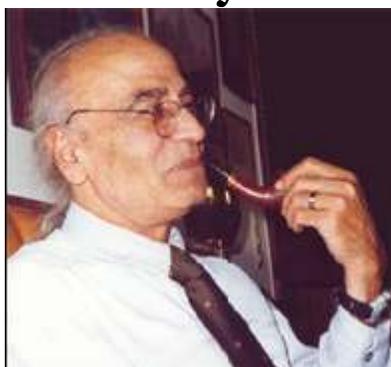


Suppression of Bahá'ís of Iran in 1955

By



Dr. Bahram Choubine

Translated by Ahang Rabbani

Translator's Introduction

In introducing 'Alí Dashtí's seminal work, *23 Sá'l*, the renowned Iranian sociologist and intellectual Dr. Bahram Choubine has penned an enlightening essay that places the events of twentieth century Iran in their fuller perspective. This essay has been widely available on the internet in such places as, <http://www.kavehroom.com/books/23years/dashti1.pdf>.

More recently, the erudite author has considerably expanded this essay and has included more analysis and documentation, and has offered it as a preface to Dasthí's *23 Sá'l*, distributed by Alburz Publishing, in Frankfurt, Germany. A section of this expanded essay (pages 34-42), appearing under the heading, "Sarkúb Bahá'íyán," is provided below in translation with the kind permission of the author. All footnotes are by the author, unless otherwise noted, as are all comments in parentheses. Clarifying remarks in square brackets []

are by the translator. Subheadings have been added in the translation to provide clarity and assist the reader's understanding.

The Persian original of this section is also available on-line at: http://www.negah.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=382&Itemid=15.

Most names and Persian terms have been transliterated in accordance with academic standards, except some commonly recognized names, such as Khomeini, have been given in their popular rendering.

Suppression of Bahá'ís

By Dr. Bahram Choubine

Persecution and slaying of the Bábís and Bahá'ís was part of the daily activities of the clerics and monarchs of the Qajar dynasty. For religious and political purposes, the propensity to kill Bábís and Bahá'ís continued to the conclusion of the Qajar era.

The Bábís had an important role in the Constitutional Movement of Iran and indeed one could claim that their efforts to advance the Constitutional Revolution were critical and constructive. However, this fact does not imply that Bahá'ís were not supportive of Constitutional rule, as it must be understood that their leaders insisted that Bahá'ís should not participate in political activities, in order that the newly-founded Baha'í community would remain immune from the attacks of radical constitutionalists, who were all among the leading clerics of the time.

Reza Shah's Reign

During the rule of Reza Shah, several towns witnessed Bahá'í-killings. However, as a whole, persecution of Baha'ís was not one of the political objectives of Reza Shah's era, as his main goal was to limit the influence of religious clerics. It was during his reign that the

notion of *millat* [national identity] acquired its roots, and to some degree, the religious identity of *ummat* [body of believers] was gradually replaced by *millat*. That is, the country was moving in a direction such that citizens considered themselves *Iranians* without concern for religious belief, political orientation or tribal affiliation. However, in the years after Reza Shah's demise, gradually that policy was abandoned and, once more, the idea of *ummat Islámi* [body of Muslims] entered political discourse. Moreover, the cold war against the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc reinforced this idea among the political figures of Iran.

The organization of *Fedáiyán Islám* [Devotees of Islam] was founded after Reza Shah was deposed and was an effort to combat leftist tendencies in Iran.

Post-Reza Shah

In the 20s and 30s [1320s and 30s according to the Islamic calendar; equivalent to the 1940s and 50s], on the pretext that they opposed the Shi'a religion or had leftist tendencies, the persecution of religious minorities, particularly Baha'is, forced the government and the Shah to follow the path of *ummat Islami* and obliged them to openly oppose the principles of the Constitutional Revolution and the country's adopted constitution. Almost all political and prominent personalities of every faction, significantly contributed to this wayward political path and forced Iranian society's accelerated departure from the established norms of democratic principles enshrined in the goals of the Constitutional Revolt. It was an opportune moment for strengthening of democratic foundations, and yes alas, the moment was lost, and the chance to arouse people's support for implementation of improvements and reforms, even within a controlled framework, was lost to the Shah and the government.

With Reza Shah's exit, intense criticism of his rule began. The clerical establishment, like ants, set out to wreck the foundations of nation's democratic system and thus every aspect of modern life, enlightened thought, social progress and liberty, became a toy in the hands of repressive powers in Iran. After 20 Shahrivar [11 September

1941, the day of Reza Shah's departure], the entire Shi'a ecclesiastical order, joined by the ruling class, arose and forced women, once again, to wear chadors and veils, and closed all mixed-gender schools. Islamic propaganda groups and societies were organized throughout the country which began disseminating publications on "truths and teachings of Islam" and as well as various religious pamphlets, daily newspapers and weekly or monthly journals – all of which had the suffix of *Islam* or *Islamic* in their titles.

