged that Mirza Hussein Ali Nuri has claimed himself to be God and that Ali Mohammad Bab was the self-proclaimed saviour, the awaited Mahdi, thereby denying the existence of the 12th imam (ibid).

Abdullah Shahbazi, head of the Political Studies and Research Institute, too concurred with the conspiracy theory of an alliance between Baha'ism and Zionism and both were not a creation of the 20th century but rather much earlier. Moreover, in his article "History of Baha'ism" published in the *Journal of Institute of Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies* in 2003, he made an attempt to expose the English, Zionist, Baha'i and Parsi joint conspiracies lasting for many decades (IPW 2009a). Mazyar Mo'meni, on the other hand, refused Baha'is as a religion since it rejected one of the central principles of divine religions, that is, fighting against the enemies of God or *jihad* and also for disapproving of religious and national enthusiasm (*ta'assob*) (Pistor-Hatam, 2017:8).

Deviating from this position on the Baha'is, there are other Iranian intellectuals, scholars, journalists and activists who showed their open support for the Baha'is. Amil Imami, a non-Baha'i Iranian intellectual, said that Islam, over the years, has been subjected to manipulation by numerous sects, sub-sects and schools to the extent that it has contested Islam to be unitary belief system. It is this clash of beliefs that have arisen from its numerous manipulations that Islamists exercise their power against the Baha'i faith (IPW 2008c). Imami also mentioned of the imperative duty of the people, especially of the non-Baha'is, to defend freedom of conscience, including freedom of religion (*ibid*).

Hashem Aghajari, an Iranian historian, opined that freedom of religion and conscience in Islam, is guaranteed not only for its followers but also for others and that the oppressions one can see in the Islamic history is not a religious oppression but a political one, even though the suppression is carried under the garb of religion (IPW 2008a). Aghajari also refuted apostasy as a religious belief and suggest that rather, it is a political action that emerged in post-modern societies (*ibid*). An ardent advocate of human rights for all, Aghajari, in a meeting with an NGO, Tulu Iranian Farda (Tomorrow's dawning of Iranians), said Iranians, irrespective of their "religious persuasion and being solely on the grounds of being human beings", should enjoy citizenship rights in the country (IPW 2008d).

Bagher-Zadeh, an acclaimed journalist and activist, stated that the main reason for anti-Baha'ism in Iran is ideology whereas the intensity of the Baha'i oppression depends on the power of the "messianics" in the Iranian government (IPW 2009d). Other than ideological reason, the other

reasons for Baha'i oppression is to divert public opinion from issues that the government wants to conceal from public (ibid). Accepting the silence of the human rights activists and organisations on the Iranian regime's suppression of the Baha'i community in Iran, according to Ali Keshtgar, an Iranian journalist, have actually increased the intensity of discrimination to an extent that even human rights activists have come to accept the ongoing scenario. Moreover maintaining that Iranians still have not been able to view religious freedom and equity that would respect others religious beliefs as well, Ali Keshtgar, believed that government would continue with this discrimination against the religious minorities unless Iranians raise their voice against it (IPW 2008b).

In an open letter called "We are Ashamed!" in 3 February 2009, a group of academics, writers, journalists, artists and activists worldwide have addressed to the world Baha'i community where they expressed their shame on the atrocities and discriminations committed against the Baha'i community in Iran since the past century. They expressed their shame on the prevalent infrequent and muted voice in the face of such crimes and also that such heinous acts against the Baha'i community has been justified by a group of Iranian intellectuals. The letter ended with a request for forgiveness and a promise of ending the silence on such injustice from now (IPW 2009b). In 2016, around 2,000 Baha'is, both within and outside Iran, along with a number of student and human rights activists, have written a letter addressed to President Hassan Rouhani, demanding for measures to allow Iranian Baha'is to continue their education (IPW 2016). In the letter, the signatories pointed the exclusion of Baha'is from university access by means of saying that their file is "incomplete" and further claimed that the reason for such a ban is "personal religious conviction" (ibid).

An Alternative Access to Higher Education

Against the backdrop of educational repression and denial of the Iranian Baha'is and given the religious importance given to education by its founder, the Baha'is pursued a distinct approach to cope with their societal changes and challenges. In 1987, a number of Baha'i lecturers who were dismissed from public universities created an informal network of higher education called "The Scientific Programme". The curriculum and the selection process of this informal network were kept similar to the prestigious universities. By mid-1990s, this informal network turned into a more extensive educational programme called the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) (Yazdani, 2015:10). The BIHE offers more than 700 courses and has a combined faculty and

administrative staff of approximately 275 members and accepts around 250 new students who have to undergo rigorous administrative standards as other students in Iran. The applicants to BIHE also have to pass the national entrance examination and the BIHE has three faculties with 40 undergraduate degree and 3 graduate degree programmes. Since its inception in 1987, more than 1,000 students have graduated from BIHE (Affolter, 2015).

At the initial stage, it offered correspondence courses, developed by the Indiana University, one of the first universities in the West to recognise the BIHE (BIC, 2005:28). There was no physical interaction between students and teachers, to the extent the students did not know who their teachers were, making the system very decentralised (Affolter, 2015). However, specialised scientific and teaching courses and other special cases were offered in small-group classes in private homes (BIC, 2005:28). BIHE offered courses on 10 subjects namely, applied chemistry, biology, dentistry, pharmacology, civil engineering, computer science, psychology, law, literature and accounting. No Baha'i subjects were taught to avoid any possibility of accusation of fostering Baha'i religion. Classes were held in private homes which provided library and laboratory facilities (Kazemzadeh, 2000:546). These subject areas of the institute were covered in five university "departments", enabling it to offer more than 200 distant courses in each term (BIC, 2005:28). Some 140 students graduated from BIHE in the 1990s (Cole, 2005:154).

