THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH IN MALWA: A STUDY

OF A CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

by

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This Thesis is based on original research conducted by the author while

he was a research scholar at the Australian National University, Canberra,

from 1972 - 1975.

William N. Darlington
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Acknowledgements

Contents

Maps and Tables

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Note on transliteration

The author has employed several systems of transliteration in the
preparation of this work. Persian and Arabic words have been transliterated
according to the system used by the Bahá'í World Faith, as exemplified in
Shoghi Effendi's translation of Nabíl-i-A'zam's The Dawn-Breakers and H. M.
Balyuzi's The Báb. Sanskrit and Hindi words have been transliterated
according to Sir Monier Monier-Williams' A Sanskrit-English Dictionary.
For geographical locations in India the spellings of the 1961 Census of
India have been used. Quotations are reproduced in their original form,
even though differing from the spelling and transliteration used in this
study.

Introduction

The Bahá'í World Faith is a contemporary religious movement which at
the present time is supporting propagation activities in over three
hundred countries and dependencies throughout the world.   It is classified
as a religious movement because its teachings and assertions of authority
are claimed to be derived from the Sacred,[1] specifically, an omnipotent
and transcendent God, as manifested in the personage of a prophet figure[2]
known by the title 'Bahá'u'lláh' (the Glory of God).

Since its early years of inception in nineteenth century Persia, the
Bahá'í Faith has received very little scholarly attention.   Outside of
the pioneering efforts of the famed Cambridge Orientalist, E. G. Browne,
whose work on the early history of the Bábí-Bahá'í movement stands
unequalled, the Faith has been virtually bypassed as a topic of academic
research.* Even in Browne's time his work on an 'insignificant sect of Islám'

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[1] Here reference is made to Emile Durkheim's distinction between the Sacred
    and the profane. As he states, 'The division of the world into two
    domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is
    profane is the distinctive trait of religious thought.' (The
    Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, trans. by Joseph W. Swain,
    (New York, 1965), p. 52). Thus it is the peculiarity of religious
    thought to set aside certain categories of reality as being
    inherently distinct from common spheres. Although the author is
    aware of the shortcomings associated with this definition, he still
    feels it is one of the most useful in terms of understanding the
    existential dimensions of religious thought, and therefore its use here.

[2] The term 'prophet' is used in the sense that it is employed by Max Weber;
    that is, '... a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue
    of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment.'
    (The Sociology of Religion, trans. by Ephraim Fischoff, (London,
    1965), p. 46). More specifically, the author implies the 'ethical'
    prophet who 'Preaching as one who has received a commission from god,
    he demands obedience as an ethical duty.' (The Sociology of Religion,
    p. 55)

* Although some work was carried out by European and American scholars, none
    of it compared to Browne's efforts either in volume or intensity.

brought him criticism.[3] Browne felt, however, that a record of the early years of the Faith's development would be invaluable if it were later to evolve into an established world religion. The rapid expansion of the Bahá'í Faith in recent years has justified Browne's efforts. Since the time of his work, however, many new developments have taken place within the movement. From its tumultuous beginnings in nineteenth century Persia the Bahá'í Faith has over the past 130 years developed into an internationally recognized world religion with headquarters in Haifa, Israel, and functioning communities on every continent of the globe. It is no longer a 'Persian' religion, but an international organization whose doctrines and institutions are influencing millions of people from many different cultural backgrounds. This fact alone should make the movement one of interest to the student of comparative religion, and it was with such thoughts that the author decided to investigate the present day activities of the Bahá'í Faith.

Having decided to conduct such a study, a suitable environment had to be found in which research could be carried out. One of the countries in which the Bahá'í movement has rapidly expanded in terms of declared believers is India. From the time of its inception in that country (1872)[*] until the early 1960's, the Bahá'í community remained a small and often isolated group of urban believers whose numbers probably did not amount to more than a thousand souls. However, with the development of internationally directed teaching campaigns aimed at enrolling the masses

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[3] Browne noted in his introduction to M. Phelp's Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi that the Oxford Magazine's issue of May 25, 1892, had considered that the history of a recent sect which has affected the least important part of the Moslem world and is founded on a personal claim which will not bear investigation for a moment was quite unworthy of the learning and labour which the author brought to bear upon it. See the above source, p. xii-xiv.

[*] This year marks the arrival of a missionary especially sent to the subcontinent by Bahá'u'lláh. For details see Chapter 2.

of humanity, the situation changed drastically.   Almost overnight the number of declared believers in India jumped from less than a thousand in 1960 to close to four hundred thousand by 1974.[4]   The work was accomplished by travelling Bahá'í teachers who personally went to the villages of India to proclaim the message of the Faith and enroll those villagers who wished to become members.   This phenomenon, known throughout the Bahá'í world as mass teaching, was particularly successful in two regions of central India in the state of Madhya Pradesh, namely, the areas surrounding the cities of Gwalior and Indore - Ujjain, the latter being known by the folk name of Malwa.   In Malwa alone over one hundred thousand persons signed declaration cards.[*]

Having enrolled the new declarants, the leadership of the movement (from this time referred to as the Bahá'í Administrative Order) has set about to try and educate many of them in the various aspects of Bahá'í life, as its aim is to develop communities of believers throughout the world which are able to function within a framework of the movement's socio-religious institutions.   However, due to lack of funds and a limited number of trained village teachers, in Malwa the Bahá'í Administrative Order has concentrated on trying to introduce the Faith's teachings and institutions into a number of 'model village' communities, some of which maintain resident Bahá'í teachers who have been specifically trained to act as community leaders.   It is hoped that these 'model village' communities will be able to evolve into springboards for further community development, and consequently they are the focal point of Bahá'í educational efforts in

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[4] These are the official figures issued by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India in July of 1973. For a detailed list of figures regarding the growth of the Bahá'í community in India see Chapter 2.

[*] As most of the villagers in rural Malwa are unable to read or write many of them declared their belief by imprinting their thumb marks on Bahá'í declaration sheets.

Malwa.   Given this situation, the region seemed an excellent laboratory
in which to examine the current activities of the Bahá'í Faith, and
consequently I decided to focus my study on the movement's work in rural
Malwa.

II

The main purpose of the present study is to examine the various
doctrines, teachings, and institutions of the Bahá'í Faith, both in theory,
and as they are being implemented in a specific cultural environment.
The work's scope, however, is not restricted to one discipline, as it
also traces the movement's historical development from its earliest days
in Persia to the advent of the mass teaching era in India and attempts to
analyze from normative and structural points of view the various aspects
of Bahá'í community life.   Consequently, it is hoped that the study will
be of interest to the historian and the sociologist as well as to the
student of comparative religion.

In terms of organization the work is divided into three parts.   Part
I (Chapters 1-3) is primarily historical in outlook, while Parts II
(Chapters 4-6) and III (Chapters 7-11) are more sociological in orientation.

Chapter 1 traces the growth of the movement from its inception in
nineteenth century Persia to its emergence as an international faith.
Being essentially an introductory chapter, it does not contain vast amounts
of historical detail, but focuses on the major events that have highlighted
the Bahá'í Faith's historical evolution.   Regarding the early history of
the movement three main sources were consulted.   The first, entitled The
Dawn-Breakers, written by Nabíl-i-A'zam (Muḥammad Zarandí), a companion of
Bahá'u'lláh, and translated by the movement's appointed Guardian, Shoghi
Effendi (1897 - 1957), is the official Bahá'í history of the early years
of the Faith.   The other two, A Traveller's Narrative and The Táríkh-i-Jadíd,

were both translated by E. G. Browne. The former was written by the son

of Bahá'u'lláh, ʻAbdu'l-Bahá[5], while the latter was penned by a certain

Mírzá Ḥusayn of Hamadán. In addition to the authors' accounts, both

works contain Browne's own notes and comments which, being based on his

thorough examination of various Bábí-Bahá'í, Muslim, and European sources,

were extremely helpful. Along with these major works numerous secondary

sources were consulted including among others: several articles written by

Browne and published in The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great

Britain and Ireland; his edited volume Materials for the Study of the Bábí

Religion, which contains several translations of original documents

pertaining to the Faith; Comte de Gobineau's Les Religions et les

Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale; H. M. Balyuzi's The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh;

Lord Curzon's Persia and the Persian Question; and A. Bausani's articles

on the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh in the Encyclopaedia of Islam.

The period from the death of Bahá'u'lláh to the present has been based

on several Bahá'í original sources, the most important of which was Shoghi

Effendi's God Passes By, a work describing the growth of the movement from

its inception through the time of his leadership. Other important sources

for this period include: ʻAbdu'l-Baha's Will and Testament and Tablets of

the Divine Plan; the letters and correspondence of Shoghi Effendi,

published in various volumes including Bahá'í Administration, The Promised

Day Is Come, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Dawn of a New Day, The Advent

of Divine Justice, Citadel of Faith, and Letters from the Guardian to

Australia and New Zealand; the Universal House of Justice's[6] Wellspring

of Guidance, a collection of messages sent to the world's Bahá'í communities;

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[5] At the time of Browne's translation the author was not known. It was
later uncovered that it had been penned by Bahá'u'lláh's son,
ʻAbdu'l-Bahá.

[6] The supreme legislative body in the Bahá'í Faith, whose headquarters are
located in Haifa, Israel.

and the thirteen volume set of The Bahá'í World: An International Record, a series of reference works published under the auspices of the Bahá'í Faith between the years 1927 and 1970. In addition, numerous secondary sources were consulted, all of which are listed in the bibliography at the end of the study.

Chapter 2 outlines the evolution of the Faith in India from the time of its earliest contact with the subcontinent up to the beginning of the mass teaching era. Much of the information in this chapter was obtained from two American Bahá'í publications, the aforementioned The Bahá'í World, and an early periodical, Star of the West (1910 - 1933), both of which contained numerous progress reports of Bahá'í activities in India over the years. In addition to these sources, use was also made of an Indian publication, Bahá'í Newsletter, whose various installments contained valuable information regarding the growth of the Indian Bahá'í community.

Chapter 3, the last chapter in this section, deals with the rise of the Bahá'í movement in the area of central India known as Malwa, tracing its growth and development in the region from the time of the first Bahá'í resident (1942) to the present day. While some of the information for this chapter could be gleaned from Bahá'í Newsletter and unpublished correspondence of the Indian National Spiritual Assembly,[7] the majority of data had to be obtained by means of personal interviews with those individuals who participated in the events. Consequently, a large part of Chapter 3 is original history as recounted by the Bahá'í pioneers who made it.

Part II looks at the sociological framework within which Bahá'í teachings are being promulgated. The first part of Chapter 4 outlines the outstanding characteristics of the contemporary Malwa village social

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[7] The paramount Bahá'í administrative body in India.

system, highlighting those aspects of the system that are experiencing stress as a result of their contact with modern influences. In the second part Bahá'í statistical information for the region is presented along with short descriptions of the five 'model village' communities from which the author's examples of community development were taken. The primary purpose of this chapter is to inform the reader of the type of social milieu into which Bahá'í doctrines and institutions are being introduced so that he might better appreciate both the obstacles and coagencies with which the movement's teachers are confronted in their attempts to implement Bahá'í teachings in village communities. In preparing the chapter two works were extensively consulted: Adrian Mayer's Caste and Kinship in Central India, and K. S. Mathur's Caste and Ritual in a Malwa Village. Both of these works were based on field studies carried out in Malwa villages, Mayer's in village Ramkheri[8] in Dewas district, and Mathur's in village Potlod in Indore district. Furthermore, several sources relating to social change in India were used, the most outstanding of which were M. N. Srinivas' Social Change in Modern India, and I. K. Ishwaran's edited volume Change and Continuity in India's Villages. This information, moreover, was supplemented by the author's own personal experiences in Malwa.[*]

Chapter 5 analyzes the organizational structure of the vehicle that is actively promoting the propagation and consolidation efforts of the Bahá'í Faith both in Malwa and in numerous countries throughout the world, the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Its pages examine the various levels of the Bahá'í administrative superstructure, with specific reference being given to their modes of operation in India and the resulting influences

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[8] Mayer uses Ramkheri as a pseudonym.

[*] The author spent six months in India doing field work.

exerted on Malwa. The analysis is not only based on numerous Bahá'í written sources but on personal interviews with individuals who are actively involved at all levels of Bahá'í leadership. These included talks with members of national and local administrative institutions in India as well as discussions with persons holding positions of international rank.

Chapter 6 describes the various channels of communication by which the Bahá'í Administartive Order in India maintains contact with its new declarants. These institutions are the primary conveyors of the movement's teaching and consolidation activities in Malwa, and consequently they can be considered the backbone of the educational program in the region. The data concerning their structure and modes of operation was obtained primarily through personal contact with them in the field, although some information was also acquired from specific written material gathered at the Bahá'í national office in New Delhi.

Part III constitutes the core of the work. In this section the essential sociological questions with which the study is concerned are raised. They are as follows:

1) What are the doctrinal and institutional norms of the Bahá'í Faith

2) How are these norms being related to the Indian cultural environment?

3) To what extent do Bahá'í institutions in five 'model village' communities reflect these norms?

The individual chapters in Part III focus on the various doctrines and socio-religious institutions that are being introduced into 'model village' communities in Malwa. These aspects of community life can be divided into five main categories: doctrines and beliefs, ritual and ceremony, social principles, administration, and education and propagation. Each chapter

examines the given category's teachings or institutions, both as they are
described in official Bahá'í literature, and as they are being taught in
rural Malwa.   In addition, at the end of each chapter data regarding the
implementation of these teachings and institutions in five 'model village'
communities has been cited.[9] By comparing the structural manifestations
with the normative formulations deductions are made as to the degree of
institutional development that has taken place in these communities.

Chapter 7 presents the fundamental doctrines and beliefs of the Bahá'í
Faith.   The discussion is primarily concerned with those doctrines which
have traditionally been referred to as theological or metaphysical.   The
bases for this information have been the works of the founder of the Faith,
Bahá'u'lláh, and his son ʻAbdu'l-Bahá.   Only official Bahá'í translations
have been used, that is, translations which have been published under the
auspices of the Bahá'í World Faith.   As stated at the outset of this
introduction, the present work is concerned with the Bahá'í Faith in its
contemporary form.   As it exists today it is no longer a 'Persian' religion.