In sum, the clerics' long-held hatred of the Babis and then of the Baha'i movement once again came to the surface and the field for expressing animosity and abhorrence of religious minorities, particularly Baha'is, as well as exponents of enlightened and progressive thought among Iranians, became wide open. At clerics' insistence, Islamic training and [Orthodox] religious education were interjected in the curricula of all elementary and high schools throughout the nation.

All of these events took place in Tehran and other cities during the 20s [1940s] and centered on opposition to Baha'is, Ahmad Kasravi and his supporters, and the Tudeh Party and its members – all of which occurred under the supervision of the government or with the direct collusion of the authorities. In truth, it was the clerical order that established the notion of *Da'iy Jan Napoleon*¹ among the Iranians who suspect that whatever occurs in Iran is the work of foreign agents. Fictitious and fabricated documents, such as, *Memoirs of Prince Dolgorouki*,² which was manufactured by the fiction-weaving

¹ *Da'iy Jan Napoleon* is a masterpiece of socio-political satire by the renowned satirist Iraj Pezeshkzad. [In the course of this entertaining and fascinating novel, which later was made into a popular play, Pezeshkzad discloses the Iranian tendency to think that behind every misfortune is the hand of foreigners, particularly the British. For a discussion of the Iranian preoccupation with conspiracy, see Moojan Momen, "Conspiracy Theories and Forgeries: The Baha'i Community of Iran and the Construction of an Internal Enemy", presented in the proceedings of Sixth Biennial Conference of Iranian Studies, August 2006. Translator]

² Prince Dimitri Dolgoroukov [Dolgorouki] was the Russian Ambassador to Iran during 1845-54. The book, *Memoirs of Kinyaz Dolgorouki*, a creation of the

pen of Ali Javaher-Kalam, and published with the financial support of Astan Quds Razavi³, and the backing of the leading Shi'a clerics, were disseminated – as one example of many such products which originated from the clerical establishment.⁴

In reality, the widespread perfidious belief that “any non-Islamic idea is the creation of foreigners” stemmed from the putrid minds of the mullas. Through this devious approach, they attached such labels as “anti-Iranian” and “foreign” to everything that was not Islamic and which could undermine their exercise of power gained under the pretext of serving religious orthodoxy. This deceitful “Othering”, and spreading the seeds of sedition and enmity, not only engulfed religious minorities, progressive nationalistic parties and independent leftist groups, but eventually damaged beyond repair the very authority of the government and constitutional rule. That is, it eventually resulted in the clerics widely claiming that the people’s Constitutional Revolution, which in reality had taken place in protest against clerical influence and the absolutist rule of the Qajar, was an exploit of the Russian and British governments in order to serve their own interests. They propagated this baseless idea, insisting that constitutional rule and secular law were fundamentally at variance

troubled mind of Ali Javaher-Kalam, endeavors to connect the Babi and Baha’i movements to Tsarist Russia. At first, this book attracted considerable attention in Iran, but soon the fact that it was a mere forgery was thoroughly established by historians and religious researchers. In a well-regarded article, Professor Abbas Iqbal Ashtiyani proved these memoirs to be a forgery created by troublemakers; (Yadegar Journal, Year 5, numbers 8 and 9). Professor Mujtaba-Minui considers these memoirs to be a forgery and the forger to be an Iranian; (Rahnami Kitab Journal, Year 6, numbers 1 and 2). Similarly, refer to *Amir Kabir va Iran* [Amir Kabir and Iran], by Fereydoun Adamiyyat, where the issue is discussed on a footnote on page 456.

³ [Astan Quds Razavi is responsible for maintenance and supervision of the Sacred Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, which has a strong publishing arm, as well as administering many religious schools and endowments. Translator]

⁴ [Adamiyyat (*Amir Kabir va Iran*, p. 456) was the first to attribute the authorship of the fictional *Memoirs of Kinyaz Dolgorouki* to Ali Javaher Kalam. However, subsequent research has proven this not to be the case. A detailed analysis will be the subject of a forthcoming study by Mina Yazdani. Translator.]

with the luminous religion of Islam and with Iran's historical tradition.

Early 1955 Opposition to Baha'is

It was stated earlier that after the 28 Mordad *coup d'état*,⁵ the mullas insisted that their significant contribution to the revolution be recognized, and this was only possible by suppression of the Tudeh Party and Baha'is. The contemptuous and renowned preacher, Hujjatu'l-Islam Muhammad-Taqi Falsafi, has stated in his memoirs that his sermons against the Baha'is took place with the prior consent of Ayatollah Borujerdi and Muhammad-Reza Shah. In an interview on 19 Urdibehesht 1334 [10 May 1955] with a reporter of "Itehad-e Melli" Journal, Falsafi described his meeting with Ayatollah Borujerdi in these words:

Before the blessed month of Ramadan, I went to Qum where I met Ayatollah Borujirdi and found him deeply distressed. He stated, "Now that the situation of the Oil industry has been resolved and the Tudeh Party has been neutralized, we must make plans for Baha'is and confront this challenge."

In *Khaterat va Mubarezat* [Memories and Struggles], Muhammad-Taqi Falsafi writes:

Ayatollah Borujerdi sent me a message to convey the issue [of Baha'is] to the governmental authorities. ...