As a non-adversarial approach, the establishment of the BIHE is seen by Friedrich W Affolter (2015) as a "university without walls" seeking to find new methods in continuing their education in the face of oppression. The Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Baha'i faith, explained this strategy as that of construction and attraction, where the oppressed would respond neither through resignation nor by becoming the oppressor itself (Karlberg, 2010:237). Rather, the Baha'i response had been of constructive resilience. The Universal House of Justice explained constructive resilience to the Baha'i youth as—

....seek to render service to your homeland and to contribute to the renewal of civilization. They responded to the inhumanity of their enemies with patience, calm, resignation, and contentment, choosing to meet deception with truthfulness and cruelty with goodwill towards all. You, too, demonstrate such noble qualities and, holding fast to these same principles, you belie the slander purveyed against your Faith, evoking the admiration of the fair-minded (ibid:235).

The Baha'is thus, through mobilising their limited sources, began to set up systems for their ensured survival through creative means and established their own "Open University" which *The*

New York Times described as an “elaborate act of self-preservation” (ibid:239). By 1998, BIHE had 900 students and 150 faculties (IHRDC, 2006:50).

Though initially it started as a decentralised programme, BIHE gradually incorporated innovative methods like online-based courses that helped its expansion through internet. Since 2005, a number of courses, like English as Foreign Language (EFL) became internet-based. Professors now put weekly course materials on the course webpage. The webpage includes slides, external links to pages, tutorials, etc. Assignments, too, are submitted online. Due to its functioning through standard software packages like Skype, Yahoo Messenger and Moodle, BIHE functioning became more flexible as it has put difficulties for the Iranian authorities to completely halt its functioning (Knowledge as Resistance, 2013:28).

However, challenges remain. Safety became a constant concern for the BIHE staff and students, like government hacking and phone tapping. Therefore, BIHE could not fully shift as an online programme and hybrid learning through both online and offline courses continued. The second challenge BIHE faces is sluggish internet speeds within Iran, with issues such as online entrapment, filtering and specific targeting of Baha’i websites. These affect the BIHE students for smoothly continuing their course work, like submitting assignments on time due to connectivity issues (ibid:29).

The BIHE, at present, has expanded its network through internet services. It now has an Affiliated Global Faculty (AGF), an international body of professors who volunteer and support the BIHE faculty and administrators academically, along with providing academic services to BIHE students. Along with this are support volunteers who provide logistical support to the Open University through its services like providing houses for classes, cooking for them, providing transportation services to submit students’ homework to the professors, etc (Affolter, 2015). Thus, BIHE now is functioning both from outside Iran through AGF and from inside through its support volunteers.

The BIHE was not without any incidents of state-sponsored onslaughts. The Iranian government does not recognise BIHE but rather claims that it was an illegal establishment that furthers the political and economic goals of an “outlawed cult” under apparent educational activities (Moghaddam, 2016:140). In September 1998, Ministry of Information officials raided

500 private homes of the Baha'is and detained 36 faculty members, charging them with teaching informally in the Baha'i "Open University" (Cole, 2005:154). The authorities confiscated laboratory equipment, books, and computers worth thousands of dollars (Kazemzadeh, 2000:546). At the police interrogation following the raid, Baha'i teachers were accused of infringing the government ban on Baha'i activity and were ordered to sign a pledge of not resuming teaching. All the teachers refused on the pretext that Iranian law does not prohibit teaching of courses that are offered by the BIHE (ibid:547). However, according to the Baha'is, the authorities had knowledge about the operationalisation of BIHE that offered courses to nearly 1,000 students at that time, since it was never concealed (Sansarian, 2004:122).

This first attack on the BIHE received worldwide publicity, with the Minister of Education of Iran receiving thousands of letters of protests and condemnations of this incident that included faculty and students from renowned universities like Yale, Harvard, Stanford, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Duke (Kazemzadeh, 2000:547). *The New York Times* reported that people arrested in the raid were not fighters or organisers but lecturers and the confiscated materials were textbooks and laboratory equipment and not political or religious as accused (IHRDC, 2006:50).

This prompted Iranian authorities to release those arrested and to allow BIHE to continue with its operations. In March 1999, four of the 36 detained, namely, Dr. Sina Hakmian, Farzad Kahjeh Sharifabadi, Habibullah Ferdosian Najafabadi and Ziaullah Mirzapanah, were convicted under Article 498 of the Penal code and sentenced to three to ten years prison terms. The four were convicted of establishing "a secret organisation" that involved "attracting youth, teaching against Islam and teaching against the regime of the Islamic Republic". All were released in December 1999, while one of the convicted named Mirzapanah, who became ill and had to be hospitalised, was allowed to return home on the condition he should be available whenever needed (US, 2000:7).