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[9] This information is based both on personal observation and reports of
informants. Unfortunatly, due to the author's movements in the rural
areas being governmentally restricted, first hand observations could
not be personally verified as being typical over an extended period
of time, and consequently he has also relied on data supplied by
1) members of the Bahá'í Administrative Order who have had contact
with the 'model' village'communities, and 2) Bahá'í teachers who
reside in the communities under examination. Although this presents
a methodological problem of having to depend to some degree on the
reports of individuals within the organization under study, the fact
that these reports were for the most part consistent with
observational experiences allows for their use. It is realized,
however, that it is dangerous to make finalized conclusions based on
such data, and consequently in each of the chapters in this section
and again in the conclusion only speculative deductions are made.
The central aim of this work, however, is to investigate the doctrines
and institutions of a religious organization as they are being related
to a specific cultural environment and not measure the degree of
religio-cultural change they have induced - a task that would be
virtually impossible for less than a team of field workers. Thus, the
'model village' data is primarily designed to be viewed as   specific
examples of the implementation of Bahá'í institutions in the rural
areas and not illustrations of overall community development.

Since its development into an international organization, the Bahá'í

Faith has had its scriptures translated into numerous world languages, the

most prominent of which in terms of volume has been English.   In fact,

outside of Írán, English has become the unofficial language of the Bahá'í

Faith.[10]   From the point of view of this study the opinions held by present

day Bahá'í orthodoxy are considered important, for they reflect the

doctrines which are currently being promulgated both in India and other

countries throughout the world.   Therefore, as the work is being written

in English, the official translations are of greater value than the Persian

originals themselves.

The following works of Bahá'u'lláh were used in the preparation of

this chapter: The Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude), revealed in Baghdád

in the year 1862 as a reply to the questions of a certain Hájí Mírzá Siyyid

Muhammad; The Hidden Words, composed in Baghdád in the year 1858; The

Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys, Bahá'u'lláh's two outstanding mystical

works, also composed during the Baghdád period; and Epistle to the Son of

the Wolf, revealed during his years of imprisonment in 'Akká.   In addition,

several compilations composed of various tablets and meditations have been

consulted including: two compilations arranged by Shoghi Effendi, Gleanings

from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, and Prayers and Meditations; a

collection of the writings of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá entitled

Bahá'í World Faith; and The Bahá'í Revelation, a source containing several

of Bahá'u'lláh's smaller tablets.

To the Bahá'í world the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are also considered

holy.   Of these, numerous letters and discourses have been collected

and published in three volumes under the title of Tablets of Abdul-Baha

Abbas.   Use has also been made of several works comprising the public

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[10]
The Faith's Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, wrote extensively in English, and
the Universal House of Justice consults in this medium.

addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during his travels in Europe and North America. These include <u>'Abdu'l-Bahá in London</u>, <u>'Abdu'l-Bahá in Canada</u>, and <u>Paris Talks</u>. Another source containing abundant material regarding Bahá'í doctrines is a collection of table talks presented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a Bahá'í pilgrim, Laura Clifford Barney, in the prison city of 'Akká during the years 1904 - 1906 and later published in English under the title of <u>Some Answered Questions</u>. Finally, the author also consulted 'Abdu'l-Bahá's long essay addressed to the Bahá'ís of Írán in the year 1875 entitled <u>The Secret of Divine Civilization</u>.

Chapters 8 and 9, 'Ritual and Ceremony' and 'Social Principles', follow the same pattern of construction as Chapter 7. In both instances, after presenting the theoretical teachings involved, the means and methods by which they are being introduced into the rural areas are examined. This information is then supplemented with specific examples taken from the five 'model village' communities. Besides making use of the above listed works, in writing this chapter the author also consulted: the Universal House of Justice's recent publication, <u>A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</u>, a summary of the basic laws and ordinances laid down by Bahá'u'lláh; <u>Bahá'í Prayers</u>, a standard Bahá'í prayerbook; <u>Bahá'í News</u>, an American periodical; several Indian publications including <u>The New Garden</u> and <u>Bahaí Gít</u> (Bahá'í Songbook); and correspondence from both Shoghi Effendi and the Indian National Spiritual Assembly.*

Chapter 10 analyzes local Bahá'í administrative institutions. As well as introducing the Faith's doctrines and devotional institutions into village communities, the Bahá'í Administrative Order is also attempting to establish administrative institutions within their confines which can act both as catalysts for community development and links of communication with the rest of the Bahá'í world. These institutions are not only being

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* Much of the latter being unpublished correspondence.

introduced in India, but in every community around the world where Bahá'ís

reside, and their establishment and development is an essential part of

the Bahá'í movement's consolidation plan.   In formulating this chapter

several primary works have been consulted including the previously mentioned

writings of Shoghi Effendi as well as two sources published by Bahá'í

agencies in Great Britain and the United States, Principles of Bahá'í

Administration and The Bahá'í Community.   Following the pattern of other

chapters, the author first describes the normative formulations of these

institutions and then notes how they are being established and nurtured

in the villages of rural Malwa.

The final chapter in this section, Chapter 11, states the Bahá'í

position regarding community education and propagation.   It is primarily

concerned with describing the educational institutions established by

the Bahá'í Administrative Order in Malwa, specifically, seasonal schools,

regional conferences, and village primary schools.   In addition, it briefly

examines the role villagers are playing in helping to propagate the Faith.

Chapters 7 through 11 are essentially descriptive in nature.   While

some degree of analysis is contained within their pages the main analytical

discussion has been reserved for the Conclusion.   Drawing on the data

supplied in the body of the work, the final chapter attempts to make some

comprehensive statements concerning the aims and accomplishments of the

Bahá'í Faith in Malwa.

III

A basic question with which we must come to terms at the outset of

this study is the one concerning the meaning of the statistical figures

cited in the above paragraphs.   In India there are almost four hundred

thousand declared believers, and in Malwa over one hundred thousand

villagers have declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh.   Yet, in terms of

individual commitment what do these figures really indicate?   Of course
the author realizes that the query is one that can never be answered
sufficiently.   The very act of asking such a question assumes that there
is an objective measure for determining an individual's faith, which
there is not.   However, from a sociological point of view, certain indices,
such as attendance at religious functions, acceptance of certain doctrines,
and participation in passage rituals, often denote, if not the strength of
an individual's belief, at least his degree of involvement with religion
as a social institution.   In terms of the Bahá'í community in India,
however, information of this nature is not available, and the large
number of villages in Malwa alone where declarants reside (6,572) makes
the acquisition of such data virtually impossible.   Consequently, at
this time the best one can do to come to an understanding of the situation
in India in general and Malwa in particular is to rely on the information
supplied by those persons who have been most active in the teaching work
within the country.

According to individuals who hold positions of leadership within the
Bahá'í community in India, the Bahá'í population can be divided into two
basic categories.   On the one hand there are the declarants who are
considered 'deepened' Bahá'ís.   This category includes those believers
who are well-informed about the history, doctrines, and teachings of the
Faith and participate on a regular basis in the movement's various socio-
religious institutions.   This group would amount to less than 1% of the
total number of declarants in India and would be found mainly in urban
areas.   Most of the individuals in positions of leadership in the
community come from this segment of the Bahá'í population.   On the other
hand there exists the great mass of village declarants who can be
considered 'undeepened' Bahá'ís.   While they have declared their belief
in Bahá'u'lláh as a prophet, in terms of behavior they are still

essentially Hindu.   Consequently, when it is said that today there are

four hundred thousand Bahá'ís in India, this statement must be qualified

by adding that for close to 99% of the declarants being a Bahá'í means

little more than having made an assertion on an ideological level of

the acceptance of certain religious doctrines and social concepts.

However, such declarations should not be dismissed as being completely

insignificant.   The fact that a large number of villagers in rural

Malwa have made these assertions is indicative that there is potential

for change in the villages.   In fact, it is the faith in this possibility

that has led the Bahá'í Administrative Order to undertake a campaign of

educating new declarants in the various aspects of Bahá'í community life.

An example of this faith can be seen in the following lines taken from

an unpublished essay written by one of the leading Bahá'í teachers in

India:

> Bahá'u'lláh says that everybody on earth is capable
> to receive His Message and to know Him Who is the
> Manifestation of God on earth. About the creative
> power of the Word of God he says that "every Word
> that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed
> with such potency as can instill new life into every
> human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this
> truth. 11

Another question concerning the new declarants which must be brought

forward at this time is the one relating to their caste backgrounds.   Is

there any specific stratum of society from which the Bahá'í Faith has

drawn its believers? According to those teachers who have been most

active in Bahá'í propagation activities in rural Malwa, the initial years

of mass teaching (1961 - 1963) saw a large number of lower caste members

enroll in the Faith, particularly persons from those castes which have

traditionally been referred to as 'unclean' and 'untouchable'.   However,

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11 Hooshmand Fathea'zam, 'One Year Teaching Among the Masses', unpublished
    essay, p. 1

with the advent of new teaching techniques in the mid-1960's whereby
higher castes were directly approached, many 'clean' caste Hindus also
enrolled.   Therefore, while in terms of numbers the majority of declarants
in Malwa would still come from the lower levels of society, in many of
those villages which have received the designation 'model village' a good
number of 'clean' caste declarants can be found, and many of the most active
Bahá'ís in the region come from this stratum of society.

<div align="center">IV</div>

As has already been indicated, much of the data used in this study
was collected by means of personal contact with the Bahá'í Faith in India.
The author spent six months in that country during which time he was able
to meet and interview many of those people who are involved in directing
the movement's teaching and consolidation activities.   These included the
Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, members of important national
and regional committees, a continental counsellor, institute teachers, and
travelling teachers.   Moreover, in Malwa use was made of the technique
of participant observation whereby the researcher places himself in direct
face to face contact with his object of research.   This meant participating
in teaching institutes, committee meetings, teacher training sessions, and
devotional meetings, as well as making several trips to local Bahá'í village
communities.

As a technique of social research participant observation has been,
to say the least, a controversial issue among leading methodologists.
Those who diminish its value as a research tool point out the problems of
observer and subject bias, as well as the large amount of subjective
judgement inherently involved in the procedure.   For example, a well-known
research team notes that 'The mere presence of the observer means that
movements are made and orientations are developed toward him which would

not otherwise have occurred.'[12]   Consequently, many sociologists feel that
quantitative methods of data collection, such as survey or sampling
techniques, are much more useful in terms of analyzing material and
developing sociological generalizations.   On the other hand, those who
support participant observation argue that it is the most direct method of
gathering information.   As Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer state in
their article 'Participant Observation and Interviewing':

> The most complete form of the sociological datum,
> after all, is the form in which the participant
> observer gathers it; an observation of some
> social event, the events which precede and follow
> it, and explanations of its meaning by participants
> and spectators, before, during, and after its
> occurrence. Such a datum gives us more information
> about the event under study than data gathered by
> any other sociological method.[13]

In a similar vein, another researcher has remarked that in India 'The
officially sponsored surveys are usually quantitative, and they seldom
succeed in getting behind a mass of figures and tables to come to grips
with the realities of social processes at the village level.'[14]

In the present work participant observation was a vital necessity, as
it supplied the author with information which could not be obtained by
quantitative methods alone.   It allowed him the opportunity to see at first
hand the in-process workings of a religious organization, a situation which
could not be recreated by questionaires or structured surveys by themselves.
Thus, participant observation served the vital function of supplementing
the information received from written sources and informants with directly
perceived phenomena.

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[12] Morris S. Schwartz and Charlotte Green Schwartz, 'Problems in Participant
Observation', American Journal of Sociology, vol. LX, July, 1954 -
May, 1955, (Chicago), p. 346

[13] Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer, 'Participant Observation and
Interviewing', Human Organization, Fall, 1957, (University of Kentucky),
p. 28

[14] K. Ishwaran, Introduction to Change and Continuity in India's Villages,
ed. by K. Ishwaran, (New York, 1970), p. 13

Most of the research could be carried out in English. As stated earlier, all of the Bahá'í writings that are of consequence for the movement's current activities are available in English. Furthermore, nearly all of the individuals holding positions of leadership in the Indian Bahá'í community are able to converse in this medium.[15] Accordingly, most of the official records concerning the development of the Faith in India are available in English. In addition, a working knowledge of Hindi was useful for reading certain sources relating to the local village communities, and more importantly, for communicating with some of the resident village teachers.[16]

Before closing, it would be appropriate to make a few comments concerning the choice of village communities to be visited. In selecting these communities two factors were considered. First, as was stated earlier, data from 'model villages' was desired: those communities which have had closer contact with the educational efforts of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Second, the author wanted communities with varying status group compositions. Consequently, he selected one community which consisted mainly of 'low' caste declarants, one community which was predominantly 'high' caste in membership, and three communities which displayed more of a mixed caste composition. From among these, the majority of data came from the mixed caste communities, as they presented situations in which the effect of Bahá'í social principles could more readily be observed. It should also be noted at this time that the names given to the village communities in the study are pseudonyms. This procedure has been followed mainly for the protection of the villagers. Since they provided the author with field data

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[15] Coming from the higher classes most of them have been at least partially educated in English.

[16] Although most of the work in the villages was purely observational in nature, that is, it was directed towards noting patterns of behavior rather than recording audible responses, it was often necessary to converse with resident Bahá'í teachers, as they supplied the author with information regarding the general state of affairs in their particular communities.

he believes they are entitled to a certain degree of anonymity. The

general location of each village, however, has been given both in the body

of the work and on map *3.

In 1917 E. G. Browne wrote the following:

> Of the future of Bahá'ism it is difficult to hazard
> a conjecture, especially at the present time, when
> we are more cut off from any trustworthy knowledge
> of what is happening in the world than at any
> previous period for many centuries. Less than a
> month ago the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's birth was
> celebrated in America, whither his teachings have
> spread only within the last twenty years, but what
> influence they have attained or may in the future
> attain there or elsewhere it is impossible to
> conjecture.[17]

It is hoped that the data presented in this study, although limited to

a specific region of central India, will shed some light on the question

Browne found impossible to answer and thereby add to our knowledge of the

Bahá'í Faith in particular and the human religious experience in general.

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[17] _Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion_, ed. by E. G. Browne,
(Cambridge, 1961), p. xxiv

Part I   Historical Development

Chapter 1   The Origins and Growth of the Bahá'í Faith

The Bahá'í Faith has been most directly influenced by Islám, notably the Shí'ah sect of that religion, as Shí'ism has been the national religion of Irán since the early sixteenth century (1502).   Examples can be seen in the concept of progressive revelation, the doctrine of the imámate and its theological implications, the rejection of an official priesthood, and the concept of the community of believers.   In addition, there are numerous minor similarities ranging from religious terminology to style and method of prayer. In the course of this work many such influences will be noted, but first we must turn our gaze to mid-nineteenth century Irán and trace the origins of the new movement.