⁵ [This is a reference to the 28 Mordad 1332 (19 August 1953) coup against the government of Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh (19 May 1882 - 5 March 1967), who was an elected prime minister of Iran from 1951 to 1953. Mossadegh was a nationalist, and passionately opposed foreign intervention in Iran. He was also the architect of the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry, which was dominated and exploited by the British through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (today known as British Petroleum). Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi removed him from power in a CIA orchestrated coup, supported and funded by the British and the U.S. governments. Translator]

Eventually, after Ramadan 1332 [May 1953], he sent me a letter instructing me to meet with the Shah and to express the Ayatollah's disapproval and displeasure over the situation of [the relative freedom of] Baha'is. ... Before Ramadan of 1333 [May 1954], I asked Ayatollah Borujerdi, 'Are you supportive of the idea that I discuss the situation of Baha'is during my radio sermons which are broadcast live from Masjed Shah?' He thought for a moment and then responded, 'If you did, it would be good. For now, the authorities are paying little attention (to the suppression and annihilation of Baha'is). At least that would put them [Baha'is] in a bad light in the field of public opinion.'

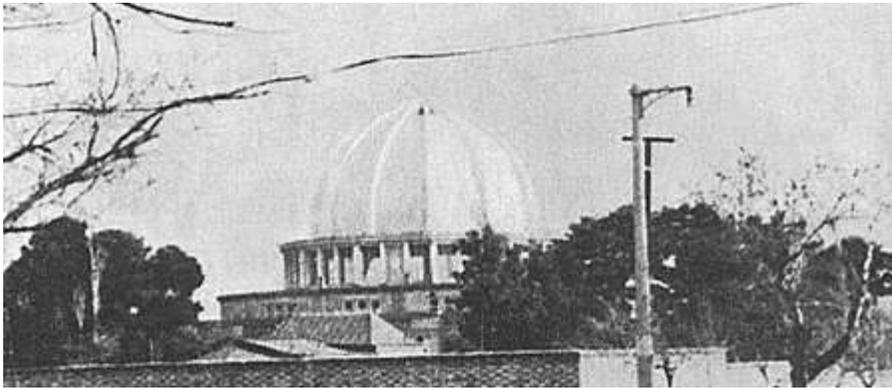
He added further, 'It is necessary to mention this to the Shah beforehand so that he would not have an excuse later to intercede, ruin everything and terminate the radio broadcasts. Such a thing would be most unfortunate for the Muslims as it would embolden the Baha'is.'

I called the Shah's office and requested an appointment. When I met the Shah, I stated, 'Ayatollah Borujerdi has consented that the issue of Baha'is, which is a cause of concern for the Muslims, be dealt with and discussed in my radio sermons during the month of Ramadan. Would your majesty consent as well?'

Falsafi relates that the Shah remained silent for a moment and then stated, "Go and preach accordingly."⁶

⁶ *Khaterat va Mubarezat Hujjatu'l-Islam Falsafi* [Memories and Struggles of Hujjatu'l-Islam Falsafi], published by Markaz Asnad Inqelab Islami, 4th printing, pages 200ff. In the same book, various documents and accounts are found that illustrate how the mullas and political figures worked hand-in-hand against the Baha'i community and strove to suppress and harm them. They even entertained the adoption of a parliamentary measure that would make it illegal to be a Baha'i. These documents clearly prove that the Shah and his appointed prime minister, Asadu'llah Alam, were complete partners in these undertakings. In the book, *A'yn Bahá'í Yik Nihzat Siasiy Nist* [The Bahá'í Faith

From 1327 [1948], each Ramadan, Falsafi used to deliver sermons against the Tudeh Party. Elimination and annihilation of the Babis and Baha'is was the cherished desire of the mullas and their partners in the government. During those days, it was widely said that strikes against Baha'is and destruction of their administrative and religious centers was one of government's objectives. However, this had to wait until Ramadan 1334 [May 1955].



Baha'i Center in Tehran (prior to 1955)

is not a Political Movement], published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Germany, after proving that the Baha'i Faith has no political objective, the various objections raised by the leaders of the Islamic Republic are addressed and answered. The author or the authors of this book, in particular, have noted the manifold problems that the Baha'is had with the government during Reza Shah's reign. In 1320 [1941], a number of Baha'is of Yazd, on the charge of being Baha'i, were imprisoned. In 1322 [1943], all local Baha'i centers in various cities were confiscated and some were destroyed. In 1325 [1946], a number of Baha'is were killed in Kashan and Shahrud, and the perpetrators were never arrested. In 1330 [1951], a jihad [religious warfare] against Baha'is was proclaimed and they were accused of collaboration with the communists. After Shaykh Muhammad-Taqi Falsafi's sermons in 1334 [1955], Baha'is were persecuted throughout Iran and a number of them were killed. In 1335 [1956], the Baha'is complained to the United Nations about these persecutions and discriminations. From 1956 until 1963, Baha'i gatherings were proclaimed unlawful by the government. Finally, in September 1357 [1978], SAVAK organized anti-Baha'i riots in Shiraz aiming at diverting the Revolution and turning it into an uprising against the Baha'is. Over 300 Baha'i homes were plundered and then set on fire. Ayatollah Khomeini in Paris spoke of this incident and pointed out its true character.