Another set of attacks was instigated at the turn of the millennium in mid-2002. The Revolutionary Guards in Mashhad and Shiraz harassed the faculty members, prompting the classes to be closed down at a time when the BIHE was conducting its nationwide qualifying examinations (US, 2003:7). The attack involved videotaping and confiscating the examination proceedings, papers and Baha'i books and also interviewing several students (BIC, 2005:23).

Nevertheless, classes continued after this incident, and students were instructed to meet discreetly in small groups (IHRDC, 2006:50).

In May 2011, the authorities engaged in another round of crackdown on individuals involved in the BIHE, detaining at least 30 members from Tehran, Zahedan, Sari, Isfahan and Shiraz (US, 2011:8). Their homes were raided and cultural items were confiscated. Ultimately, the authorities arrested 16 persons and held them in Evin prison, on the accusation of “failing to meet the entrance requirements to the university” and having membership in “illegal cult with anti-human rights activities” (ibid). However, within 10 days, nine of the detainees were released and the other seven, namely Kamran Mortezaie, Ramin Zibaie, Mahmoud Badavam, Farhad Sedghi, Riaz Sobhani, Vahid Mahmoudi, and Nooshin Khadem, were found guilty by the court of “membership in the deviant Baha’i sect and of those organisations outside the country” having goal of breaching the country’s security(ibid). These seven Baha’is were jailed for terms between four and five years (AI, 2012:6). This was for the first time that individuals involved in BIHE received harsh long-term sentences for their involvement (Knowledge as Resistance, 2013:31).

In June 2014, another Baha’i instructor Azita Rafizadeh received a four-year sentence for working for the BIHE and was given the chance to avoid prosecution provided she pledges to cease working for the BIHE. She was ordered to report to prison for serving her term in October 2015. Her husband, Peyman Kushk-Baghi, too, received a five-year prison term in May 2015 on the similar charge of being a Baha’i which was considered as an “illegal and misguided group” that act against national security through the BIHE. Their sentences were upheld by the Appeals Court (Moghaddam, 2016:140).

The BIHE, therefore, is just not a university but rather a social space for marginalised Baha’i community to satisfy their fundamental psychological needs of accessing higher education even though it is not recognised within Iran, where everyone involved share the same experience of exclusion from its own state. It is a peaceful response and resistance to the discrimination Baha’i teachers and students have been facing in educational sphere since the founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979.

Response of the International Community

The Iranian Baha'i community has been a victim of persecution and continuous discrimination since the inception of its faith but they took a systemic and systematic turn following the Iranian Revolution in 1979. However, its voices did not go unnoticed in the international community. Being an independent worldwide religion, the Baha'i community has the advantage of having its own representation in the United Nations. The Baha'i International Community (BIC) is recognised as an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) within the UN context, having its affiliates in over 180 countries. The BIC, has offices at the UN in New York and Geneva. It has been given recognition by the Department of Public Information in 1948 and was granted Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1970, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1976, and at the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 1989 and in the same year it also established relations with the World Health Organisation (WHO). It has close working relations with other bodies as well, like the UN Environment Program (UNEP), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the UN Development Program (UNDP) (BIC, 2000).

As a result, the Baha'i International Community (BIC) has led a successful campaign in spreading global awareness and highlighting the state-sponsored discrimination of the Iranian Baha'is through its periodic reports, documentations and news. Hence, although the Baha'is being a minority community in Iran seemed to be diffused, its strong presence and political contacts outside Iran, and with the BIC being their voice in the international arena have provided a large backing to the Iranian Baha'is and highlighted their human right situation in the country.

Another important factor lie in the historical location of the Baha'is supreme leadership, the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, present-day Israel, where Iranian Baha'is are also well represented (Warburg, 2012:202). Moreover, the prominent international community like the United Nations has also undertaken a thorough approach in its year-round reports and resolutions on the conditions of the Baha'is in Iran. Appeals and resolutions passed by the parliaments and congresses of the national governments around the world like Australia, Brazil, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, among others, have also been another important factor of continuous scrutiny of the Iranian Baha'is human rights situation (BIC, 2016b:73). For example, in May 20 2016, the Canadian House of Commons' Subcommittee on

International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, in its fourth annual Iran Accountability Week, condemned Iranian regime's "systematic repression of dissenting voices", "the legal and practical discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities in Iran", and its "continued incitement of violence against the Baha'i community" (SDIR Committee News Release, 2016). The United Kingdom's Home Office in November 2014, in its Country Information and Guidance- the Baha'is in Iran, mentioned about the real risk that Iranian Baha'is are subjected to by the Iranian authorities. Religious freedom of the Baha'i community is been severely violated by prohibiting them from teaching or practicing their faith, and making them subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, unfair trial and torture. The report also mention about the societal violence inflicted on the Iranian Baha'is that includes "murder, discrimination and harassment in accessing education and employment, closure of businesses, arson, raids, confiscation of property, expulsions from schools and universities, and destruction and/or closure of religious sites and cemeteries" (Country Information and Guidance, 2014:5). All these efforts forged for a coordinated action globally, not only within the Baha'i community but also in the larger international community (Karlberg, 2010:241).