On the evening of May 22, 1844, in a small apartment in the city of Shíráz, a young merchant by the name of Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad, while conversing with a certain Mullá Husayn-i-Bushrú'í, proclaimed himself a báb, or gate to the 'hidden imám'.[1]   A claim of this magnitude was not entirely unexpected, as numerous Shí'ah divines had recently been announcing the imminent appearance of such an individual.   The most renowned of these divines had been Shaykh Ahmad Zayni'd-Dín Ahsá'í (1743 - 1826), founder of the Shaykhí school, and his main disciple and inheritor of the school's leadership after his death, Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí (1793 - 1843).   The former was considered the most learned of the learned[2], while the latter was largely responsible for spreading the doctrines of the Shaykhís over the length and breadth of Persia.   In fact, prior to his declaration 'Alí-Muhammad had been a pupil of Siyyid Kázim.[3]

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[1] According to Shí'ah doctrine (see Appendix A) the 'hidden imám' communicated with four chosen agents. The last of these agents, Abdu'l-Hasan Samarí, did not appoint a successor, thus ending the 'Lesser Concealment' in the year 940. In claiming to be a báb Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad appeared to be enunciating another period when the expected imám should again be visibly represented. The official Bahá'í position, however, states that he was the imám mahdí himself, and his designation of báb was meant to reflect that he was the gate to a greater prophet yet to come. For a Bahá'í explanation see Shoghi Effendi's introduction to Nabíl-i-A'zam's The Dawn Breakers, (New York, 1953), p. xxx-xxxi.

[2] A. L. M. Nicolas, Essai Sur le Shaykhisme I, (Paris, 1910), p. 18

[3] E. G. Browne, A Year Amongst the Persians, (London, 1950), p. 65

Map 1

PERSIA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

TURKEY

SYRIA

CASPIAN SEA

RUSSIA
TRANS-CASPIA

R. Atrek

To Mecca

Astarábád (Gurgán)

Mashhad

KHURÁSÁN

Hirát

AFGHÁNISTÁN

Mosul
Ninevah

Karkúk

Sámarrá

Kázimayn
BAGHDÁD
Kázimíyah

Karbilá
Kúfah
Najaf

'IRÁQ

KURDISTÁN

Hamadán

Kirmánsháh

Khanul

LURISTÁN

Qum
Káshán

TIHRÁN

Rasht

GILÁN

Dasht-i-Kavír

Tabas

PERSIA

Yazd

Dasht-i-Lút

Dasht-i-Margo

KHÚZISTÁN

Diztúl

Isfahán

Zarand

KIRMÁN

Basrah

KUWAIT

Khárg Is.
Dáluki
Búshihr

FÁRS

ARABIA

BAHRAYN

PERSIAN
GULF

BALÚCHISTÁN

TRUCIAL
STATES

ARABIAN SEA

Land over 3,000m

Land over 6,000m

Desert (Dasht)

★ Fortress

Present Day Boundaries
fixed between
1807 and 1914

100   0   100   200 Statute Miles
100   0   100   200   300 Km

MAP DRAWN BY ROY MOLE

The Báb, as Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad came to be known, soon gathered around him seventeen disciples known as the 'Letters of the Living',[4] and instructed them to inform the inhabitants of Persia and 'Iráq of his appearance. In October of 1844, having dispersed sixteen of the 'Letters' on their mission, the Báb along with one other disciple, Quddús, left on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

During the Báb's absence, the word of his declaration quickly spread throughout his home province of Fárs, so much so as to raise the fury of the conservative divines of Shíráz.[5] As a result, several Bábís were arrested, and in June of 1845 the Governor-General of the province, Husayn Khán, hearing of the Báb's expected return, commissioned a body of horsemen to journey to Búshihr, the port of disembarkation for returning pilgrims, and bring the the young Siyyid back to Shíráz where he was to be placed in confinement. Moreover, 'His followers were prohibited from discussing his doctrines in public, and some of the more active were beaten, mutilated and expelled from the town.'[6] When brought before the Governor-General the Báb was insulted and struck in the face.[7] Finally, at the behest of a maternal uncle who agreed to keep him in his home away from public view, the Báb was released.

The Báb, however, did not remain in isolation. During the following year he was constantly embraced by his new disciples with whom he openly consorted and to whose listening ears he dictated numerous tablets. Consequently, in September of 1846, Husayn Khán once more issued orders for his arrest. The Chief Constable of Shíráz, 'Abdu'l-Hamíd Khán, was requested to carry out the orders, but their issuance coincided with an

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[4] Nabíl-i-A'zam, p. 69

[5] H. M. Balyuzi, The Báb, (Oxford, 1973), p. 78

[6] Browne, A Year Amongst the Persians, p. 66

[7] Nabíl-i-A'zam, p. 150

outbreak of cholera, which caused the Constable to take the Báb to his home, where upon arriving he found his sons stricken with the disease. According to the account of the official Bahá'í historian, Nabíl-i-A*zam, the Báb cured his sons, causing the thankful Constable to approach the Governor-General for his release.[8]   The accuracy of this account is uncertain, but 'Abdu'l-Bahá states in A Traveller's Narrative that the Báb was released on condition that he depart the city.[9]   In the last days of September, 1846, the Báb left for Isfahán.

In Isfahán the Báb apparently won the heart of the Governor-General of that ancient city, Manúchihr Khán, for the government official protected him from the wrath of the local 'ulamá, seventy of whom had declared the Báb a heretic and condemned him to death.[10]   For four months he enjoyed the Governor-General's protection, during which time both the number of his followers and, as a consequence, his opponents continued to mount. The movement had by this time become so wide spread that the Sháh himself, Muhammad Sháh Qájár, began to take personal interest in it.[11]   Following the death of Manúchihr Khán in March of 1847, the Sháh issued orders for the removal of the Báb to the capital.

The Báb, however, was not destined to reach Tihrán.   During the journey to the capital his escorts received two messages: one from the Grand Vizier, Hájí Mírzá Aqásí, directing them to proceed to the village of Kulayn, located less than thirty miles from Tihrán, where they were to await further instructions;   and a second, twenty days later, from the Sháh. According to the account in A Traveller's Narrative, the royal message

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[8] Nabíl-i-A'zam, p. 196-197

[9] A Traveller's Narrative written to illustrate the Episode of the Báb, vol. II, ed. and trans. by E. G. Browne, (Cambridge, 1891), p. 11

[10] Nabil-i-A'zam, p. 209

[11] The Qájár chieftans began their rule in 1796.

declared:

> Since the royal train is on the verge of departure
> from Teherán, to meet you in a befitting manner
> is impossible. Do you go to Mákú and there abide
> and rest for a while, engaged in praying for our
> victorious state; and we have arranged that under
> all circumstances they shall shew you attention
> and respect. When we return from travel we will
> summon you specially.[12]

The fortress of Máh-Kú is situated on a mountain peak overlooking the city from which it is named. Located in the province of Ádharbáyján in the extreme north-west of Írán, it is but a short distance from the Aras river and the meeting place of the Russo-Turkish frontiers. In this fortress, awaiting an interview that would never take place, the Báb was lodged for close to nine months. During this time he produced one of his best known works, the Dalá'il-i-Sab'ih (The Seven Proofs), and began the composition of the Persian Bayán.[13]

On April 9, 1848, he was transferred to the castle of Chihríq, located in the vicinity of the region known today as Ridá'íyyih. He was moved as a result of a request submitted by a Russian minister in Tihrán who feared a possible disturbance so close to the Russian border.[14] The Báb initially remained in Chihríq for three months. Apparently, during his first stay in the castle prison he began referring to himself not only as the Báb, but as the qá'im.[15] As Mírzá Husayn of Hamadán states in his history of the Báb, The Táríkh-i-Jadíd, 'It was during his sojourn at Chihrík, too, that the Báb, having due regard to the exegencies of the

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[12] A Traveller's Narrative, p. 15-16

[13] Balyuzi, The Báb, p. 132

[14] 'Letter written by Mullá Ahmad-i-Ibdál', in Balyuzi, The Báb, p. 132

[15] In Shí'ah theology the qá'im is identified with the return of the 'hidden imám'. See Appendix A.
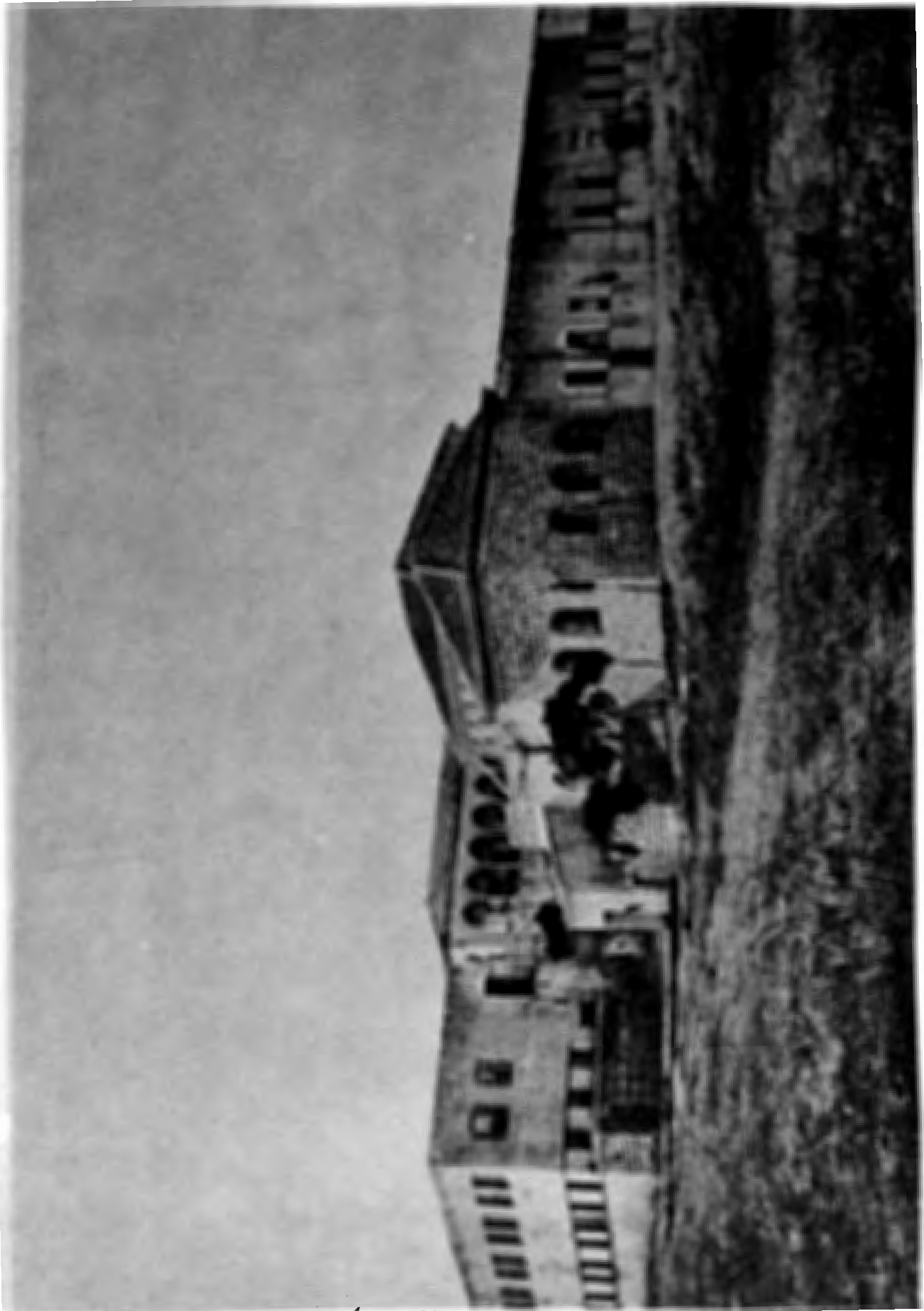
Bahjí - 1920

time, the dictates of expediency, and the capacity of men, declared himself

to be the Ḳá'im; though some think that he made this declaration during

the latter days of his residence at Máḳú.'[16] Perhaps for this reason,

as well as the continued success of the movement throughout the realm, in

July of 1848 the Báb was summoned to Tabríz by orders of the Grand Vizier

to be examined by a panel of divines in front of the Crown Prince,

Nási̠ri'd-Dín Mírzá.

During his examination at Tabríz the Báb was asked by Hájí Mullá

Maḥmúd, the Nizámu'l-'Ulamá, if he claimed to be the mahdí, the Lord of

Religion, to which the Báb responded - 'yes'.[17] Amír Aslán Ḵẖán, who

was present at the interrogation, reported the Báb stated the following:

'And I swear by God that I am that person whom you have been expecting

from the beginning of Islám until now; I am he whom forty thousand doctors

will deny.'[18] According to E. G. Browne, during the trial the divines

of Tabríz mocked the Báb, asking him obscure questions about Arabic

grammar and reproaching him for not being able to respond to their demand

to perform a miracle. Browne summarized the events as follows:

> That the whole examination was a farce throughout,
> that the sentence was a forgone conclusion, that
> no serious attempt to apprehend the nature and
> evidence of the Báb's claim and doctrine was made,
> and that from first to last a systematic course of
> brow-beating, irony and mockery was pursued appear
> to me to be facts proved no less by the Muhammadan
> than by the Bábí accounts of these inquisitorial
> proceedings. [19]

At the close of the proceedings the Báb was bastinadoed and sent back

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[16] Mírzá Huseyn of Hamadán, The Táríkh-i-Jadíd, ed. and trans. by E. G.
Browne, (Cambridge, 1893), p. 241

[17] A Traveller's Narrative, note M, p. 288-289

[18] Amír Aslan Ḵẖán, 'Report of the Interrogation of the Báb', trans. by
E. G. Browne, Materials for the Study of the Bábi Religion, p. 253

[19] A Traveller's Narrative, note M, p. 290

to Chihríq.   The ecclesiastical sentence which was handed down by the
'Ulamá of Tabríz stated that the only thing which caused the postponement
of his immediate execution was doubt as to his sanity, and continued:
'Should this doubt be removed, the sentence of an incorrigible apostate
would without hesitation be executed upon thee.'[20]

Following the examination of the Báb at Tabríz, persecution of Bábís
was intensified throughout the entire country.   In October of 1848 a host
of Bábís under the leadership of Mullá Husayn (the first disciple of the
Báb), having been initially attacked by the townspeople of Bárfurúsh and
subsequently pursued by military troops of the province, finally took
shelter at the shrine of Shaykh Ahmad ibin-i-Abí-Tálib-i-Tabarsí, around
which they proceeded to build a fortress.   The presence of over three
hundred Bábís in a fortified garrison led the Sa'ídu'l-Ulamá of Mázindarán
to request aid from the Sháh.[21]   Muhammad Sháh had died a month before,
and the new ruler was Násiri'd-Dín Sháh, the same man who had three months
earlier attended the examination of the Báb at Tabríz.   In response an
army of 12,000 men was sent to Mázindarán, and the fort was put under
siege.   After more than seven months struggle the Bábís weakened by lack
of food and water surrendered, only to be slaughtered by their assailants.[22]
Included in this group were most of the 'Letters of the Living'.[23]

The early months of the year 1850 were marked by two further military
actions against the Bábís.   The first took place outside the town of

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[20] 'The Ecclesiastical Sentence (fatwá) of the 'Ulama of Tabríz', trans.
    by E. G. Browne, Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion, p. 259

[21] Nabíl-i-A'zam, p. 358

[22] 'Note of Captain C. F. Mackenzie Regarding his Journey from Rasht to
    Astarábád in 1859', Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion,
    p. 242-243

[23] Mírzá Yahyá Subh-i-Ezel, 'A Succinct Account of the Bábí Movement',
    trans. by E. G. Browne, Appendix III of The Táríkh-i-Jadíd, p. 417

Nayríz in the province of Fárs, where as in Mázindarán more than a hundred Babís were beseiged by troops of the Sháh and took refuge in a fort. Like their fellow believers at fort Shaykh Tabarsí the majority were finally killed, many being taken to Shíráz in chains to meet their end.[24] The second struggle occurred in the city of Zanján. From May to December approximately three thousand Bábís led by Hujjat-i-Zanjání (a local divine) withstood the onslaught of over eighteen of the Sháh's regiments. The operation drew the attention of the British envoy, Lt-Col. Sheil, who on September 5, 1850, reported that '...these fanatics are reduced to a few hundred fighting men, they continue to maintain a hopeless contest with undaunted resolution, refusing submission on any terms...'[25] However, their defeat was only a matter of time, and in the end the great majority of Bábís at Zanján either met with death or were imprisoned.