1955 Baha'i Persecution

In accordance with Ayatollah Borujirdi's wishes, immediately after the 28 Mordad [coup], the attack against the Baha'is began with Falsafi's sermons delivered in Ramadan of 1334 [1955]. The brutal attack led to the confiscation of Baha'i properties in every city by the government. In Tehran, in front of the cameras of both foreign and domestic reporters, General [Nader] Batmanghelich, the chief of staff of the Iranian army, along with [General] Taymour Bakhtiar, the military commander of Tehran, took pickaxes and demolished the dome of the Baha'i Center. For many years, that building was impounded by the military and used as its own command center.



Generals Batmanghelich and Bakhtiar demolishing Tehran's Baha'i Center

General Muhammad Ayarmalu, the deputy-chief of the most powerful branch of government, namely, the Department for Security and Information [SAVAK], writes the following in his memoirs:

One morning, General Batmanghelich, the chief of staff of the army, along with General Taymour Bakhtiar, the military commander, climbed the dome of the Baha'i Center [in Tehran] and using pickaxes began to demolish it.

The next morning, the military attaché of the United States came to my office and in a voice shaking with rage protested, “What was this act that the chief of staff committed? Why would the military chief take-up an ax, and before the gaze of multitudes, demolish a building? Furthermore, he destroyed a building that is deeply respected and cherished by many of your citizens! My country is assisting Iran to repair the ruins, and now you turn a beautiful building into a ruin?!”

As I, too, was puzzled over this illogical destruction – particularly by the hands of such a high-ranking officer – I remained quiet and said nothing.

A few hours later, the late Batmanghelich summoned me into his office and impatiently asked, “What are the military attachés saying about yesterday’s occurrences?”

I, openly, shared the comments of the American military attaché and added, “Several more of the military attachés have expressed their perplexity and disappointment over this incident.” When I saw signs of distress in his face, I asked, “General, what truly motivated you to undertake this act?” He lifted his head and responded, “I had no motives. It was the chief’s order.” And by that he meant the late Muhammad-Reza Shah.

As later I read in various publications, Muhammad-Reza Shah had given this order in order to appease several influential akhunds [clerics], particularly Siyyid Abu'l-Qasem Kashani. ... It is ironic to note that twenty-five years later, the late Muhammad-Reza Shah witnessed the result of giving so much license to the akhunds. Also twenty-five years later, when General Batmanghelich was arrested and prosecuted at the height of the 1357 [1978] Revolution, he recounted this incident in his semi-successful defense.”⁷



⁷ *Yadvareh Yek Bacheh Qazraq* [Memoirs of a Military Lad], written by General Muhammad Ayarmalu, first printing, Germany, pages 213-214.

Clerical Influence over the Government

The activities of Ayatollah Borujerdi, and essentially the entire efforts of the Shi'a ecclesiastic order against Baha'is, were not only aimed at securing the "foundation of the luminous religion of Islam". In fact, this undertaking was an instrument for the clerics to portray themselves as actual participants in the 28 Mordad *coup d'état* and restoration of the Shah to his throne.

By yielding to the illegal wishes of the religious and clerical establishment after the 28 Mordad *coup d'état*, the Shah and his government, in effect, placed a stamp of approval on the clerics' partnership in government's exercise of power. Through a study of documents, letters and communications of the clerics after the 28 Mordad *coup d'état* until the 1357 [1978] Revolution we can see how intertwined and aligned the relationship between the royal court, the government and the clerics had become. This friendly association developed into such close relationship that hoping to realize his satanic fancies, Ayatollah Borujerdi asked the Shah and Prime Minister Hossein Ala' to modify the contents of the nation's constitution through parliamentary action. This is the text of his letter:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

To his Excellency [Hossein Ala'] the Prime Minister, may his glory last!

Your Excellency's letter of 5 Tir 1334 [27 June 1955] conveying the necessary instructions of his majesty to the government regarding my suggestions as communicated in my letter of 27 Shavval 1373 [29 June 1954] was received through Haj Qa'imu'l-Mulk Rafi. The essence of my suggestions, as noted in your letter, are:

1. The Baha'i sect must be prevented from propagation [of its teachings] which is against the luminous religion of Islam.

2. Their centers and gatherings, wherever found across the country, must be closed.

3. Any governmental worker who is not of one of the religions mentioned in the Constitution must be expelled after due investigation. Consequently, the Baha'is would fall into this category [and be expelled].

May God, exalted is His Station, protect holy Islam and the independence of Iran from the harm of accidents and attack of the enemies. And may He confirm and succor his majesty and the authorities in their work of protecting the country and supporting the sacred religion [of Islam].

Upon thee be peace, the Mercy of God and His Bounties.