Concerns over the treatment of Iranian Baha'is began in the 1980s itself at the United Nations (UN) when the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities expressed "profound concern" over the safety of Iranian Baha'is (BIC, 2008a:52). The issue was also taken up by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) which has passed around 28 resolutions between 1985 and 2016 regarding the human rights violations in Iran. Each of them made specific mentions about the Baha'is in Iran. Likewise, the UN Commission on Human Rights, before its replacement by the Human Rights Council, too, passed more than 20 resolutions making explicit mention of the persecution of the Iranian Baha'is (BIC, 2016b:72). The UN bodies have also appointed a number of special investigators called "special rapporteurs" who monitors and reports on human rights concerns in Iran along with other countries, thereby confirming the extensive and systematic oppression of the Baha'is in Iran based on its religion (ibid).

On 14 March 1984, the UN Commission on Human Rights passed resolution 1984/54, which mandated the appointment of a Special Representative to monitor the human rights situation in

Iran (IHRDC, 2006:47). The Islamic Republic has always refused to accept the Baha'is as a religious community in the country. Rather, the Iranian representatives to the UN and other countries have justified the official mistreatment by claiming that the Baha'i faith is a British creation whose purpose was to create division among the Muslims, or that they are Zionist spies of Israel or were aides of the Pahlavi regime and its secret police SAVAK (IHRDC, 2006:48). In one of his reports, UN Special Representative Reynaldo Galindo Pohl (1986-1995) reflected on this attitude of the Islamic Republic towards its Baha'i community:

He [the IRI delegate, Kamal Kharrazi] said that those resolutions [concerning the Bahá'ís] contained subjective criteria and lacked objectivity and good will. He said, in particular, that, as on previous occasions, such resolutions attempted to confer on groups a status that they did not really have. That indirect language referred to the attribution of the status of religious minority to the Bahá'ís. Those problems had prevented the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran from cooperating fully with the Special Representative... (ibid:47).

The UN agencies have significantly contributed in placing the Iranian Baha'i situation on a global platform, and for engaging the national governments worldwide in addressing the same.

Almost all the UN reports and resolutions have made specific references to the systematic persecution of the Baha'is since 1979, the harassment and discrimination the Baha'is are subjected to in Iran by its authorities and the arbitrary detention and imprisonment of the Baha'is because of their religious belief. The discrimination faced by Baha'i children and youth in their access to education came under attention in each of these reports and resolutions. The Economic and Social Council of the UN, in its report in 1993, referred to Iran's 1991 memorandum known as the "Baha'i Question" according to which university studies were beyond the reach of Baha'is along with their denial in access to public office (UN, 1993a:para55).

In the same year, the Commission on Human Rights reported on the dismissal of Baha'is from government posts on the basis of their religion. According to this report, a Baha'i was given "permanent dismissal from any government posts" on a unanimous consensus reached by Ministry of Education and Development. The reason for dismissal was due to a letter it received from a legal source that indicated that the person "belongs to the misguided Baha'i sect" and that the person revealed about his Baha'i faith in an interview. In November 1990, the Court of Administrative Justice issued a decision on the discontinuation of pension to the retired and the dismissed due to "membership in the misguided Baha'i sect" (UN, 1993b:42).

The 1996 Economic and Social Council report (E/CN.4/1996/95 Add.2), however, needs a special mention. It explicitly covered the Iranian government's attitude towards the Baha'i community that refuses to accept it as a religious community, but rather a political organisation that was previously associated with the Shah regime. Furthermore, it reported that the Baha'is were considered by the Iranian authorities to be anti-revolution and espionages of the foreign entities, especially Israel. For this reason, Baha'is are considered "counter-revolutionary" (UN, 1996:para 55). The same attitude gets reflected in their attitude towards Baha'is education as well. With regard to education, the Deputy Minister of Education justified Baha'is denial to university education stating that the only condition for its access is "respect for law and involvement in wholesome activities". The Deputy Minister further indicated that Baha'is access to university education would not be a problem provided they do not reveal their beliefs in educational institutions (ibid, para 63:15). This is a clear indication that the 1991 memorandum, whose existence the Iranian authorities have continuously denied, is very much in play.

In its recommendations, the Special Rapporteur called for a legislative enactment that would give clear recognition of rights for every citizen, individual or person, regardless of one's beliefs or the community to which one belongs (ibid, para 90:20). With special regard to the Baha'i community, the Special Rapporteur further recommended to the Iranian authorities to withdraw from the presumption that the entire Baha'i community has been politicised or of their engagement in espionage activities. It further voiced its opinion against the prohibition, restriction or discrimination through means of control that jeopardize one's right to freedom of belief. The Special Rapporteur also expressed his wish on ending of discrimination that might impede Baha'is access to establishments of higher education or to employment in the administration and in the private sector (ibid, para 109:23).

The denial of Iranian Baha'is access to education has been continuously reported by the UN agencies as well. In 2009 the Human Rights Council reported the expulsion of 104 Baha'i students from Iranian universities in 2007 as provided by the Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir. She also has reported a confidential communication that she received. Issued in 2006 by Asghar Zarei, Director General of the Central Security Office, to 81 universities in the Islamic Republic it instructed to expel any students who is identified as a Baha'i either at the time of enrolment or during the course study, further indicating the 1991 "Baha'i Question" to be in effect even today

(UN, 2009b:para 91). The report also mentioned about the absence of any reply from the Iranian authorities on the said allegations (ibid:para 92).