Two months after the start of the Zanján insurrection the Báb was once again summoned to Tabríz, this time by Násiri'd-Dín Sháh's new Grand Vizier, Mírzá Taqí Khán, who planned to put him to death by warrant of the clergy.[26] Apparently it was hoped that the death of the Báb would lead to the termination of the new movement. In the words of the French historian Comte de Gobineau:

> Mírzá Taqí Khán, maudissant la mollesse avec laquelle son predecesseur, Hájjí Mírzá Aqásí, avait laisse naitre et grandir un pareil peril, comprit qu'il ne fallait pas prolonger cette faut et voulut couper le mal dans sa racine. Il se persuada que la source en etait le Báb lui-meme, premier auteur de toutes les doctrines qui troublaient le pays, et il voulut faire disparaitre cette source.[27]

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[24] Nabíl-i-A'zam, p. 495

[25] Quoted in Balyuzi, The Báb, p. 210

[26] Mírzá Huseyn of Hamadán, p. 293

[27] Comte de Gobineau, Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale, (Paris, 1928), p. 210-211

In the noonday sun of Tabríz on July 9, 1850, the Báb (having received his death warrant from Mullá Muḥammad-i-Mámaqání) was suspended by rope along with one other disciple on a wall in the citadel square. Three rows of 250 soldiers opened fire.[28] When the smoke rose the Báb was nowhere to be seen, but he was soon found in a nearby recess whence he was returned to the scaffold and once again fired upon, the second volley of bullets taking the desired course.[29] The two bodies were subsequently dragged through the city streets and finally thrown on the edge of the city's surrounding moat.

The death of the Báb dealt a great blow to his followers. Constantly attacked, they were now forced to accept the fact that their 'promised one' had been taken from them. In the midst of such despair, in August of 1852 three young Bábís made an attempt on the life of the Sháh. Their ill-conceived plan failed and brought upon the much persecuted Bábí community even greater governmental and ecclesiastical vengeance. The Great Persecution of 1852 has had numerous reporters, but in spite of the cruelties[30] cast upon it, the community survived, as 'It was their

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[28] Nabíl-i-A'zam, p. 512

[29] There are five different accounts of the execution of the Báb. Nabíl's account (p. 513) and A Traveller's Narrative (p. 43-44) agree that the Báb and his disciple were both unharmed after the first firing and that they were only killed after the second volley. The Táríkh-i-Jadíd (p. 301-307) states that the Báb's disciple was executed alone, after which the Báb was fired upon thrice, the first two volleys missing their mark. According to E. G. Browne (The Táríkh-i-Jadíd, note 2, p. 306), the Nuqtatu'l-Káf of Mírzá Jání says that the disciple was executed alone and that the Báb was fired upon twice. In A Traveller's Narrative Browne adds that the two Muslim histories which mention the execution of the Báb present varying descriptions of the episode. The Násikhu't-Tawárikh (A Traveller's Narrative, note A, p. 182) declares that both men were shot upon, the first volley killing the disciple but leaving the Báb unharmed, thus necessitating a second volley. The Rawzatu's-Safa (A Traveller's Narrative, note A, p. 191) makes no mention of a second firing.

[30] See 'An Austrian Officer's Account of the Cruelties Practised on the Bábís who Suffered in the Great Persecution of 1852', Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion, p. 265-271.

readiness to meet death that made the Babees [sic] so formidable to their assailants.'[31]

The doctrines of the Báb were never systematized into a coherent whole. This was largely due to the fact that except for a short period in Shíráz the Báb was isolated from the majority of his followers. It is true that a number of his leading disciples meeting in the hamlet of Badasht in July of 1848 decided that the movement was not just an offshoot of Islám but an independent Faith, a new Dispensation which repudiated old laws and established new ones.[32] However, the absence of the Báb detracted from their attempt to formulate doctrine. But doctrine was not the real issue. The Báb attracted followers by means of his personal charisma and his claim. In this sense he serves as a perfect example of Max Weber's concept of prophet where '...the personal call is the decisive element distinguishing the prophet from the priest. The latter lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition, while the prophet's claim is based on personal revelation and charisma.'[33] This charismatic quality which drew individuals to the Báb was expressed by his first disciple, Mullá Husayn, when recalling his first meeting with his master said:

> That holy repast refreshened alike my body and
> soul. In the presence of my Host, at that hour,
> I felt as though I were feeding upon the fruits
> of Paradise...Had my youthful Host no other claim
> to greatness, this were sufficient - that He
> received me with that quality of hospitality and
> loving-kindness which I was convinced no other
> human being could possibly reveal.[34]

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[31] Lady Mary Leonora Sheil, Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia, (London 1856), p. 181

[32] See Balyuzi, The Báb, p. 167-170, and Nabíl-i-A'zam, p. 288-300.

[33] Weber, p. 46

[34] Quoted in Nabíl-i-A'zam, p. 62

As mentioned earlier, the Báb claimed to be the gate to the imám mahdí and at later date to be the qá'im himself. E. G. Browne claims that the Báb saw himself as the latest spokesman for God, the Eternal Essence, Who had revealed Himself to numerous prophets in the past and would continue to do so in the future.[35] Consequently, the Báb did not claim to be the final mouthpiece of the Divine. According to Browne, in the Persian Bayán emphasis '...is laid on the doctrine that this revelation is not final, but that believers therein must continually expect the coming of "Him whom God shall manifest", who will confirm what he pleases of the Bayán and alter what he pleases...'[36] To this hope, the appearance of 'Him whom God shall manifest', the mass of bewildered Bábís, hunted and leaderless, now turned their thoughts.

Following the attempt on the life of the Sháh, many of the leading Bábís throughout the country were arrested and thrown into prison. Among these prisoners was a certain Mírzá Husayn ʻAlí, known amongst the Bábís as Bahá'u'lláh, the 'Glory of God'. He was the son of a well-known minister of the royal court, and his activities in the Bábí movement were soon brought to the attention of governmental authorities. Along with several companions, he was confined to an old abandoned reservoir in Tihrán known as the Síyáh-Chál. He remained there for four months, during which time no less than twenty-eight Bábís were executed.[37] Bahá'u'lláh later claimed that it was during this period of confinement that he received revelations from God in which it was made known to him that he was 'Him

[35] E. G. Browne, 'The Bábís of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines', The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. XXI, (London, 1889), p. 914

[36] Browne, 'The Bábís of Persia. II', p. 919

[37] A Traveller's Narrative, note T, p. 329-334

whom God shall manifest'.   Bahá'u'lláh expressed this experience in
the following words:

> O King! I was but a man like others, asleep
> upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the
> All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught
> Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This
> thing is not from Me, but from One Who is
> Almighty and All-Knowing. And He bade Me
> lift up My voice between earth and heaven, and
> for this there befell Me what hath caused the
> tears of every man of understanding to flow.[38]

Bahá'u'lláh was subsequently released, possibly due to the prestige
of his family and the intervention on his behalf of a Russian minister
in Ṭihrán, but he was exiled by order of the Sháh to Baghdád, never
again to return to his native Persia.   On January 12, 1853, together
with several members of his family Bahá'u'lláh began a two month journey
westward.

Upon his arrival in Baghdád Bahá'u'lláh found the community of Bábís
(most of whom had fled to Baghdád to avoid further persecution) in a state
of utter confusion.   'The community of the Báb, harassed and hounded and
heart-broken, was in grave danger of succumbing to forces of reckless
nihilism within its own ranks.'[39]   After remaining in Baghdád for one
year, during which time he shared the leadership of the community with
his half-brother, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal (the person the Báb had made the inheritor
of community leadership granted he abdicate if 'Him whom God shall manifest'
should appear[40]), Bahá'u'lláh, not yet having declared his revelation,
alone and on foot left for Sulaymáníyyih.

For close to two years Bahá'u'lláh dwelt in the mountains of Kurdistán

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[38] Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, trans. by Shoghi Effendi, (Wilmette, Illinois, 1969), p. 11

[39] H. M. Balyuzi, Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith, (London 1970), p. 42

[40] E. G. Browne, Introduction to Hájji Mírzá Jání's Nuqtatu'l-Káf, in E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, vol. XV, (London, 1910), p. xxxi-xxxii

far removed from human habitations.[41] Then, in March of 1856 he returned
to Baghdád

Bahá'u'lláh remained in Baghdád for seven years.   During this period
he revealed[42] three of his best known writings: Kitáb-i-Íqán (The Book
of Certitude, Kalimát-i-Maknúnih (The Hidden Words), and Haft-Vají (The
Seven Valleys).   The first contains among other themes an explanation of
the symbolism contained in the New Testament and the Qur'án;   The Hidden
Words is a distillation of the eternal verities;   while The Seven Valleys
is an example of Bahá'u'lláh's mystical prose.   At the same time,
Bahá'u'lláh played an active role in helping reconstruct the Bábí community,
which had sorely declined since the death of the Báb.

Bahá'u'lláh's active participation in the life of the Bábí community
in Baghdád had two consequences: first, it engendered a breach between
himself and his half-brother Subh-i-Azal, a split which was later to have
important ramifications for the movement;   and second, it aroused the wrath
of several local divines and subsequently the hostility of the Persian
Consul-General in Baghdád, Mírzá Buzurg Khán.   The latter, by means of his
vivid letters portraying Bahá'u'lláh as a threat to the security of the
empire, induced the Sháh to instruct his Foreign Minister, Mírzá Sa'íd
Khán, to direct the Persian Ambassador in Constantinople to make
arrangements with the Ottoman government for Bahá'u'lláh's deportation to
Turkish territory.   An extract from the Foreign Minister's letter reads

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[41] 'We betook Ourselves to the wilderness, and there, separated and alone,
led for two years a life of complete solitude...Alone, We communed
with Our spirit, oblivious of the world and all that is therein...
until the hour when, from the Mystic Source, there came the summons
bidding Us return whence We came.' (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán,
trans. by Shoghi Effendi, 2nd ed., (Wilmette, Illinois, 1970),
p. 250-251.

[42] Bahá'ís believe these works to be the revealed word of God.

as follows:

> ...then the best thing is that explicit orders
> should be given to His Excellency Námiq Pasha
> the governor of the Province of Baghdád, while
> on this side also orders should be issued to
> the Prince-Governor of Kirmánsháhán, that Mírzá
> Husayn 'Alí and such of his followers and familiars
> as are the cause and root of the mischief should
> be arrested in such   manner as is requisite, and
> handed over at the frontier to the officers of
> the afore-mentioned Prince; and that the Government
> should detain them, under guard and supervision,
> in some place in the interior of the country which
> it regards suitable, and not allow their evil and
> mischief to spread. [43]

Consequently, in March of 1863 Bahá'u'lláh received a letter from 'Alí

Páshá, the Grand Vizier of the Sultan of Turkey, which bade him journey

to Constantinople.   While tarrying for twelve days in the Najíbíyyih

Garden, he announced to his companions before departing that he was 'Him

whom God shall manifest'.   It was the twenty-second day of April, 1863.

Bahá'u'lláh and his companions in banishment arrived in Constantinople

on August 16, 1863.   There they lingered for four months awaiting a

decision from the government as to their fate.   In December of that year

they learned they were to be sent to Adrianople.   Following a twelve day

journey through ice and snow they arrived at their destination.

It was in Adrianople that the breach which began in Baghdád between

Bahá'u'lláh and Subh-i-Azal widened into an unbridgeable lacuna.   In this

city Bahá'u'lláh issued an open and public announcement of his revelation,[44]

but the appointed heir to leadership of the Bábí community refused to

recognize his claim.   He and his followers asserted that it was impossible

that one revelation should so soon be abrogated by another.[45]   Hence, from

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[43] 'Letter from Mírzá Sa'íd Khán to the Persian Ambassador in Constantinople',
trans. by E. G. Browne, Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion,
p. 286-287

[44] H. M. Balyuzi, Bahá'u'lláh, (London, 1963), p. 36

[45] E. G. Browne, 'The Bábís of Persia. I. Sketch of their History and
and Personal Experiences amongst Them.', Journal of the Royal Asiatic
Society of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. XXI, p. 514-515

this time forward there were two groups within the old Bábí community: those who followed Bahá'u'lláh were known as Bahá'ís; and those who took the side of Şubḥ-i-Azal were termed Azalís. By and large the great majority of former Bábís supported Bahá'u'lláh.[46]

The growing enmity between the two groups (characterized by examples of open hostility) as well as the continual stream of Bahá'í pilgrims who came to see their new master began to cast suspicion in the eyes of the Turkish authorities as to the intentions of the community. Consequently, a decision was finally reached whereby Bahá'u'lláh and a number of his companions were to be banished to the penal colony of 'Akká, a small island situated in the bay near Haifa (Israel), where murderers and political agitators from all parts of the Ottoman Empire were consigned, while Şubḥ-i-Azal and his followers were to be sent to Famagusta, Cyprus. Thus, on August 12, 1868, the already twice banished band of Persians once again began a journey into exile.