7 Dhi'l-Qa'dah 1374/7 Tir 1334 [28 June 1955]

Husayn Tabataba'i.⁸

During that time and subsequently, Muhammad-Taqi Falsafi would cry out in warning in every mosque and place of worship in Tehran or other cities from which he preached:

Merchants, employees, students, and brave workers of Iran! Arise and combat these irreligious people⁹ and Baha'i-sympathizers¹⁰ and completely exterminate them, so that it will be proven that (Imam) Ali is alive, the Prophet (of Islam) is alive and the religion of Islam will not fade away.

⁸ *Marja'iyat dar 'Arseh Ijtima' va Siyasat: Asnad va Guzareshba'i az Ayat 'Uzam Na'ini, Isfahani, Qumi, Hairi va Borujerdi – 1292 ta 1339 Shamsi* [Highest Authority in Society and Politics: Documents and Reports from the Grand Ayatollahs Na'ini, Isfahani, Qumi, Hairi and Borujerdi – spanning 1913 to 1960], compiled by Siyyid Husayn Manzur'l-Ajdad, Tehran, Shirazeh Press, p. 498.

⁹ [Meaning, Baha'is. Translator]

¹⁰ Meaning the Shah, the Prime Minister and members of the national parliament.

Do not permit this illegal government to belittle Islam any longer!

After their successful role in the 28 Mordad *coup d'état*, the clerical establishment would blame the Baha'is for every shortcoming in political, societal or economic conditions, and through this stratagem would provoke religious sentiments, as well as inflame the latent anti-Baha'i attitude of the Iranian people. Whenever the Shah or the government retreated on the announced [anti-Baha'i] objectives, the clerics and Shi'a leaders would refer to "the agreement between the government and the clerics," or threaten "the fall of the government", or would say, "Through God's will, strivings of the courageous nation of Islam and the indefatigable ulama [clerics], a mighty victory will be achieved!"¹¹

In a telegram to the Shah, Ayatollah Siyyid Muhammad Behbahani stated, "I offer my heartfelt gratitude for closing this center¹² of religious and national sedition through the efforts of the Islamic army and consider this auspicious event to be among the annual religious events worthy of celebration." In response to Ayatollah Behbahani, the Shah noted, "As you have repeatedly heard us state, we consider ourselves bound to carry out the requirements of Islam and beseech the Almighty to continue confirming us in this undertaking."

In a cable to the Shah, Ayatollah Borujerdi referred to Baha'is as "enemies and trouble-makers" to the royal throne, and stated, "May God, exalted be His station, protect the sacred religion of Islam and Iran's monarchy from the harm of the enemy and mischief-makers, and may He preserve your majesty over all Muslims."

In a letter to Muhammad-Taqi Falsafi, Ayatollah Borujirdi – the object of emulation for all Shi'as – had expressed gratitude for his "precious services" to "the sacred religion of Islam, and indeed to all

¹¹ *Zaban Guyai-e Islam: Hujjatu'l-Islam Muhammad-Taqi Falsafi* [The Eloquent Tongue of Islam: Hujjatu'l-Islam Muhammad-Taqi Falsafi], published by Markaz Barrasi Asnad Tarikhi-e Vezarat Ittella'at, vol. 9.

¹² [Baha'i Center in Tehran.]

religions, and to the holy Qur'an." He wrote that since Baha'is held many positions in the government, the highest priority was therefore to remove them all from every agency, department and bureau of the government, and from every other position of influence. In an interview with Keyhan, he expressed his wish for destruction of the Baha'i Center in Tehran, expulsion of Baha'is from all governmental and official positions, and adoption of a [parliamentary] plan to forcibly expel all Baha'is from Iran.



Falsafi participating in destruction of Tehran's Baha'i Center

On the pulpit, Muhammad-Taqi Falsafi never hesitated to spread every manner of untrue and vicious rumor intended to provoke the simple-minded, fanatical and superstitious people against Baha'is. Using preachers' ancient weapon, he would make up false stories and relate; "One of the members of the Tudeh [Party] disclosed to me, 'As every arena of activity was closed to us and since we heard that the Baha'is intended to initiate a *coup d'état*, the following year, we, therefore gravitated towards them so that we could render a major contribution.. In order to prove our interest in the Baha'i religion, we even married Baha'i women in accordance with their traditional ceremony.'"

In response to objections from the international community and its agencies, and possibly protests from Western countries against

the maltreatment of Baha'is in Iran, Falsafi devised a new trick. On the pulpit he would say, "We do not speak of religion. Our only concern is the group who wears a religious mask, and it is against them that we speak."

Falsafi's Ties to America

He himself declared from a pulpit that he had close affiliations with the agents of the American Embassy – a place described by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as "the nest of spies". In a resonant voice he would proclaim, "I told Americans that Muslims have fought the Tudeh Party. And if they were to support the Baha'is, it would be like supporting the Tudeh Party, which is an enemy of America."