In November 2012, the Human Rights Council reported the expulsion of five Baha'i students from three different universities, namely, Farbod Mohammad Zadeh from Isfahan University; Saamieh Gholinejad from Behshahr University of Science and Technology; and Tanin Torabi, Nava Hamidi, and Mona Ashrafi from Khomeini International University in Qazvin. The universities offered to continue their admission provided they recant their faith. The three expelled students from Khomeini International University were asked to sign pledges that they would discontinue to follow their faith and upon which the students were then asked to sign documents where they had to state that they belong to the Baha'i faith. This was followed by their expulsion (UN, 2013b:para 20). The university regulations (moral selection regulations for university entrance applicants), as reported by the UNGA, has continued to provide admissions only to the recognised religious minorities mentioned in the Iranian Constitution which consequently led to the denial of admission of around 1,000 Baha'i students in a single year (UN, 2014a:para 57).

Nevertheless, the Iranian authorities have repeatedly denied all the allegations concerning the Baha'i community posed it by the international community. In most cases, its responses and comments to the Special Rapporteur's reports, stood by its one claim on the Baha'i issue: that while the Baha'i faith is not officially recognised, its members have "equal legal, social and economic rights". At the same time, the Baha'i faith has been characterised by them as a "cult who are often encouraged to infringe upon the law of the land" (UN, 2012c:para 32). On the question of access to higher education of the Baha'is, the Iranian authorities reply was that full citizenship rights that includes university education have been granted to the Baha'is, provided they refrain from partaking in "missionary activities" (UN, 2014a:para 60:15).

Besides the Special Rapporteur's reports, the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) has periodically also expressed concerns over the situation of Iranian Baha'is in the country. The Secretary General Kofi Annan, in his report in 2000, welcomed the elimination of questions regarding the religion of spouses during the registration of marriage which improved the conditions of the Baha'i women and children who were so long denied inheritance rights in Iran (UN, 2000:para 75). The same report also mentioned about the acts of intimidation aimed to hindering Baha'i participation in its religious gatherings and educational activities (ibid:para 74).

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Committee of Experts, too, has noted the seriousness of religion-based discriminations of the unrecognised religious minorities in Iran, the Baha'is in particular, which restricted their access to education, including university education and occupation in the public sector (UN, 2011b para 24). Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, in his 2016 report, acknowledged Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's statement on April 2014 that "all ethnicities, all religions, even religious minorities, must feel justice." At the same time, the Secretary General noted the persistence of ethnic and minority community's discriminations in law and practice and that the Baha'is were continued to be denied of access to higher education and government employment along with government interference in their private employment (UN, 2014b para 40). However, the government's response continues to be the same that no Baha'is have been discriminated based on their religious belief, and that Baha'is are seeking their Masters and Doctoral programmes at Iranian universities, contradicting the said allegations (UN, 2016b: para 45).

The Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) which, since its formation in 1987, has not given any recognition by the Iranian authorities, has also been found mentioned in the UN reports over the detention of its members and subjection of consistent raids. The imprisonment of 17 members in 2011 associated with the BIHE and their conviction to four to five years on charges of being part of the "deviant Baha'i sect" and acting against national security in "collaboration with the BIHE" have been mentioned in the reports. The government's response, as noted by the UNGA, is that the BIHE is an illegal establishment that was "operating under the guise of educational activities [but] was [furthering the] political and economic goals of an outlawed cult" (UN, 2015b: para 88). In a joint statement on 31 May 2012, about 17 human rights and student organisations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, Green Students for a Democratic Iran - Southern California, Iranian Democratic Student Association of George Washington University, to name a few, have expressed concerns on the systematic deprivation and injustice towards the Baha'is in the BIHE, noting Iran's violation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that recognises everyone's right to education, and equal access to higher education in the basis of capacity (UN, 2012d: para 20).

The UNGA resolutions, too, have expressed serious concerns on the ongoing human rights violations in Iran. In the six resolutions passed between 1985 and 1989, the UNGA resolution took note of the “various forms of harassment and discrimination” that the Iranian Baha’is remain victims of (UN Res 1988:211). The resolutions passed between 1990 and 1999 have expressed concerns on the threatening existence of the Baha’is as a viable community in Iran (UN Resolution, 1992 but reference to 1999:para 3). The resolutions have also expressed their concern on the closure of the BIHE and the arrests of people working at it and called upon the government of the Islamic Republic for full implementation of the conclusions and recommendations suggested by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission of Human Rights to end the religious intolerance towards the Baha’is, including other minorities until their complete emancipation (UN Res2000:para 13).

Subsequent resolutions passed in the millennium have expressed concern over the increasing discrimination towards the Baha’i community which included “the suspension of social, educational and community-related activities and the denial of access to higher education, employment, pensions and other benefits” (UN Res 2005:para 2h), including “preventing the members of the Baha’i faith from attending university and from sustaining themselves economically...” (UN Res 2008: para 2(f)). Therefore, the resolutions have called upon the Iranian government

... to eliminate all forms of discriminations based on religious grounds or against persons belonging to minorities and to address this matter in an open manner with full participation of the minorities themselves, and to implement fully the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the question of religious intolerance relating to the Baha’is and other religious minorities until they are completely emancipated (UN Resolution, 2002: para 4d).

In the last half a decade, the UNGA resolutions have expressed their concern regarding the intensification of persecution against the unrecognised religious minorities, Baha’is in particular, including the targeted attack on the BIHE (UN Res2012b:para 2j); the restricted access of the Baha’is to higher education due to their religion; long-term prison sentences to 12 Baha’is associated with the Baha’i educational institutions; and the “defacto criminalisation of membership in the Baha’i faith” (UN Res 2013b: para 2k). They further called upon the government to eliminate all sorts of discriminations, including in higher education, and the criminalisation of the Baha’i faith (ibid: para 7g).