Bahá'u'lláh and his family reached 'Akká on August 31, 1868. Until October of 1870 they (along with approximately seventy other Bahá'ís) were kept under closed confinement in the citadel barracks. During this period several followers became ill and died, and Bahá'u'lláh's younger son was killed when he fell through a skylight. The group was finally transferred to a local caravanserai, while Bahá'u'lláh and his family were lodged in a small house within the city walls where they remained for nine years. After this time the restrictions placed upon Bahá'u'lláh by the local authorities were somewhat relaxed, and he was allowed to occupy two houses outside the city proper: the first located four miles north of 'Akká, where he dwelt for two years; and the second, a neighbouring abode known as the mansion of Bahjí, where he remained until his death in 1892.

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[46] G. N. Curzon, <u>Persia and the Persian Question</u>, vol. I, (London, 1966), p. 499

Bahjí

During Bahá'u'lláh's exile in 'Akká, numerous Bahá'ís from throughout the Near East came on pilgrimage to the prison city. Initially the most they could hope for would be to catch a glimpse of their master from beyond the city's moats, but as restrictions were gradually lifted they were permitted to call on him in person. Bahjí became the center of such activity, and it was here that the Cambridge Orientalist, E. G. Browne, met Bahá'u'lláh in person. [47]

In both Adrianople and 'Akká Bahá'u'lláh penned numerous tablets. These writings can be classified into roughly four categories: laws and ordinances, prayers and meditations, interpretations of past scriptures, and discourses and exhortations. Among these, two compositions stand out in their magnaminity: the Súriy-i-Múluk (Súrih of Kings), and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book). The former, composed in Adrianople, collectively addressed the major kings, rulers, and ecclesiastical leaders of the world. This exordium was later supplemented by letters sent to individual rulers from 'Akká. Included in the list of recipients were 'Álí Páshá, the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire, the ecclesiastical leaders of Sunní Islám, the French Emperor, Napoleon III, the Czar of Russia, Alexander II, Queen Victoria, Pope Pious IX, the rulers of the Americas, and numerous others. In these tablets:

> He called upon them to take fast hold of the "Most
> Great Law"; proclaimed Himself to be "the King of
> Kings" and "the Desire of all Nations"; ...exhorts
> them to be reconciled among themselves, to unite and
> to reduce their armaments; bids them refrain from
> laying excessive burdens on their subjects, who, He
> informs them, are their "wards" and "treasures";
> enunciates the principle that should any one among
> them take up arms against another, all should rise
> against him; and warns them not to deal with Him as
> the "King of Islám" and his ministers had dealt. [48]

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[47] For a description of this meeting see E. G. Browne's Introduction to A Traveller's Narrative, vol. II, p. xxxviii-xl

[48] Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, (Wilmette, Illinois, 1965), p. 206-207

A special tablet was likewise sent to the Sháh of Persia, Násiri'd-Dín

Sháh.   As Lord Curzon reported, the messenger who carried this tablet

'...received the penalty of his rash presumption by being branded to death

with red-hot bricks.'[49]   The Kitáb-i-Aqdas was revealed at Bahjí in

1873.   This book not only set down the laws and ordinances of Bahá'u'lláh's

religion, it also established a line of succession for his cause and

ordained those institutions that would ensure its future unity.

Like the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be a manifestation of God, an

appointed spokesman for the Sacred.   However, there were two major

differences in their ministries.   First, while the Báb directed his

message primarily to the Islamic world, Bahá'u'lláh also made his claims

known to leaders of the Occident.   He claimed to fulfill not only the

expectations of Shí'ah Islám but the prophecies of other religious

traditions.   For example, in the epistle to Pope Pious IX he announced

that 'the Word which the Son concealed is made manifest.'[50]   Likewise,

his letter to the high-priests of the Zoroastrian religion proclaimed that

'the Incomparable Friend' is manifest.[51]   Second, Bahá'u'lláh was able

to codify his message to a much greater extent than was the Báb.   The

latter's ministry lasted only nine years, most of it being spent in

isolation, while from the time of his declaration in Baghdád until his

death in 'Akká Bahá'u'lláh had almost thirty years in which to elaborate

upon his teachings.   Although he too was kept a constant prisoner, the

numerous pilgrims that attended their master both in Adrianople and 'Akká

allowed him to maintain regular communication with his followers, and

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[49] Curzon, note 1, p. 500

[50] Bahá'u'lláh, Proclamation to the Kings and Leaders of Religion, in
The Bahá'í Revelation. A Selection from the Bahá'í Holy Writings,
rev. ed., (London, 1970), p. 30

[51] Quoted in Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 211

consequently, in terms of doctrines, laws, and institutions, the teachings
of Bahá'u'lláh are much more coherent and intact.

Bahá'u'lláh's main doctrines, which shall be examined at greater
length in subsequent chapters, can be summarized as follows.   There is
only one God, the transcendent and omnipotent Source of the universe, Whose
Essence can be comprehended by no man.   However, from time to time God
reveals Himself to certain individuals (manifestations) who in turn reveal
to men principles by which they should live their lives.   The commandments
Of God vary in accordance to the needs and exigencies of the time, but
their purpose is always the same: to draw men both as individuals and
as societies closer to the knowledge of the Sacred.   Being the latest
of God's messengers whose dispensation will last not less than a thousand
years, Bahá'u'lláh has the right to abrogate the laws and institutions of
the past and introduce new ones.   The core of Bahá'u'lláh's social
teachings is the concept of the oneness of mankind.   All men regardless
of race, sex, religious background, or economic status are considered
equal in the eyes of God, and should therefore treat each other as equals.
Consequently, in the Bahá'í Faith, as in Islám, there is to be no priestly
hierarchy.   Instead, there should exist a community of believers sharing
similar status.   The sole source of authority within the community is
the manifestation and his duly appointed successors, be they individuals
or institutions.   The point to be stressed, however, is that Bahá'u'lláh
spoke with the authority of the Sacred, and his various decrees are
therefore to be followed unhesitatingly.

Through his own efforts Bahá'u'lláh was able to lift the Bábí community
out of its despair.   He was able to capture and transfer to himself the
charismatic qualities of the Báb, and in so doing steer the movement on
its new course - that of a world religion.   The powerful impression he

made upon his followers was summed up by the poet Na'ím when he sang:

> Why should we not see a hundred thousand souls
> His sacrifice?
>
> Why should we not see a hundred thousand hearts
> bewitched by Him? [52]

Upon his death in May of 1892 the Sulṭán of Turkey was notified by telegram that 'the Sun of Bahá has set'.[53]

After the death of Bahá'u'lláh the leadership of the movement passed to his eldest son, 'Abbás Effendi. In his last testament Bahá'u'lláh alluded to 'Abbás Effendi's position as interpreter of h's writings,[54] but when the latter claimed leadership of the Bahá'í community, Bahá'u'lláh's younger son, Mírzá Muḥammad 'Alí, refused to recognize him, asserting that his elder brother had concealed part of his father's testament. Subsequently, all but two of Bahá'u'lláh's immediate family took the side of Mírzá Muḥammad 'Alí. However, the large majority of Bahá'ís throughout the Near East followed 'Abbás Effendi, and after several years of intra-community conflict Mírzá Muḥammad's group ceased to carry much influence in the Bahá'í ranks. At this time 'Abbás Effendi took the title of 'Abdu'l-Bahá[55] (the servant of Bahá) by which he was later to become known throughout the Bahá'í world.

Although still a prisoner of the Turkish government, in 1894 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave his approval to a Lebonese convert to introduce the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States, thereby initiating a new phase in the growth of the religion. Until this time the movement's believers had come only from the East. Under the leadership of 'Abdul-Bahá the Bahá'í Faith was destined to be established both in Europe and

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[52] Quoted in E. G. Browne, A Literary History of Persia, vol. IV, (Cambridge, 1959), p. 214

[53] Balyuzi, Baha'u'llah, p. 67

[54] Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-'Ahd, in The Bahá'í Revelation, p. 162-163

[55] H. M. Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, (London, 1971), p. 60

North America.

Following the fall of 'Abdu'l-Hamíd's Ottoman government in July of 1908, 'Abd'ul-Bahá was finally released from captivity; he was sixty-five years old. Three years later, in August of 1911, he left for Marseilles and for the next three months addressed various groups both in London and Paris concerning his father's teachings. These groups ranged in constitution from Archdeacon Wilberforce's congregation to Annie Beasant's Theosophical Society. After wintering in Egypt 'Abdu'l-Bahá again journeyed westward, this time to the United States and Canada where he remained for over six months. During his visit he traversed the entire continent, lecturing from New York to California. His subjects on these occasions varied from talks on the nature of man to discussions about economic principles for the modern world, but he always stressed one point, namely, that Bahá'u'lláh had lived for the explicit purpose of raising mankind to a new level of spiritual existence. By the time 'Abdu'l-Bahá returned to the Holy Land in December of 1913, after a second trip to Europe and a five month stay in Egypt due to poor health, numerous Bahá'í groups had been formed both in Europe and in North America .

During the war years (1916-1917) 'Abdu'l-Bahá penned the Tablets of the Divine Plan in which he outlined a teaching campaign that would take the message of the Bahá'í Faith to 120 territories and islands. At this time the movement had followers in only thirty-five countries,[56] and the initiation of the plan would have to wait until 1937 when its administrative institutions would be strong enough to support such a campaign, but the dark hours of World War I could not diminish 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision.

On November 28, 1921, 'Abdu'l-Bahá died. For twenty-nine years he had been the recognized leader of the Bahá'í Faith. His charismatic

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[56] Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 424

qualities though somewhat different in nature than those of the Báb or

Bahá'u'lláh were none the less compelling, as is witnessed by the

impression he left on numerous individuals both in Europe and North America.

He was not a manifestation of God; he did not claim to receive revelation

from the Sacred. Bahá'ís believe, however, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was

divinely inspired and guided[57] and therefore contact with the Sacred did

not cease with the death of Bahá'u'lláh but was seen to be manifest in

the living example of his eldest son.[58]

The leadership of the Bahá'í community next passed to Shoghi Rabbani,

known more commonly to Bahá'ís as Shoghi Effendi.[*] A grandson of 'Abdu'l-

Bahá, he was only twenty-four years of age when he learned he had been

appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith by declaration of his grandfather's

last will and testament. The young man suddenly found himself the leader

of an emerging world religion whose adherents resided in thirty-five

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[57]
Amín Banání, 'The Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá', World Order, vol. VI, #1,
    Fall, 1971, (Wilmette, Illinois), p. 68

[58]
The official position of the Bahá'í Faith regarding the station of
    'Abdu'l-Bahá was stated by Shoghi Effendi as follows: 'He is, and
    should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center
    and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His
    most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the
    perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His
    Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every
    Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root,
    the Limb of the Law of God, the Being "round Whom all names revolve",
    the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most
    Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy
    Dispensation - styles and titles that are implicit and find their
    truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name 'Abdu'l-
    Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the "Mystery of
    God" - an expression by which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has chosen to
    designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify
    us to assign to him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the
    person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human
    nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended
    and are completely harmonized.' (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of
    Bahá'u'lláh, rev. ed., (Wilmette, Illinois, 1969), p. 134

[*]
Effendi is a title of respect, meaning mister or sir. 'Abdu'l-Bahá
    instructed all Bahá'ís to address him as such.

countries. The task to which he dedicated his life involved not only expanding this number but constructing a viable administrative system which would link the various Bahá'í communities throughout the world and allow them to interact with one another. 'A new day had come to the Cause, new methods were required. This was to be the era of emancipation of the Faith, of recognition of its independent status, of the establishment of its Order, of the up-building of its institutions.'[59]

From his headquarters in Haifa, Israel, the center of the Bahá'í world, Shoghi Effendi began his task. From the beginning of his Guardianship he set out to establish the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion. Up to this time the Faith had been closely tied to Islám; it had been reared in its milieu and had deeply imbibed of its heritage. While not denying this parentage Shoghi Effendi consciously attempted to wean the young movement:

> Shoghi Effendi never set foot in the Mosque
> whereas 'Abdu'l-Bahá had attended it until the
> last Friday of His life. What local people had
> suspected - that the Bahá'í Cause was really
> something quite different - became blatantly clear;
> that which it would have been almost impossible for
> the Master to do, namely, to sever the intimate
> bonds which had bound him for so long to the Arab
> community, particularly the Muhammadan community of
> Palestine, during many years when it was forbidden
> to even mention the name Bahá'í, the Guardian now
> did overnight and began to encourage the Bahá'ís to
> likewise do in different parts of the world.[60]

Shoghi Effendi was unexpectedly aided in his efforts when on May 10, 1925, the Egyptian law court of Beba, after hearing a case in which a small village headman had demanded that the Muslim wives of several local Bahá'ís be granted a divorce on the grounds that their husbands were heretics,

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[59] Rúḥíyyih Rabbani, The Priceless Pearl, (London, 1969), p. 229

[60] Rúḥíyyih Rabbani, Twenty-five Years of the Guardianship, (London, n.d.),
 p. 5

stated that:

> All these prove definitely that the Bahá'í
> religion is a new religion, with an independent
> platform and laws and institutions peculiar to
> it, and show a different and contradictory belief
> to the beliefs and laws and commandments of Islám. [61]

Between the years 1923 and 1937 Shoghi Effendi personally directed

several projects. These included sending teachers to different parts of

the world, translating literature, and guiding the construction of the

Bahá'í temple in Wilmette Illinois. The most important task he undertook

during these years, however, was the strengthening of national and local

Bahá'í administrative institutions. [62]

During the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a national body which

administered the affairs of the various communities under its jurisdiction

had been introduced in the United States and Canada. Before the

establishment of this institution there had existed throughout the world

only scattered local communities whose activities were rarely co-ordinated.

By 1934 Shoghi Effendi had created additional national bodies in Persia,

'Iráq, India-Burma, Great Britain, Germany, Egypt-Sudan, and Australia-

New Zealand. The National Spiritual Assembly assumed grave responsibilities,

'...for it has to exercise full authority over all the local Assemblies

in its province, and will have to direct the activities of the Friends,

guard vigilantly the Cause of God, and control and supervise the affairs

of the Movement in general.' [63] Such institutions were only established

in countries where there existed a strong base of local communities. Until

such time as other countries and regions of the Bahá'í world developed

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[61] The Bahá'í World. A Biennial International Record, vol. III, April 1928-
1930, (New York, 1930), p. 49

[62] These institutions will be examined in subsequent chapters.

