

## Chapter LXVIII <sup>1</sup>

### The navjote<sup>2</sup> of a converted Zoroastrian Bahai<sup>3</sup>

With the downfall of the Sasanian Empire our vast population suffered all kinds of attacks and has now dwindled to a mere hundred and twenty five thousand. The major portion of the present Muslim population of Iran comprises of converted Zoroastrians. Conversion into Islam has, to a large extent, ceased since the last hundred years. Instead, since about seventy-five years, a similar threat has arisen from an entirely different direction. Every year, in Iran, as well as in India, an increasing number of Iranian co-religionists are being converted into the new Bahai religion that was born in Iran in the last century.

Time and again, without request or reason, messengers claiming to bring the latest and final message from divine sources, have been narrating the same story that all the old religions have got entwined in the web of superstition and have lost their pristine purity. The new religion that they have brought is unadulterated. It is as clear as crystal and as pure as nectar.

Astute Bahais are saying the same thing today. They affirm that no religion exists that can meet the demands of the twentieth century. The unparalleled religion of Bahauallah alone is capable of fulfilling mankind's needs today and will remain so permanently. These good people forget that followed and practised by educated and illiterate adherents of diverse mentalities and passing through the vicissitude of time, the plight of Bahaism will be the same.

Heralds of all religions have always said that they are the last and that no prophet will come

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 68 of *Dastur Dhalla, the saga of a soul : an autobiography of Shams-ul-ulama Dastur Dr. Maneckji Nusserwanji Dhalla*, trans. Gool & Behram Sohrab H. J. Rustomji (Karachi : Dastur Dr. Dhalla Memorial Institute, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> The navjote (Parsi Gujarati for sidra púshí) ceremony is the ritual through which an individual is inducted into the Zoroastrian religion and begins to wear the Sidra and Kustí. The term navjote is used primarily by the Zoroastrians of India (the Parsis), while sidra púshí is used primarily by the Zoroastrians of Iran.

<sup>3</sup> Dhalla, Maneckji Nusserwanji. *Dastur Dhalla: The Saga of a Soul*. Dastur Dhalla Memorial Institute, Karachi. 1975. <http://www.avesta.org/dhalla/saga.htm>

after them. But ere their bones mingle with the dust, a new and even more powerful messenger arises and will continue to come.

Bahauallah came and he has gone. Innumerable such Bahauallahs will come and go, generation after generation.

The history of the religions of the world teaches the same lesson.

Alberuni and Mirkband write that the disciples of Mani, the prophet that came into prominence in Sasanian Iran, declared him to be 'the very seal or the last messenger of God'. Yet newer messengers have kept on coming.

Mirza Ali Mohomed, who was known as 'Bab' or the 'Gateway of God', proclaimed his religion in Iran in 1854. At the age of thirty, by order of the Shah, he was shot dead at Tabriz. His successor, Mirza Husainalli, rekindled the religion and he became known as Bahauallah or God's manifested form, God's aura or radiance, the fulfiller of God's will, the perfect man, God's messenger, God's voice, the Almighty's prophet of the modern age. It was announced that previous prophets had spread the light in their own age but it was incomplete. Bahauallah is the 'sun' of the age. He had come to complete and perfect the unfinished work of all the prophets. He was 'the Promised One of all Prophets'. Every prophet had predicted his advent. As spring follows winter, bringing with it freshness and new life, he had come in this new age to elevate humanity to a higher level. Many a whimsical pretext was professed about him.

A great deal of harm has been wrought by the teachings of the great religions about the advent of a future Soshyosh, a Messiah or a Mahadi. At least fifty faked and pretentious prophets and God's

messengers have beguiled mankind from time to time. Some have succeeded in establishing new sects, but more have failed to do so.

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

In some of the unauthentic Pazand and Pahlavi books written after we lost our kingdom, it has been foretold that Shah Behram Varjavand of Kyanian lineage will come some day. At the age of thirty he will raise an army of Hindus and Chinese and attack Iran and conquer it and will reinstate a Zoroastrian regime in Iran.

It is understandable that uneducated Zoroastrians of Iran, fifty or sixty years ago, believed these fictitious fairy tales; but for highly qualified and cultured Parsis of India to gulp down such fantastic stories today is truly regrettable. Certain gentlemen inform us that Shah Behram Varjavand will be born between 1941 and 1950 and that 1940 to 1990 will be very bad years for the world. These people write that, with his spiritual powers and the

strength of his prayers and purity, he will perform universally renowned miracles by arresting electricity in the atmosphere that suspends aero planes high up in the air, will poison the planes engaged in warfare and bring them down! What a miserable exhibition of the intellectual prowess of men who have qualified and stepped out of the portals of the Bombay University!

At first some Zoroastrians of Iran and later Iranian Zoroastrians settled in India accepted Bahaim. The secret movement of this new religion had misled us in the past. We have been misguided by their deceptions up to this day. The Bahais have no churches, they have no priests, they are free to marry non-Bahais. The President or Secretary of an association takes the place of a priest in their marriage ceremonies. Some such prominent person recites a short prayer. Thereafter the couple, their guardians and leading men of the assembly sign the document. At the time of the wedding an 'Alvaha' chosen from the Alvaha composed in Arabic by Bahaullah is recited. Under the canopy of their faith it is permissible to retain the 'sudre' and 'kusti' when necessary, to pass as Zoroastrians when need arises, to derive benefit from communal funds and its institutions. The corpse of the deceased they bury in their own separate cemetery.

In 1905 when I commenced my studies at Columbia University in New York, the Mazdaznan, Vedant and Bahai movements were active. The Mazdaznan movement had just begun. The Vedant movement had started in 1893 when Swami Vivekananda had made a memorable debut at the Conference on World Religions at Chicago. The spread of Bahaim had started in 1892 by a Syrian Muslim, Ibrahim George Khairullah, who had been

converted to Bahaim. While the expansion of the Mazdaznan sect was still in its infancy, the Vedantists and Bahais were already well-established.

During my stay in New York from 1905 to 1908 I saw that the Christians who were converted to the Bahai religion ceased to be considered Christians and were known as Bahais only. On returning from America in 1907 I drew the attention of leaders in Bombay to this fact, but scholars and eminent people alike refused to countenance the Bahai Movement as anything more than an innocent institution, or a Brotherhood, like the Theosophical Society. The Bahai religion had not found a footing amongst the co-religionists of Karachi at that time. In 1914 when I went to America a second time with my wife, the Bahai movement appeared to have gained a firmer foothold. This was the result of a wide-spread propaganda in Europe and America from 1911 to 1913 by Abbas Effendi who had adopted the name of Abdul Baha.

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

Mr. Ardeshir Edulji Reporter, who had been residing in Teheran for nearly four decades as a representative from Bombay of the 'Society for the improvement of the condition of the poor Zoroastrians of Iran', informed me that the Zoroastrians of India are making a serious mistake and their indifference is extremely harmful to the community. Every year an increasing number of Zoroastrians is abandoning the religion of their forefathers and

becoming Bahais. Despite repeated warnings the coreligionists of Bombay are not being alerted.

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

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

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

In Karachi a recently converted Iranian youth repented his error and honestly appealed to be taken back into the Zoroastrian religion. In the

presence of an assembly of prominent people I performed the Navjote ceremony of that youth. Similarly, constant efforts should be made wherever possible to reinstate into their ancient faith converts who have gone astray.