The two *Universal Periodic Reviews* (UPR) in 2010 and 2014 conducted by the member-states of the United Nations, have expressed their concerns on Iran's human rights records, with special regard to the Baha'is (UN 2010b; UN 2014d). In its response, however, the Iranian government has ignored the questions and comments regarding its treatment of the Baha'i community along with failing to implement the recommendations given in the reviews. In 2010 review, at least 21 nations referred to the situation of Baha'is in Iran and they included countries like Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Luxembourg, Canada and France. They called for termination of religious discrimination of any form towards the Iranian Baha'is, including the discrimination in the fields of education, along with expressing concern over the seven detained Baha'i leaders. The Iranian delegations continue to maintain that the Baha'is enjoy full citizenship rights, even though they are not recognised as an official religion in Iran. Moreover, the limitations on some of the Baha'i students in their access to education was attributed to their failure to meet the admission requirements (UN, 2010b:para 42).

In the 2014 *Universal Periodic Review* (UPR) countries like Denmark, Hungary, Peru, Chile, Sierra Leone, Sweden, Australia, Austria, Czech Republic, France, Lithuania and Mexico have given specific attention on the Baha'i situation and called for elimination of all forms of discriminations, in law and practice, towards the Baha'i community along with offering legal protection to the same (UN 2014d). The response from the Iranian delegation regarding the minority situation, especially the Baha'is, was the same like its response in 2010 that the Baha'is enjoy equal citizenship status in Iran. However, it added that "it was a paradoxical situation that certain states were perfectly willing to deprive the whole nation of Iran of basic rights through unwarranted and discriminatory sanctions but were deeply concerned about the status of the Baha'i citizens" (UN, 2014d:para 136).

In this review Iran has rejected all the recommendations that explicitly focused on the Baha'i situation, except recommendation 138.131 by Chile which recommended to adopt provisions for prevention of all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and "in particular, promote access to higher education for members of the Baha'i community and other religious minorities". Interesting to note here is that this recommendation has been partially accepted and the reason given by Iran is that "full implementation of some of these recommendations is contrary to our constitution, basic laws and Islamic values" (UN 2015a:3). Therefore, it can be

said that none of the recommendation on the Baha'i question got any support from Iranian authorities, making it quite obvious of its uncompromising approach towards the international community's call regarding the Baha'i situation in Iran.

Conclusion

The onset of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic had made things quite obvious regarding the kind of the new Republic that Ayatollah Khomeini sought to bring into force. "Islamisation" became the sole target of the Iranian authorities, which reflected very much in every aspect of the Iranian society, particularly in its educational arena. The Baha'i faith, being a post-Abrahamic faith, was denied any constitutional recognition unlike the three religious minorities in Iran, Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians. This constitutional non-recognition became the source of all forms of discriminations towards the Baha'i community whereby they have been particularly targeted, monitored, harassed and persecuted, solely on the basis of their religious faith.

Knowing the importance the Baha'is attach to education, the Iranian authorities have routinely created a systematic approach to eliminate the Baha'is from accessing higher education. The Baha'i professors and university students were expelled during the period of Cultural Revolution. The new university entrance examination admission forms included the criteria of mentioning of the applicant's religious faith from the option of four recognised religions. Because of these changes, the Baha'is have been systematically excluded from university education since 1979.

Thanks to the global awareness of this situation and the consequent pressure from the international community, this criteria of mentioning one's religion has been removed in the university entrance examination admission forms in 2003 and Baha'is, for the first time, got an opportunity to sit for the entrance examination. Nevertheless, situation remained uncertain for the Baha'is, as the Iranian authorities came up with new measures and excuses to hinder the enrolment of the Baha'i students, either during the admission process, or their subsequent expulsion during their course once their Baha'i faith has been revealed.

Nevertheless, the Iranian authorities still could not be completely successful in halting Baha'is access to higher education. As mentioned earlier, Baha'is attach utmost importance on

education for the basic survival of the faith, and therefore, the Iranian Baha'i community has found means and ways to provide an alternative exposure for the Baha'i youth who wish to continue their higher education. This formulated in the establishment of the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) in 1987 which provided a platform not just for the Baha'i youth to get their access to higher education, but also to the Baha'i professors in the Iranian universities who were also expelled or forced to resign due to their faith following the Iranian Revolution. Therefore, the BIHE became an umbrella where the Baha'is sharing the same fate have found a social platform of achieving their aim of getting higher education, even though the BIHE is not recognised by the Iranian government.

The role of the international community deserves special mention in making the situation of the Iranian Baha'is aware on a global scale along the lobbying of the Baha'i International Community for which the Iranian government now has come under regular scrutiny of its human right situations, especially with regard to its treatment of the Baha'i community. While periodic reports and resolutions have provided consistent pressure on Iran, the Iranian authorities have most of the times failed to reply to the allegations concerning the state-sponsored discriminations towards the Iranian Baha'is.