[63] Principles of Bahá'í Administration. A Compilation, 3rd. ed., (London,
1973), p. 74

this base, their local communities were guided by the Guardian himself.

Under the directive of Shoghi Effendi, in 1927 the American community adopted a Bahá'í National Constitution which set down the powers, duties, and functions of the National Spiritual Assembly and gave it a firm basis in law. This Constitution in turn set an example for the various national spiritual assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world to follow. Likewise, the By-Laws of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the City of New York, drafted in 1931, served as a model for every local community around the globe. [64] By means of constant letters and telegrams Shoghi Effendi advised the various institutions, both national and local, how they should conduct their affairs in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In such a way he was orienting the communities towards the common goal of becoming unified bodies directed from a world center. [65]

In 1937 Shoghi Effendi launched the first of three systematic teaching campaigns designed to spread the message of Bahá'u'lláh across the entire planet. Thus 'Abdu'l-Bahá's scheme as set down in the Tablets of the Divine Plan was finally initiated. Known as the Seven-Year Plan, it was directed mainly towards the American community. Its goals included the establishment of one Bahá'í community in every state of the United States, province of Canada, and republic of Latin America. In addition, the various countries in which Bahá'í communities existed were called upon to extend teaching activity, increase the translation of Bahá'í literature, develop Bahá'í educational courses, and work towards the purchasing of properties or buildings to be used as future national centers. By the time of its completion in April of 1944, the goals of the Plan as regards the Americas were achieved, and the numerous Bahá'í communities

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[64] Rúḥíyyih Rabbani, The Priceless Pearl, p. 303

[65] Rúḥíyyih Rabbani, The Priceless Pearl, p. 303

throughout the world had been both numerically and structurally
strengthened.

After a two year respite, the Second Seven-Year Plan was begun.   Like
its predecessor, it called on the Bahá'í communities in various countries
to continue to expand their activities in the vital areas of teaching,
publication of literature, and community education.   Moreover, it outlined
a systematic teaching campaign for Europe similar in objectives to the
previous operation in the Americas.

The latter years of the Second Seven-Year Plan saw the introduction
of two new institutions on the international level: the International
Bahá'í Council, and the Hands of the Cause.   The former, composed of
eight members appointed by the Guardian and designed to be the forerunner
of a future Bahá'í international court,[66] initially served the purpose of
providing a link between the Faith and the new state of Israel.   The
second was a group of nineteen individuals (later expanded to twenty-seven)
also appointed by the Guardian, whose duties were to help propagate and
protect the Bahá'í Faith.   Each Hand was assigned a specific area of the
world in which he was to consult with local and national institutions
regarding their teaching efforts.   He also formed a vital communicative
link between the communities under his jurisdiction and the Guardian in
Haifa.

The success of the Second Seven-Year Plan was marked by the creation
of four new national spiritual assemblies; national bodies were formed in
Central America, South America, Canada, and Italy-Switzerland,[67] bringing
the total number of such institutions in the Bahá'í world to twelve.   At

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[66] The Bahá'í World, vol. XII, April 1950-1954, (Wilmette, Illinois, 1956),
p. 41

[67] During the early years of the development of the administrative system
assemblies were often assigned to areas or regions - thus the
assembly of Central America etc.

the conclusion of the Plan in 1953, Shoghi Effendi felt that the movement

was now strong enough to launch its most ambitious program of expansion.

Four international teaching conferences held successively in Kampala,

Uganda, Wilmette, U. S. A., Stockholm, Sweden, and New Delhi, India

signaled the advent of the Ten-Year Crusade.   Shoghi Effendi notified all

Bahá'í communities around the world that:

> Feel hour propitious (to) proclaim (to the) entire
> Bahá'í world (the) projected launching (on the)
> occasion (of the) convocation (of the) approaching
> International Conferences (on the) four continents
> (of the) globe the fate-laden, soul-stirring,
> decade-long, world-embracing Spiritual Crusade
> involving (the) simultaneous initiation (of) twelve
> national Ten Year Plans (and the) concerted
> participation (of) all National Spiritual Assemblies
> (of the) Bahá'í world aiming (at the) immediate
> extension (of) Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual dominion
> as well as (the) eventual establishment (of the)
> structure (of) His administrative order (in) all
> remaining Sovereign States, Principal Dependencies,
> comprising Principalities, Sultanates, Emirates,
> Shaykhdoms, Protectorates, Trust Territories (and)
> Crown Colonies scattered (over the) surface (of the)
> entire planet. 68

The major objectives of the Ten-Year Crusade included;doubling the number

of countries in which the Faith was established from 131 to 260; doubling

the amount of translated literature, doubling the number of temples in

the world from two to four; and quadrupling the number of national

spiritual assemblies to forty-eight.

In the midst of this world-wide project Shoghi Effendi suddenly died.

In November of 1957 he succumbed to a heart attack in London after being

bed ridden by a case of the Asiatic flu.   The Bahá'í world was initially

in a state of shock.   Shoghi Effendi, the architect of the Bahá'í

Administrative Order, was now gone.   He had appointed no successor;   the

Faith stood leaderless.   In this state of emergency the Hands of the Cause,[69]

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68 The Bahá'í World, vol. XII, p. 253

69 In 1957 eight more Hands of the Cause were appointed by Shoghi Effendi,
   bringing their total to twenty-seven.   For details see Chapter 5.

meeting in Haifa, assumed leadership of the movement. From this time

until the end of the Ten-Year Crusade in 1963 they constituted the

highest institution in the Bahá'í world.

In April of 1963 elected delegates from throughout the Bahá'í world

met in London to take part in the Bahá'í World Congress, an event marking the

completion of the Ten-Year Crusade. By this time the number of countries

and territories opened to the Faith numbered 259 and the number of

national spiritual assemblies stood at fifty-eight. At this meeting the

Bahá'ís elected a body of nine men known as The Universal House of Justice,

which was accorded the distinction of becoming the paramount administrative

institution in the Bahá'í world. Until the passing of Shoghi Effendi the

Bahá'í Faith had always been dependent on a specific individual to

interpret its scriptures and direct its activities. With the election

of the Universal House of Justice the leadership of a charismatic

individual came to an end.

The Universal House of Justice feeling that 'The great work of

teaching must be extended, not only in those areas where mass conversion

is beginning, but everywhere.',[70] in October of 1963 announced their

formulation of the Nine-Year Plan, to be inaugurated in April of 1964.

The goals of the new Plan included raising the number of local communities

in the world to 13,700 and increasing the number of national spiritual

assemblies to 108. It also called for the translation of literature into

133 additional languages. In the words of the Universal House of Justice

the driving aim of the plan was, '...to carry the Message of Bahá'u'lláh

to every stratum of society, not only in the towns and cities but also

in the villages and country districts where the virus of materialism has

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[70] 'Message to National Conventions, May 7, 1963', Wellspring of Guidance.
      Messages from the Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, Illinois,
      1970), p. 6

The Bahá'í World Center

had much less effect on the lives of men...'[71]

When the Nine-Year Plan ended in April of 1973 the Bahá'í Faith was no longer an 'obscure sect of Islám'. It had established itself as an independent world religion, being recognized as such by the state of Israel. Furthermore, it had introduced its institutions into more than three hundred countries and dependencies throughout the world and had developed an efficient system of administration. It had broken the bonds of geographic isolation and become a full-fledged international movement.

A perusal of the short history of the Bahá'í Faith reveals several themes of analytical interest. The first concerns the prophets' means of legitimatizing their claims. It has continually been stressed throughout this chapter that both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh were individuals possessed of dynamic charismatic qualities and that their claims to prophethood were largely based on these qualities. For example, when asked for a substantiation of his claim during the examination at Tabríz, the Báb responded by asking his examiners who else had the power to reveal so many verses of scripture in such a short period of time. This recalls the answer given by Muhammad twelve hundred years earlier when he used his creation of the Qur'án as a proof of his station. In a like manner, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh pointed to the power of their leader's verses as proof that he was 'Him whom God shall manifest'.[72] Hence, although the two men professed to fulfill the prophecies found in past scriptures, thus adding an element of apologetics to their assertions, it was the self-generated charisma which they felt to be the Sacred within them that was the decisive factor. Again one can not help but notice the precision with which their

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71 'Message of July, 1964', Wellspring of Guidance, p. 28

72 E. G. Browne, 'Some Remarks on the Bábí Texts edited by Baron Victor Rosen in Vols. I and VI of the Collections Scientifiques de l'Institut des Langues Orientales de Saint-Pétersbourg', Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. XXIV, 1892, p. 303

personal qualities and characteristics match Max Weber's ideal type of the ethical prophet.

The second theme involves what may be termed the transference of authority. One of the central problems in the history of religions has been the question of the maintenance of legitimate authority. As Max Weber points out, after the prophet makes his claim there generally follows a period of routinization during which a religious community arises through a process '...whereby either the prophet himself or his disciples secure the permanence of his preaching and the congregation's distribution of grace, hence insuring the economic existence of the enterprise and those who man it...'[73] The main issues have always been: first, who has the authority to assume the leadership of the community after the prophet's death; and second, in what sense is this authority related to the Sacred? In fact, it is over these very issues that the major divisions within many of the world's religious communities have resulted, the classic example of such a rift being the one which occurred after the death of Muḥammad and divided the Islamic world into two mainstreams, Sunní and Shí'ah.

During the development of the Bahá'í community the question of legitimate authority has arisen at each stage of transition: Bahá'u'lláh's claim to leadership of the Bábí community was challenged by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal; 'Abdu'l-Bahá's authority was contested by his half-brother Mírzá Muḥammad 'Alí; Shoghi Effendi faced the antagonism of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's private secretary, Aḥmad Sohráb; and the Universal House of Justice had to deal with the rebellion of one of the Hands of the Cause, Mason Remey. However, in each instance the overwhelming majority of community members sided with those individuals to whom the immediate power fell, and consequently the

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[73] Weber, p. 60-61

Bahá'í Faith has to this day averted a major break within its ranks
capable of realistically challenging the established claim to legitimate
authority.

One of the important characteristics of Bahá'í leadership has been
its asserted relationship to the Sacred.   Both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh
claimed to receive direct revelation from God.   The official Bahá'í
position concerning 'Abdu'l-Bahá is that 'Whatsoever His tongue utters,
whatsoever His pen records, that is correct; according to the explicit
text of Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of the Branch.' [74] Thus, although
falling into a different category than either the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh, his
word is accepted by Bahá'ís as being inspired by the Sacred.   Likewise,
Bahá'ís hold that Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice by
the power granted to them by 'Abdu'l-Bahá are divinely guided. As
'Abdu'l-Bahá's last will and testament reads:

> The sacred and youthful branch, the guardian of
> the Cause of God as well as the Universal House
> of Justice, to be universally elected and established,
> are both under the care and protection of the Abhá
> Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of
> His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered
> up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. [75]

Therefore, in the tradition of Shí'ah Islám the Bahá'í Faith maintains
that contact between God and the leadership of His community has not been
severed but progressively continues.

Finally, during both its early years of growth in Persia and its later
expansion throughout the world the Bahá'í Faith has attracted followers
from various social and economic backgrounds.   Lord Curzon found them in
every walk of life from the ministers of the royal court to the scavenger

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[74] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'The Covenant', in The Bahá'í Revelation, p. 184

[75] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, trans. by Shoghi
Effendi, (Wilmette, Illinois, 1944), p. 11

and the groom.[76]   Hence, it is difficult to argue that the movement is

solely the manifestation of a specific socio-economic class.   Rather, it

appears that the Bahá'í Faith is a product of a world whose rapidly

collapsing civilizations, be they characterized by an overt rationalism or a

dogmatic traditionalism, have failed to answer, both individually and

socially, the basic problems of modern man.

The Bahá'í Faith sees its historical mission as being that of creating

the foundation of a new world civilization, and therefore its teachers are

attempting to impart the Faith's message to the masses of mankind.   One

country with which the movement's connections can be traced back to its

earliest years of historical development, and one which has subsequently

become a center of mass teaching activity, is India, and it is to this

land that we shall now turn our attention.

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[76] Curzon, p. 499

Chapter 2   The Bahá'í Faith in India

India's earliest contact with the new movement took place during the
time of the Báb.   The various histories of the Báb make mention of
several prominent Indian believers.   Nabíl-i-Aʿzam tells us that one of
the 'Letters of the Living' was an Indian known as Shaykh Saʿíd-i-Hindí.
Like the other disciples of the Báb, he was directed by his master to
spread the message of the new revelation.   This command took him not only
to various parts of Persia, but also to his homeland of India.   His work
in India, however, was unproductive.   As Nabíl states, '... the latter was
productive of what might seem a negligible result, its only fruit being the
conversion of a certain siyyid ...'[1]   After this, Shaykh Saʿíd-i-Hindí
dropped from sight, his ultimate fate remaining a mystery.

Another Indian convert during the ministry of the Báb was a certain
blind Siyyid, Jenáb-i-Baṣír, about whose life the Bábí histories are not in
complete agreement.   Nabíl states that this believer was none other than
the above mentioned Siyyid converted by Saʿíd-i-Hindí in the town of Multan,
where 'Casting behind him the trappings of leadership, and severing himself
from his friends and kinsmen, he arose with a fixed resolve to render his
share of service to the Cause he had embraced.'[2]   On the other hand,
The Táríkh-i-Jadíd claims Siyyid Baṣír heard of the Báb's appearance in
Bombay from where he hastened to Mecca and met the Báb in person.[3]   After
this meeting he returned to Persia and began to disseminate the teachings
of his new master.   Both histories agree, however, that he became active
within the Bábí community, and that he was known for his eloquence and

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[1] Nabíl-i-Aʿzam, p. 652

[2] Nabíl-i-Aʿzam, p. 589

[3] Mírzá Huseyn of Hamadán, p. 245-246

depth of learning.

The activities of Jenáb-i-Basír were finally brought to the attention of the state authorities.   The Táríkh-i-Jadíd says that after the Mázindarán upheavel Siyyid Basír went to 'Iráq where he was eventually arrested by the Prince-Governor in Burújird who, '... because he was so ready of speech and eloquent in discourse, first ordered his tongue to be cut out, and then put him to death.'[4]   Nabíl says he was arrested in Luristán where after being tortured, he eventually succumbed.[5]   It is clear from both accounts, therefore, that Jenáb-i-Basír never returned to his homeland.