In this way, Muhammad-Taqi Falsafi painted himself as an American supporter in their fight against communism and socialism in Iran; and insinuated that the cold war waged by the Americans and their European allies was in reality also aimed at combating the Baha'is and was an instrument to suppress them within the same policy framework. His implication was that the suppression of Baha'is was not a religious issue but a struggle to guard Iran's national unity, as part of the overall plan in fighting worldwide communism.¹³

Montazeri's Role in Persecution of Baha'is

The anti-Baha'i activities of Ayatollah Borujerdi were not limited to launching Falsafi, the preacher, on his theological outbursts against Baha'is. He had dispatched his seminary students and hired thugs to every corner of the country to provoke the already inflamed religious fanatics to murder Baha'is and plunder their properties. Based on information from hundreds of documents in this regard, the present author can only briefly draw attention to the activities of Shaykh Hossein-Ali Montazeri, who was one of the most zealous mullas under the tutelage of Ayatollah Borujerdi.

At that time, Shaykh Hossein-Ali Montazeri was a young seminarian, but in the winter of his life he reached the rank of Grand

¹³ For more details, see *Iran-Nameh*, a journal of Iranian Studies, published in America, the special issue devoted to religious minorities of Iran.

Ayatollah and was a deputy to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution. He has opened the substantial account of his biography and without any hesitation – indeed with great pride – has recounted many events, and here we note only a few passages:

The late Borujerdi was extremely anti-Baha'i. For instance, they had killed a Baha'i near Yazd and planned to execute his murderer. ... Borujerdi had lost all sleep over this and wanted to prevent this hanging through any possible means.¹⁴ One year, Borujerdi also instructed Falsafi to give sermons against Baha'is on the radio during Ramadan. Ayatollah Kashani also concurred in this.

At the beginning of Ramadan, Falsafi began his preaching against Baha'is. That year his sermons became very popular and people would gather around the radio to listen to him. ...

It was about this time that I was given a mission to go to Najaf-Abad. I asked Ayatollah Borujerdi about business dealings, trade and commerce with Baha'is, and in response, he issued a written fatwa stating: "In the Exalted Name of God. It is incumbent upon all Muslim to avoid association, relationship and dealings with this sect [Baha'is]. ..."

This news of the proclamation spread throughout the city and received a great deal of publicity in mosques and other public places. ... With the announcement of this religious ruling, an extremely tense atmosphere was created against Baha'is in Najaf-Abad.

At that time, I gathered representatives from every class, creed and strata of Najaf-Abad and each was asked to produce a proclamation against Baha'is. For instance,

¹⁴ Through the illegal exertions of Ayatollah Borujerdi and the collusion of the government, the murderer was freed.

the bakers wrote, “We will not sell bread to Baha’is.” The taxi-drivers wrote, “We will not permit Baha’is in our cabs.” ... In short, a taxi ride between Najaf-Abad and Isfahan which had previously cost one tuman, could not be had for 50 tumans by a Baha’i no matter how much he pleaded.

Of course, these inhuman acts were not always based on religious faith. Many participated because they feared others or were forced to, due to the general social mood. ...

Eventually, my efforts resulted in the dispersal of the Baha’is of Najaf-Abad. ... After they were dispersed they would hide themselves from public view. ... We extended this hostility to Isfahan as well, where a widespread uproar against Baha’is was initiated. ...

After a while, it became known that I was the instigator and the author of these incidents.¹⁵

It was through the scheming of this fair-minded cleric – Ayatollah Montazeri – that the homes of the Baha’is of Najaf-Abad were plundered and looted, and thus homeless, they eventually dispersed – and the government took no action to protect them. Further, it was by the instructions of this propagandist and the brilliant mind behind *velayat-e faqih* [leadership of religious jurists] that the Baha’i Center of Najaf-Abad was set on fire and burned to the ground. Montazeri admits that Ayatollah Borujerdi, “was completely aware of my activities and was most pleased.”

Because of the machination of clerics more cunning than him, Montazeri failed to become the deputy Imam and even received a letter from his supreme leader dated 68/1/6 [26 March 1989] that for all time will illumine the history of the militant clerics. In this letter, Khomeini addressed Montazeri without the title of Ayatollah:

¹⁵ *Kbaterat Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri* [Memoirs of Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri], pages 94-96.

Your Excellency Mr. Montazeri,

With a broken heart and great sadness, I write this short letter so that one day the people may become apprised of the situation. You have forfeited the necessary prerequisites and qualifications to become the next leader of the nation.

From now on, tell the seminarians who bring you money to take the funds to Qum, to the home of Mr. Pasandideh (my brother) or to bring them to Tehran to Jamaran (my residence). Praise unto God that you have no shortage of financial means (thanks to the Islamic Revolution and plundering the possessions of Muslims and non-Muslims).

At this point in the letter, the Imam refers to his deputy as dim-witted and with the customary language of an akhund addresses Montazeri, "Since you are a simpleton", you must remain home, "perchance God would pardon you your sins." At the letter's conclusion, Khomeini writes the reason for this communication:

You have committed a treasonous act against the nameless soldiers of the Hidden Imam¹⁶ and the sacred blood of the martyrs for Islam and the Revolution. So that you would not burn in the depth of hell, you should confess your mistakes and sins perchance God would aid you.