One important point to note here is the Iranian government has been refusing to admit its mistreatment towards the Baha'i community and along with its refusal to consider it as a religious minority group, it sees them rather as a "cult" or a "misguided sect" and hence an enemy of Iran. However, Iran being under constant watch by the international community for its human rights violations and this has somehow helped in reducing, if not totally eliminating the persecution and discriminations towards the Baha'i community. Baha'is do get the opportunity to sit for the university entrance examinations and to refute the international community's allegations, some of them do get admission in universities as well. However, during the course, Baha'i students get expelled on some pretext or the other, with the Iranian authorities making sure that no written proof is given for the reasons of their expulsion. What is to be noted here is that only those Baha'is who have never revealed their faith, earlier, or during the admission time, somehow manage to escape from expulsions from the universities.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Baha'is being its largest religious minority, have been a constant source of discomfort and challenge for Iran since the inception of the faith in the mid-1800s and the Baha'is never received formal legal recognition either in the Pahlavi regime, or under the Islamic Republic since 1979. In the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905, the new constitution, for the first time, acknowledged Muslims and non-Muslims as equal citizens. The new constitution, also, for the first time gave recognition to its religious minorities. However, this status was given only to those religions that are recognised as the Abrahamic faiths, that is, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrians and Islam and enabled them with representations in the Iranian Parliament. Baha'ism, being a post-Abrahamic faith, was thus denied any recognition or representation. The onset of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic continued this stand as well.

Islam of the Twelver Shi's sect became the official religion of the new Republic, and the three Abrahamic faiths, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrians, were given formal recognition as the recognised religious minorities (RRMs) in Article 13 of its constitution. This arrangement once again deprived the Baha'is of any formal or legal recognition as a minority. As a result, in spite of being the largest religious minority group of approximately 300,000-350,000 population, the Baha'is are unrecognised, and consequently have no formal recognition of their existence as citizens of the Islamic Republic.

Interesting to note here is the discourses on the non-recognition of the Baha'i community take different pattern in both pre- and post-revolution Iran. It is true that the Baha'i community faced formal non-recognition since the birth of the faith. Even though the situation of the Baha'is in pre-revolution period was comparatively better, the non-recognition, exploitation and discrimination that Baha'is had to face was based on theological lines and the faith was called a "misguided sect" rather than a distinct religion. The post-revolution Iran, on the other hand, has witnessed not only further deterioration of the human conditions of the Baha'is, but it also has justified its exploitative treatment, attitude and non-recognition by adding a political tone. The

Baha'is, along being called a “misguided sect”, are now being accused of being an espionage of the foreign powers like the US, Russia and Israel, who also happen to be an apparent ally of the pre-Revolution Shah regime.

The Iranian Revolution was not just a revolution to overthrow the Pahlavi regime, but was also a revolution aimed at transforming the whole of Iran and aligning it with Islamic principles. It was not just the state system which became Islamic in its ideology, but also the whole society which subsequently underwent through the process of “Islamisation”. From the imposition of Islamic dress-code, to eradication of every element secular and western from the society, the Islamic Republic sought to revive and ‘restore’ the country to its old Islamic traditions.

This was reflected in its education system. “Islamisation” being the key and was imposed on every educational institutions, from changing the school names to changes in the curricula. Even though the recognised religious minorities (RRMs), are allowed to operate their own schools, the state has imposed certain restrictions like reducing the time of teaching languages other than Persian, and appointment of Muslim principals, teachers and clerics in these schools in order to prevent the Muslims from attending these schools run by the minorities. In curriculum, religious education is mandatory and the RRM's are allowed to teach their own religion instead of Islam.

However, only a single textbook called *Religious Studies Specially for Religious Minorities: Jews, Zoroastrians and Christians*, produced under a directive of the Ministry of Education and Training (MET) is given to these RRM's as for their course on religion. Minority-run schools also are required to seek permission from the state authorities before conducting any ceremonies, including religious ones. In the higher education, too, the national university entrance examination or *konkur*, requires the applicants to sit for the compulsory religious examination which includes only the recognised religious. Baha'is as unrecognised religious minorities, thus, find no scope or space in the Iranian education system. Moreover, senior Iranian officials have been calling for the ‘eradication’ of the Baha'i faith due to its professed believes against Islam.

Education is an intrinsic aspect of the Baha'i faith and the sole survival of faith rests with education. The absence of the concept of clergy in the Baha'i faith makes the role of education one of its cardinal principles. Hence during the inception of the modernisation process in Persia, the Baha'is were found to be at the forefront in reforming the education system. It is this

involvement that gave Persia some of the finer educational institutes, advanced in providing modern education to students of all religions. All changes in the education system that Iran witnessed in its modernisation process, from introducing modern curriculum to providing education for both male and female, had a major contribution from the Baha'i community in Iran. These transformations in the education system are also the cardinal principles of the role of education of the Baha'i faith that are mentioned in its holy book *Kitab-e-Aqdas*.

The deliberate state-sponsored exclusion from the education system since the Islamic Revolution, did not lead to complete eradication of the Baha'is from attaining their education. While Baha'i children get limited access to state schools in spite of the harassment and discrimination from the education system, the higher education completely closed to its doors the Baha'is following the Iranian Revolution though its discriminatory policy regarding the admission process of *konkur* which required the aspirants to mention their religion among the given options which included only the recognised religions.