A third convert from India was a dervish mentioned in The Táríkh-i-Jadíd under the title of 'the Indian believer'.[6]   This is most likely the same individual mentioned in Nabíl's account who had seen the Báb in a vision and soon hastened to Persia on foot to find the imám mahdí.   The dervish met the Báb in Chihríq where the latter gave him the title Qahru'lláh.[7] After leaving the Báb's presence, 'the Indian believer' began to expound his leader's doctrines.   This eventually led to his being arrested in the city of Khuy where the new convert along with several other Bábís was beaten and paraded through the streets on an ass.[8]   If indeed 'the Indian believer' was the same Qahru'lláh mentioned by Nabíl – the likeness of the two accounts making it appear to be so – he later, following orders from the Báb, left on foot for India where he was to announce the appearance of the qá'im.   Whether or not he successfully returned to India is unknown.

That there were other Indian believers present in Persia during the time of the Báb is made apparent by Mahjúr's monograph on the Bábí

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[4] Mírzá Huseyn of Hamadán, p. 247

[5] Nabíl-i-A'zam, p. 590

[6] Mírzá Huseyn of Hamadán, p. 241

[7] Balyuzi, The Báb, p. 137

[8] Mírzá Huseyn of Hamadán, p. 244

insurrection in Mázindarán. He lists four Indians as being among the 318

Bábís who defended themselves at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí.[9] It is evident,

however, that the activites of Indian converts at this time were for the

most part limited to Persia: Shaykh Sa'íd-i-Hindí upon reaching India found

his efforts unproductive; Qahru'lláh's arrival in his homeland remains

doubtful; and while it seems apparent from The Táríkh-i-Jadíd's account of

Jenáb-i-Başír's hearing about the Báb in Bombay that some knowledge of the

Báb's doctrines was current in India, it also appears that is was only

partial or scattered knowledge. Therefore, it is safe to say that during

the lifetime of the Báb the new Faith was virtually non-existent in the

subcontinent.

The year 1872 marks an historical landmark in the history of the Bahá'í

Faith in India. It was in this year that Jamál Effendi arrived in Bombay

and began to actively teach the doctrines and principles of the new religion.

Since the time of the Báb's death in 1850, several Bábís, and henceforth

Bahá'ís, had settled in Bombay (largely in association with the Parsi

community), but no active teaching of the message had taken place. In 1871

from his confines in 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh commissioned one of the numerous

pilgrims who came to visit him from throughout the Near East to proceed to

India and spread the word of his religion. This man, a learned scholar of

Arabic and Persian, was the above mentioned Sulaymán Khán-i-Tanákábuní Jamál

Effendi. Having had the title of 'Lamia' (the brilliant one) conferred upon

him by Bahá'u'lláh,[10] Jamál Effendi and his kinsmen Mírzá Huseyn late in the

year 1872 boarded a boat in Port Said, Egypt, and set sail for India. Upon

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[9] E.G. Browne, 'Further Notes on Bábí Literature', Materials for the Study
  of the Bábí Religion, p. 238

[10] Siyyid Mustafa Roumie, 'Bahá'í Pioneers', Star of the West. The Bahá'í
  Magazine, vol. XXII, # 3, June, 1931, (Washington D.C.), p. 76
  (Note - The author of this article was the same Siyyid Mustafáy-i-Rúmí
  mentioned in subsequent pages who was converted by Jamál Effendi. The
  spelling of names differs due to the fact that I have listed the author's
  name in the exact form as it appears in Star of the West).

arriving in Bombay the two Bahá'ís were received by several Persian merchants.

During his stay in Bombay Jamál Effendi delivered a great many talks concerning the claims and principles of the Bahá'í Faith. One such talk was directed towards the head of the Khoja community, the Aga Khan. However, rather than bringing converts to the Bahá'í Faith, his discourses aroused the animosity of numerous religious leaders, and consequently the two teachers, on the advice of their friends, departed the city. Although their initial stay in the great port city was cut short, Bombay was subsequently to become one of the leading Bahá'í communities in India.

After leaving Bombay the two men travelled throughout the subcontinent delivering the message of Bahá'u'lláh to the elite of the country:

> It was his custom to notify his arrival to the Governor
> or highest official of the place in British India and to the
> ruling prince in an Indian State. He would then pay a
> visit to them and deliver the Message. His list of those
> whom he delivered the Message contains names of almost all
> the high officials and princes and princesses of the land.[11]

In 1876 an historic gathering was held in the old Mughal capital of Delhi. The event was the assumption of the title 'The Empress of India' by Queen Victoria. Present at this ceremony were all the rulers of the various states in India, as well as numerous religious and secular leaders of the country. Jamál Effendi used this timely occasion to reveal the message of the Bahá'í Faith to many of the dignitaries. For example, he was able to meet and talk with Swāmī Dayanand Sarasvati, founder of the Ārya Samāj.[12]

The movement's initial reception in India was a mixed one. In most instances Jamál Effendi was met with consideration and courtesy. There were, however, several exceptions to this gentility. As previously

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[11] Bahá'í Newsletter (India), ✳ 31, May, 1944, (New Delhi), p. 1-2

[12] Siyyid Mustafa Roumie, 'Bahá'í Pioneers', Star of the West, vol. XXII, ✳ 3, June, 1931, p. 78

mentioned, he met with hostility in Bombay, and at later date he
experienced similar antagonism in Calcutta.   Altogether, the fruits of his
labor seemed negligible.   During a year's travel in India Jamál Effendi
had managed to convert only a handful of individuals.   When he left the
subcontinent in 1878 to carry the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the countries
of South-east Asia, he left behind him three prominent converts:
Raḍíd-din Khán of Hasanpur, Ḥájí Ramaḍán of Rampur, and Siyyid Muṣṭafáy-i-
Rúmí of Madras.[13]   The latter was destined not only to give great service
to the Faith in India, but also in Burma where he helped establish two
Bahá'í groups, one in Rangoon, and another in Mandalay.[14]

The next twenty years was a period of slow growth and development for
the Bahá'í Faith in India.   The message of the movement was spread via
the work of devoted converts to the major cities of the subcontinent.   Teaching
activities were directed from three centers of Bahá'í organization:
Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras.   Many of the programs were presented under
the auspices of the Theosophical Society, while others were carried out by
individual believers in their own way and by their own means.   Slowly the
claims of the Bahá'í Faith began to reach the ears of many of the educated
members of Indian society.

During his years of leadership, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent several prominent
Bahá'í teachers to India to help promote the movement.   Among these were
Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání, and Aga Mírzá Mahram.   The latter finally settled
in Bombay where he played a leading role in the Bahá'í community, while
Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání toured the country and eventually returned to his
native Persia.[15]   Both men by means of their zealous spirits helped enhance
teaching activity throughout the country, and by the year 1908 there were a

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[13] Siyyid Mustafa Roumie, 'Bahá'í Pioneers', Star of the West, vol. XXII
    # 4, July, 1931, p. 112

[14] Bahá'í Newsletter (India), # 31, May, 1944, p. 10

[15] Bahá'í Newsletter (India), #31, May, 1944, p. 2

Siyyid Mustafáy-i-Rumí

number of Bahá'í local spiritual assemblies (communities of nine or more believers) established in India including assemblies in Bombay, Calcutta, Aligarh, and Lahore. Of these, the Bombay community took the forefront in both the teaching of the Faith and the translation of literature. Its advancements in the area of translation marked the first time any of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh had been translated into one of the native languages of India. The activities of the Bombay community were commented upon by a travelling American Bahá'í, Sydney Sprague, who in 1908 reported, 'There are three meetings a week held in Bombay and there are as a rule eighty to a hundred men present.'[16] He also emphasized that it was not easy to become a Bahá'í in India. 'It often means a great sacrifice on the part of a believer, a loss of friends, money, and position.'[17]

In January of 1910 a convention comprised of members from the various religions of India was held in Allahabad. The Bahá'ís were invited to this convention, and Siyyid Muṣṭafáy-i-Rúmí, one of Jamál Effendi's original converts, presented a talk which was enthusiastically received by the delegates. As a result of the interest shown at the convention it was decided that teaching activities in the subcontinent should be accelerated, and approximately one year later a national teaching campaign was launched. The program called for the election of a nineteen member teaching council which would co-ordinate propagation activities across the entire country. The council officially came into existence during the early months of 1911.[18]

Two female American Bahá'ís were very prominent during the campaign, and their influence was felt by the various Bahá'í communities in the subcontinent. One, Lua Getsinger, was personally directed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to travel to India and spread the Faith. 'Just as 'Abdu'l-Bahá had sailed

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[16] Sydney Sprague, A Year with the Bahá'ís of India and Burma, (London, 1908), p. 15

[17] Sprague, p. 17

[18] 'Letter from N.R. Vakil', Star of the West, vol. II, # 7-8, August, 1911, (Chicago), p.14

from the East to the West to spread the Faith, He now summoned Lua to travel

from West to East to do the same thing.'[19]   The other teacher, Mrs. H.

Stannard, a student of comparative religion, answered a call for assistance

put out by the Indian community.   For several years these two dedicated

women delivered lectures from one end of the country to the other.   Lua

Getsinger spoke on various aspects of the Bahá'í Faith at numerous meetings

sponsored by such groups as the Ārya Samāj, the Brāhmo Samāj, and the

Theosophical Society.   In addition to her lecture tours, Mrs. Stannard

represented the Bahá'í religion at the All-India Theistic Conference of

1913.[20]   Both women were also responsible for the publication of Bahá'í

articles in several Indian newspapers.   For example, in the Sind Gazette

of December 24, 1913, an editorial appeared which stated that:

> A rather remarkable visitor to Karachi - far more remarkable
> than any of the Congress and Conference dignitaries - is
> Mrs. Stannard, the Baha'i Missionary. This gifted lady,
> who has studied all the religions of the world, and all the
> philosophies, and has come to the conclusion, not that
> they are all wrong, but that they are all right, has a new
> gospel to preach - not her own, but that of her Master,
> Abdu'l-Baha, the head of the Baha'i religious movement.[21]

The popular response that the two Americans received throughout their

travels was portentous; in future years American believers would continue to

play an active role in the teaching campaigns of the Indian community.

Although not winning many converts to the movement, the teaching

campaign was still of great importance to the development of the Bahá'í

community in India, as it marked the first real attempt to systematically

teach the Faith in the subcontinent.   It not only paved the way for future

plans, it also gave the Bahá'ís of India their first true feeling of

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[19] William Sears and Robert Quigly, The Flame, (Oxford, 1972), p. 112

[20] Star of the West, vol. V, # 2, April, 1914, (Chicago), p. 22

[21] 'Editorial from The Sind Gazette', in Star of the West, vol.V,#2,
        April, 1914, p. 23

community spirit. Before this time, teaching activities were for the most part efforts of individual communities; rarely was there an attempt made to organize anything beyond the local level. Thus, the Teaching Council of 1911 was in many ways the forerunner of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma.

December 27-29, 1920, is another significant landmark in the history of the Bahá'í Faith in India. It was on these dates that the First All-India Bahá'í Convention was held in the city of Bombay. Representatives of all the major world religions were present, as well as Bahá'í delegates from throughout the country. Although there are no official figures on the number of Bahá'ís residing in India during this time, it was estimated that there were nearly 175 followers present at the Convention. [22]

There were several important resolutions passed at the Convention from which the following were taken:

1) that funds be collected to build a Bahá'í temple in India;

2) that a school be started in Bombay for the education of Bahá'í children;

3) that a Bahá'í library be established in India;

4) that a publishing society be established to translate Bahá'í literature into different Indian languages; and

5) that there be a greater expansion in teaching activities and distribution of literature. [23]

It was to these objectives that the Bahá'ís of India now turned.

It is significant to note that the First All-India Bahá'í Convention and the death of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá were separated by less than a year. It was as if the Indian community sensed the new course the movement would take

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[22] K.K. Bhargava, 'Echoes of First All-India Bahá'í Conference', Star of the West, vol. XII, #13, Nov, 1921, (Chicago), p. 220

[23] 'The First All-India Bahá'í Convention', Star of the West, vol. XII, #1, March, 1921, p. 21

under the guidance of Shoghi Effendi.   From this point forward the Bahá'í

community in India – in accordance with the Guardian's plans for the Faith

throughout the world – was to an ever increasing degree to become oriented

towards executing its teaching plans within the framework of an

international administrative structure, the center of which was the Guardian

himself.

Between the years 1921 and 1938 the objectives initiated by the First

All-India Bahá'í Convention were pursued vigorously.   Consequently, there

were notable accomplishments in all areas of endeavor.   The guidance of

these projects was entrusted to the National Spiritual Assembly of the

Bah'ís of India and Burma, which Shoghi Effendi saw fit to create in April

of 1923.   The role he bequeathed to this body is evident from the contents

of the following message sent in November of 1925:

> I pray that your newly constituted National Spiritual
> Assembly may grow from strength to strength, may
> co-ordinate and consolidate the ever-expanding
> activities of the friends in India and Burma and
> inaugurate a fresh campaign of Teaching that will
> redound to the glory and power of the Most Great Name.[24]

The National Spiritual Assembly, composed of nine individuals elected by

delegates of the various local communities in India and Burma, met

periodically in Bombay.   Ten years later, in January of 1933, it was

incorporated with the government of India.