In response to this insulting letter, the deputy of Imam Khomeini, the illustrious Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri, wrote most pathetically and meekly, "Please allow me to continue my

¹⁶ He is referring to treason against the agents of SAVAMA and VEVAK. [SAVAMA is short of Sazman-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Melli-e Iran, which was the successor of the Shah's secret police, SAVAK. Later, SAVAMA was transformed into Vezarat-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Keshvar, or VEVAK for short. Translator.]

studies and teachings as before, like a small and insignificant seminarian, under the wise shadow of your exalted leadership.”¹⁷

The Collusion of the Clerics and the Government

At the conclusion of Ramadan 1334 [May 1955], the most distinguished of the clerics, the religious leaders, the renowned preachers and promoters [of Shi‘ism] from pulpits, along with a representative of Ayatollah Borujerdi gathered in the residence of Ayatollah Khonsari. After discussions and consultations, the participants composed a communication addressed to “the presence of his majesty the king”, requesting urgent and ultimate disposal of the Baha’is of Iran. In this letter, the Muslim clerics stated at length their submission and fidelity to the Throne and pleaded with the Shah to conclude the situation of Baha’is in much the same brutal and bloody way that he had eliminated the members of the Tudeh Party, insisting that delay would only prolong the inevitable.

The struggle to cleanse Iran of the presence of “the wayward and misguided Baha’i sect” gradually turned into an anti-Western and anti-American struggle and in the course of several decades ultimately evolved into a rebellion intent on toppling the Pahlavi Dynasty in Iran.

The presence of the two highest-ranking military chiefs at the destruction of the Baha’i Center in Tehran was a clear sign of the Shah’s support, and his government encouragement, of persecution and suppression of Baha’is – an act devoid of foresight and strictly intended to appease the high-ranking clerics.

The mullas’ activities against Baha’is were not only to protect “the foundation of the luminous religion of Islam”; it was also an instrument by which the clerical establishment sought to demonstrate their power and influence to the government and people alike.

Contrary to the common belief among people – and yet supported by the unwise policies of the Tudeh Party – it was the clerical establishment that portrayed Sha‘ban Khan Ja‘fari as

¹⁷ *Khaterat Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri* [Memoirs of Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri], pages 539-540.

“tajbakhsh” [bestower of the crown or king maker]. However, the truth was something else. That is, whenever social reforms intersected with the clerics’ interest, the clerical establishment would remind the Shah and his government that he wore the crown and sat on the throne solely due to their active role in the 28 Mordad *coup d'état*.

In letters of Ayatollah Borujerdi, communications or speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini prior to 15 Khurdad [Islamic Revolution], and among the memoirs of various clerics that are presently being published by the Islamic regime in Iran, very often we see that the Shah was warned that he owed his throne to the “militant clerics” and their efforts against Dr. Mossadegh’s government. In some letters, we note that they caution the Shah that if he were to undertake any act that would displease the clerics or jurists, they had the power and ability to remove him from the throne.¹⁸

Recollections of Dr. Hairi-Yazdi

Ayatollah Abdolkarim Hairi-Yazdi was an object of emulation of the Shi‘as and the founder of the religious school in Qum. His son, Dr. Mehdi Hairi-Yazdi studied in Qum and later continued his advanced studies in western philosophy in England, the United States and Canada. He remained in the west continuing to teach and research in philosophy. Dr. Habib Ladjevardi has captured Dr. Mehdi Hairi-Yazdi’s memoirs as part of Harvard University’s “Iranian Oral History Project”. Some of these memoirs relate to events after the 28 Mordad coup, the role of clerics, the fall of Dr. Mossadegh, and the collusion of the Shah with the clerics in running the country. They

¹⁸ *Marja’iyat dar ‘Arsih Ijtima’ va Siyasat* [Authority in Society and Politics], Tehran, Autumn 1379 [2000]. In this book, we encounter many documents discussing the relationship between the Shah and his governments with various high-ranking clerics such as, Ayatollah Mirza Muhammad-Husayn Na’ini, Haji Siyyid Abu’l-Hasan Isfahani, Haji Aqa Husayn Qumi, Haji Shaykh Abdu’l-Karim Ha’iri Yazdi, and Haji Aqa Husayn Borujerdi. Indeed these documents would be most illuminating for any researcher. Alas, citing all these documents would prolong this brief essay.

are most illuminating in understanding the evolution of modern politics and religion in Iran.

Regarding the issue of *velayat-e faqih* [the rule of religious jurists], Dr. Mehdi Hairi-Yazdi states, “The way [the Islamic Republic] has defined this theory has no basis whatsoever. At least I have been unable to find any logical, or religious evidence, or any reference in past traditions or sacred books to support such a system.”

Hairi-Yazdi had a close relationship with Ayatollah Borujerdi and relates:

On religious matters, Borujerdi would instruct the regime what to do, and government would follow his wishes. For instance, he did not approve of Dr. Mossadegh. However, when the Shah returned from Italy, Borujerdi approved him.

Dr. Mossadegh showed Borujerdi great respect, to the point that he used his position to pass a special legislation banning any publication which would print anything that offended the person of the “object of emulation”. This law was passed solely for Borujerdi. It even caused annoyance to Ayatollah Kashani. In fact, one of the reasons that Kashani disassociated himself from Dr. Mossadegh was this very legislation and the feeling that Dr. Mossadegh had sided with Borujerdi.