In response to this situation, the Baha'is came up with an alternative to provide its youth the higher education by establishing an informal system called the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) in 1987 which offered courses and educational quality on par with the education system outside. BIHE, more than a platform for providing higher education to those who aspire and has also given a social space to the Baha'i community in Iran who shares a common fate, to gather under one umbrella and work together to eliminate the hurdles thrown at them. The involvement of voluntary services in BIHE, thus, has helped the institution in expanding its network to a global recognition, even though not recognised by the Iranian authorities. Changes in the admission process in 2003, which amended the option of mentioning one's religion, provided a limited higher educational access to the Baha'is for the first time and Baha'i students are getting admissions in Iranian universities, in the face of the challenges posed by the authorities.

Nevertheless, the Iranian attitude towards the Baha'i situation is not homogenous. While the state's attitude towards the Baha'is is one of non-recognition and discrimination, voices of concern and condemnation of the atrocious have been heard from the Iranian scholars, intellectuals and human rights activists. Some *ulamas* have even shown their differences with respect to the Baha'is and prominent *ulamas* like Ayatollah Montezari, Hassan Yousefi

Eshkavari and Ayatollah Abdol-Hamid Masoumi Tehran, to name a few, have openly called for an end to the human rights violations of the Iranian Baha'is, along with giving the due recognition to the Baha'i community. It is, therefore, important to note that the responses of non-government sources regarding the Baha'is is not completely in line with the Iranian authority's position on the Baha'i community.

Finally, the contribution of the international community deserves special recognition. The Baha'i faith being an independent world religion is recognised by the international community. Moreover, the Baha'is around the world, including in Iran, have representations in the Universal House of Justice. The role of the Baha'i International Community in providing documentation, reports and news to the United Nations where it has its representation has helped in raising the voices of the Iranian Baha'is which is suppressed in Iran. Human rights organisations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, have monitor and document the conditions of Baha'is in Iran, including the educational discrimination that they face. The *Religious Freedom Reports* of the United States Department is one of the most important sources which provides annual detailed accounts of the religious minority community, both recognised and unrecognised, in Iran. Lastly, the United Nations and its agencies present the most significant platform in the international community to keep the Iranian authorities under constant scrutiny regarding the condition of its human rights in the country, along with its treatment of the Baha'is. Through its reports and resolutions they have been asking the Iranian government to eliminate all forms of discrimination targeted at the Baha'is. Being a signatory to International Convention of Civil and Political Rights (1968) and International Convention of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1968) Iran has been consistently accused by the UN of violating human rights, especially through discriminatory practices towards the Baha'is and thereby make Iran answerable and accountable to the international community.

The Iranian authorities have consistently maintained their attitude towards the Baha'i faith and have refused to consider Baha'is as a religious faith, but rather a "misguided sect" who works as an espionage of Israel and earlier as an ally of Pahlavi regime's secret police force SAVAK. Since the emergence of the faith, the Baha'is have not given any formal recognition in the country of its birth and the same position persists after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Denied of any constitutional recognition in the new Republic, the existence of the Baha'is in Iran has no

formal guarantee. For long, Baha'i marriages were not recognised, resulting in depriving Baha'i children from inheritance rights and other government facilities.

Same forms of discriminations are reflected in its education system. With the "Islamisation" of primary and secondary schools, unrecognised religious minority such as the Baha'is were adversely affected in getting admission in schools. The textbook curriculum, including the course on religion, only mentions of the recognised religious minorities while at the same time portraying a distorted picture of the Baha'is, depicting them as an enemy of the state of Iran and Islam, a colonial formation of the British and a spy for Israel. This position of the Iranian authorities has largely targeted the Baha'is in the educational system, making them victim of discriminations and harassment. This proves the first hypothesis of this dissertation that the educational condition of the Baha'is in the Islamic Republic has been adversely affected by larger issue of their non-recognition as a religious minority.

The Baha'i faith being a contemporary faith and having followers all over the world has been recognised as an independent world religion in the international community. Moreover, the Baha'i community, is represented in the United Nations. The Baha'i International Community (BIC) through its periodic reports, documentations and news has persistently been a voice of the suppressed Iranian Baha'is for the international community. This global representation has been a tremendous leverage for the Iranian Baha'is to make aware of its situation in the country. In matters of education, this global awareness has come to fruition when the Iranian Baha'is established the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) in 1987. Its Affiliated Global Faculty (AGF), with professors from worldwide universities assisting and tutoring the Iranian Baha'is, is a significant backing to the efforts of the Baha'is to pursue their higher education that is denied in the Iranian universities by the state authorities. Moreover, the very fact that BIHE is globally recognised help the BIHE graduates to continue their higher education in universities outside Iran as well. This is one reason that BIHE still continues to exist in its operations amidst the targets, raids and detentions of its members by the Iranian authorities.

The international community, especially the United Nations, has also contributed in highlighting the human rights situations of the Iranian Baha'is, including the educational discrimination that it faces. By making the 1991 secret Iranian memorandum on the "Baha'i Question" public, it has largely exercised its pressure tactics on the Iranian authorities to give access to the Baha'is in

higher education. This materialised in 2003 when Iranian authorities amended the admission process by omitting any reference to applicant's religious criteria same. Baha'is, therefore, have been able to sit for the national university entrance examination even though post-admission discriminations have not stopped. The role of the international community in addressing the Baha'i issue in Iran, thus, have helped in sustaining Baha'is educational access amidst the ongoing violations aiming to complete eradication of the community. This proves the second hypothesis that despite state discriminations, the Baha'i education system has been sustained with the backing of the international community and Baha'is worldwide.

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