Dr. Hairi-Yazdi relates a recollection of Ayatollah Mir Siyyid Muhammad Behbahani which is most interesting and instructive. According to this recollection, Ayatollah Behbahani had knowledge of 28 Mordad *coup d'état* before it took place. He states, “On the morning of 28 Mordad, the sun had not risen, when the phone rang.” The call was from the residence of Ayatollah Behbahani with the instruction that he should immediately come before the Ayatollah for “an urgent matter.” Hairi-Yazdi quickly went to Behbahani’s home and was told by the Ayatollah:

This morning you should leave for Qum. Go before Borujerdi and convey to him on my behalf, “Master, the country is on the verge of dismemberment. Soon it will be ruined because there is talk of forming a republic. The Shah has left and any day now, the country will be thrown into chaos and disorder. It is certain that the country will fall on the other side of the Iron Curtain. No name will remain of religion; no name of him [Borujerdi]; no mention of religious guidance; no memory of principles of the faith. The country will become communist. He should devise a plan. Perhaps a communication, or a ruling, so that people would be made aware of the truth of the matter and would rise to oppose the Tudehs.

In short, do not allow the country to become communist.

Hairi-Yazdi continues, “I should mention that the same way that he considered Baha’is to be the disruptors of security and a threat to the country’s independence, Ayatollah Borujerdi also viewed the Tudeh Party in the same light. That is, he combated the Baha’is the same way that he combated the Tudeh party.

A question was asked of Dr. Hairi-Yazdi regarding Ayatollah Borujerdi’s “intense and open battles against Baha’is after 28 Mordad.” Dr. Hairi-Yazdi responded:

At that time, Khomeini was one of the confidants of Borujerdi. In fact, it was widely acknowledged that he was Borujerdi’s foreign minister. This was at a time when he had not, as yet, come to blows with Borujerdi.

At least on one occasion during that incident, Khomeini went to the court and met with the Shah on Borujerdi’s behalf. After this meeting, I myself heard him explain, “Yes, I went as the emissary of Borujerdi and met with the Shah.” In telling this, Khomeini seemed very joyous and robust.

Khomeini continued relating for me, “I said to his majesty, ‘The late Shah, your majesty’s father, had this wayward group [Baha’is] completely reduced and immobilized. And now the people of Iran expect the same from you.’”

This is exactly what Khomeini related for me.

Borujerdi had conspired with the Shah to harass and suppress these people [Baha’is] as much as possible. They had agreed to close their Haziratu’l-Quds, which was their propaganda center located on Hafez Street. At that time, they had agreed on this plan – a plan in which the Shah himself was involved. They instructed Falsafi to commence his sermons from pulpit in Masjed Shah in Ramadan and prepare people for this. And they accomplished their plan.¹⁹

Conclusion

To appease and placate the mullas, the Shah sacrificed an innocent religious minority, when in reality, every Iranian, young and old, knew that the Baha’is had no opposition to the parliamentary government and were not enemies of the state.

After that, once more in order to indulge the mullas, SAVAK created the Hojjatiyeh Society for combating Baha’is. This Society had many branches throughout Iran under SAVAK’s supervision,²⁰

¹⁹ *Khatirat Dr. Mehdi Hairi Yazdi*, Iran Oral History Project, by Dr. Habib Hadjevardi; published by Nader, Tehran, 1382, pages 43-59.

²⁰ After the Islamic Revolution, a number of SAVAK’s secret documents were discovered. Mujadid Newspaper, in its 9 June 1980 issue, printed a facsimile of a document related to the year 1350 [1971], which is illuminating: “Regarding Anjuman Tablighat Islami [Society for the Promotion of Islam]. The supervisor of Anjuman Islami in the central office [Tehran?] has requested SAVAK to provide necessary aid in combating Baha’is scientifically and intellectually. In sharing this request of the Anjuman Islami with your contacts among known elements in the region, kindly emphasize that their activities should not cause provocation or interference. In simpler terms, while maintaining public order, Anjuman Tablighat Islami is permitted to use SAVAK’s assistance to combat

engaged in religious activities, and training in spying methods, and causing uproar and unrest among religious minorities, particularly among Baha'is. Although the Hojjatiyeh Society was founded with the Shah's consent, gradually and unanticipated by its founders, it became a recruiting ground for the "Islamic Coalition Societies" and the Mujahidin Khalq organization.

the Baha'is." The chief of SAVAK's Third Department signed this document. Also, Subh-e Azadegan Newspaper, in its Bahman 1360 [February 1982] issue, in an article under the title "A Glance at the Anjuman Hojjatiyeh", described at length the deep relationship between SAVAK and Anjuman Hojjatiyeh. For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between SAVAK and Anjuman Hojjatiyeh, see *Hizb Qa'idin Zaman* [The Party of Founders of Time], a title of Anjuman Hojjatiyeh, by 'Amadu'd-Din Baghi.