Organized teaching activities and the distribution of literature were

greatly increased during these years.   One of the largest teaching events

took place at the centenary celebration of the birth of the founder of the

Ārya Samāj, Dyanand Sarasvati.   The commemoration was held in Mathura in

the year 1925 and the Bahá'ís were granted special camp grounds where they were

allowed to distribute their literature.   During the five day event almost

five thousand booklets explaining the principles of the Faith were

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[24] Shoghi Effendi, 'Message of November 24, 1925', Dawn of a New Day,
    (New Delhi, 1970), p. 11

distributed.[25]

The Guardian constantly encouraged the Bahá'í community of India and Burma to increase their teaching activities. He continually stressed that it was part of their duty as Bahá'ís to spread the message of Bahá'u'lláh. For example, in a message to the Bahá'ís of India dated November 25, 1934, he said; 'The essential is that all the friends, without any exception whatever, should realise the full measure of the responsibility which Baha'u'llah has placed on them for teaching far and wide his Message.'[26] At a later date he reiterated that '... an unprecedented effort in the field of teaching is urgently required. Such an effort is of vital and paramount importance.'[27]

In an effort to stimulate teaching activity, Shoghi Effendi sent several teachers from various parts of the world to the subcontinent. Among the most famous of these travelling teachers was an American convert, Miss Martha Root. She made two tours of India, one in 1930 and the other in 1937-1938. A short synopsis of her work shows she delivered public lectures from Karachi to Madras, including major presentations in the colleges and universities of Lahore, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Delhi, Aligarh, Lucknow, Kanpur, Allahabad, Benares, Patna, and Calcutta. She also broadcast radio messages in both Mysore and Hyderabad and met with many of the leading personalities of the country including the poetess Mrs. Sarojini Naidu. Her work was so impressive that the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma in a letter to the Bahá'ís of the United States said of her, 'Martha Root has opened the whole of India for us, and it now devolves upon us to so utilize these openings.[28]

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[25] The Bahá'í World, vol. II, April, 1926 - 1928, (New York, 1928), p. 42

[26] Shoghi Effendi, 'Message of November 25, 1934', Dawn of a New Day, p. 50

[27] Shoghi Effendi, 'Message of March 10, 1936', Dawn of a New Day, p. 59

[28] The Bahá'í World, vol. VIII, April, 1938 - 1940, p. 61
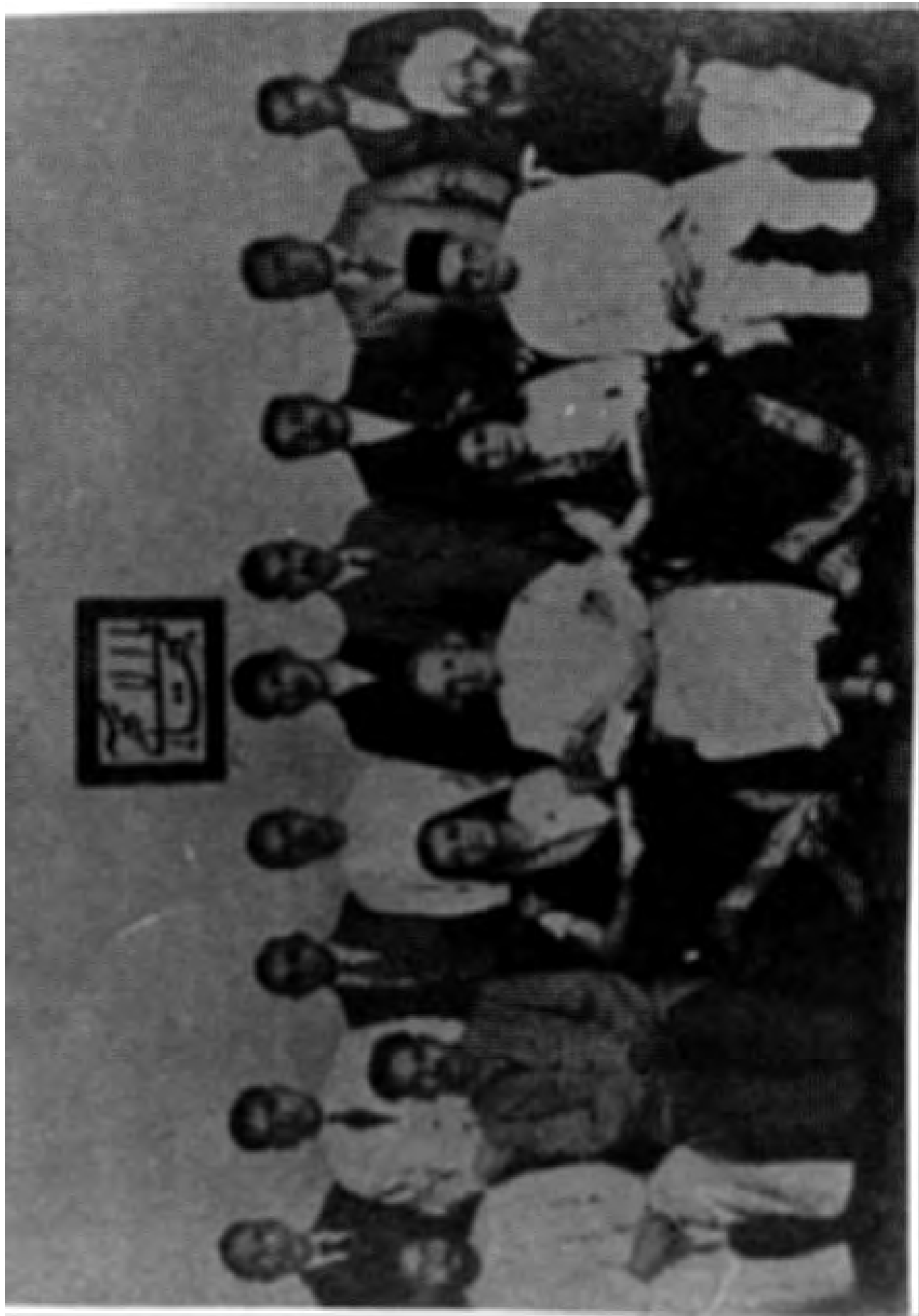
Martha Root and Indian Bahá'ís

There were numerous other teachers who took to the highways and railways of India during these years in order to help spread the knowledge of the Faith to a greater number of the subcontinent's inhabitants: Mr. Maḥfúẓ-'ul'Ḥaq 'Ilmí carried on active propagation in Delhi; Professor Pritam Singh made several teaching tours of the colleges and universities of northern India; Mrs. Shírín Fozdar spoke to more than a thousand people in the town hall of Calcutta[29]; and Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler made a two month lecture tour of the major cities of the country. Therefore, the teaching work which Shoghi Effendi prescribed as a vital necessity to the advancement of the Faith in India was systematically increased.

Advancements were also made in the field of publishing between the years 1921 and 1938. Many Bahá'í books were translated into several different Indian languages including Gujarati, Bengali, Sindhi, Hindi, and Urdu. One of the most internationally well known introductory books on the Faith, Dr. J.E. Esselmont's Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, was one of these texts. Shoghi Effendi had personally encouraged the Bahá'ís of India to translate this work. In March of 1932 he wrote: 'I wish to urge you to take as soon as you possibly can, the necessary and most effective steps to ensure the translation of Dr. Esselmont's book into Urdu and Gujrati.'[30] Another major publishing accomplishment was the establishment of a Bahá'í monthly magazine, the Kaukib-i-Hind. The magazine was published in Urdu and had over 200 subscribers. In addition, over 200 articles appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout the country including many articles in Telugu speaking areas.

Concerning the other goals which the First All-India Bahá'í Convention had set for the Indian community, the following can be related: A Bahá'í school for children was successfully established in Poona, and in September of 1937 the first Indian Bahá'í Summer School session was held; Bahá'í books

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[29] Bahá'í Newsletter (India), # 8, March, 1937, p. 5

[30] Shoghi Effendi, 'Message of March 12, 1932', Dawn of a New Day, p. 33-34

were presented to a number of major libraries around the country; and construction of a Bahá'í Center was begun in Karachi.

The efforts made by the Bahá'í community in India during these years increased the public's knowledge of the movement. Furthermore, under the guiding hands of Shoghi Effendi and the National Spiritual Assembly the various Bahá'í communities throughout the country began to function as a unit. The time had come when Shoghi Effendi could truly speak of the 'Indian community'. However, even with the inter-community organization that marked the period, the number of new converts to join the movement was practically nil; over the eighteen year period only three new local spiritual assemblies had been added to the list of assemblies in the country.

One of the characteristics of teaching activity during this period was that it was by and large directed towards the educated elite of the country. In fact, ever since its inception in India the movement had been closely connected with the intellectuals and leaders of the country. Even though as early as 1933 (when referring to translation work) Shoghi Effendi had said, 'I would urge you to concentrate your energy on this important and essential preliminary to an intensive campaign of teaching among the masses in India.',[31] his advice went virtually unheeded. Lecture tours and university visits were capable of reaching only certain strata of society, and, as previously noted, these were the types of activity that predominated. Perhaps for this reason, the number of converts in India remained infinitesimal.

When in 1937 Shoghi Effendi initiated the Seven-Year Plan in the United States, the Indian community meeting in convention in Karachi suggested to the National Spiritual Assembly that a similar project be started in India and Burma, and consequently the National Spiritual Assembly resolved to undertake a Six-Year Plan which would commence in 1938, but due

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[31] Shoghi Effendi, 'Message of March 24, 1933', Dawn of a New Day, p. 42

to lack of funds, it was not until 1940 that any real action was taken.
It was the Guardian who finally set the project in motion by earmarking money
for the creation of a special teaching fund to help finance the Plan.   In
this regard, his secretary relayed that:

> He trusts that this will stimulate the body of Indian
> and Burmese Baha'is also to contribute to this Fund
> generously and by providing the necessary means to
> enable them to speedily fulfil the task they have
> avowed to carry out.[32]

The Six-Year Plan contained several distinguishing characteristics
which were not found in previous teaching plans.   Until this time most
teaching activities had involved lecture tours in co-ordination with
various reform movements such as the Ārya Samāj, the Brāhmo Samāj, and the
Theosophical Society.   In the past there had been very little contact with
sections of society outside the intellectual circles.   The new Plan
attempted to change these policies.   No longer were only the large cities
visited, but efforts were also made to hold meetings independent of other
groups in smaller cities and towns.   More importantly, the emphasis was
shifted from teaching tours to the establishment of residences throughout
the country.   Individual Bahá'ís now left their homes and moved to areas
where they could address a larger segment of the population.   Hence, a
conscious effort was made to direct the teachings of the Faith towards a
different social stratum.

Once underway, the Six-Year Plan produced immediate results.   By 1941
three new local spiritual assemblies had been formed: one in Hyderabad,
one in Kota, and one in Bangalore.   As was his custom, Shoghi Effendi
wired the Indian community, congratulating them on their achievements and
urging them to continue their efforts.[33]   The next year saw three more
local spiritual assemblies established, and Bahá'í Groups (communities
whose members total less than nine) were formed in Secunderabad, Belgaum,

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[32] Bahá'í Newsletter (India), # 31, May, 1944, p. 2

[33] The Bahá'í World, vol. IX, April, 1940 - 1944, (Wilmette, Illinois, 1945), p. 60

and Ujjain.   By the time of the Fourteenth Annual Bahá'í Convention held

in Poona in 1943, eight new assemblies had been formed.   The rigorous

teaching efforts continued during the final year of the Plan, resulting in

twenty-nine local spiritual assemblies being established in the subcontinent

by 1944.[34]

The achievements of the Six-Year Plan encouraged the Indian Bahá'í

community to launch another teaching campaign starting in April of 1946.

A month before its inception Shoghi Effendi (writing from Haifa to the

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma) remarked:

> The believers in India have set an inspiring example
> to their fellow-believers throughout the East, and
> even to the great mass of their co-religionists in
> Bahá'u'lláh's native land, and have abundantly
> demonstrated to them all, what organized activity,
> boldly conceived and soundly and energetically
> conducted can achieve when directed and animated by
> the ennobling influences and the generative spirit of
> the Faith of Baha'u'llah.[35]

Although marred by the disruptive events brought upon the subcontinent

by the partition of Pakistan and India in July of 1947, the Four-Year Plan

met with much the same success as had the previous Six-Year Plan.   By April

of 1947 another eight local spiritual assemblies had been founded, and the

same number of groups had been established.   In addition, each summer,

Bahá'í schools for both children and adults were organized.   Due to these

encouraging figures the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma

received nearly six hundred pounds sterling from Bahá'í communities

throughout the world to finance yet another teaching project, and as a

consequence, in 1951 India embarked on its third successive teaching

campaign.

One of the major accomplishments of India's third teaching project

occurred in the area of translation and publication.   The language problem

had always been a major roadblock for Bahá'í teachers in India, and during

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[34] The Bahá'í World, vol. IX, p. 63

[35] Shoghi Effendi, 'Message of March 20, 1946', Dawn of a New Day, p. 113

the third campaign a determined effort was made to bridge the communication

gap by translating publications into as many as fifteen different languages.

As a result, over four thousand books and pamphlets were sold and distributed.

Also, between the years 1951 and 1953 eight new local spiritual assemblies

were established[36], and by the end of 1953 there were approximately seven-

hundred Bahá'ís in India.

In October of 1953 the fourth and final Intercontinental Teaching

Conference, which had been designed to inaugurate the Ten-Year Crusade, was

convened in New Delhi.   The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís

of India, Pakistan, and Burma[37] hosted the gathering.   Other participating

National Spiritual Assemblies included the United States, Canada, Central

and South America, Persia, 'Iráq, and Australia and New Zealand.   Mason

Remey, a Hand of the Cause and the Guardian's representative at the Conference,

delivered Shoghi Effendi's message, which enumerated forty-one new

territories and islands within the Asia Teaching Mission to be opened to the

Faith during the Crusade.   In this message he said of the Asiatic Continent:

> ... the cradle of the principal religions of mankind;
> the home of so many of the oldest and mightiest
> civilizations which have flourished on this planet;
> the crossways of so many kindreds and races; ... such
> a continent, so privileged among its sister continents
> and yet so long and so sadly tormented, now stands at
> the hour of the launching of a world-encompassing
> Crusade, on the threshhold of an era that may recall, in
> its glory and ultimate repercussions, the great periods
> of spiritual revival which, from the dawn of recorded
> history have, at various stages in the revelation of
> God's purpose for mankind, illuminated the path of the
> human race.[38]

The 450 Bahá'ís present at the Conference not only outlined strategies

for the upcoming Crusade, they also engaged in a program of public relations.

A reception held in one of Delhi's large hotels was attended by over

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[36] The Bahá'í World, vol. XII, p. 69

[37] With the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the National Spiritual
    Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma became the National
    Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, Pakistan, and Burma.

[38] The Bahá'í World, vol. XII, p. 31

a thousand persons, and delegates were also sent to meet with government leaders including the President and Vice-President of India, as well as the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. When the closing prayer of the final session had been chanted on October 15, 1953, the Indian community once again found itself embarking on another teaching project; one which by the time of its completion in 1963 would have completely revolutionized the composition of the Indian Bahá'í community.

While not seeing any outstanding numerical increase for the Bahá'í community in India, the 1950's contained two important events which should be noted. One was the separation of the India, Pakistan, and Burmese National Spiritual Assembly into three distinct bodies: Pakistan received an independent National Spiritual Assembly in 1957, and Burma became separate in 1959. The other occurrence, although minor at the time, proved to be an omen concerning the future direction the movement would take in India. It involved the first village teaching conference in India held in village Rampur (near Benares) where several villagers had earlier been converted. Several recommendations came from this conference which were important in terms of their future implications. First, it was requested that the National Spiritual Assembly print up simple leaflets in Hindi to be distributed in nearby villages. Second, it was suggested that study classes in Hindi be established in Rampur, and finally, it was recommended that city Bahá'ís interact with Rampur's inhabitants by participating in their religious festivals, thus creating an atmosphere of friendliness.[39]

The modern period of Bahá'í history in India began in 1961. In that year Hand of the Cause Dr. R. Muhájir, while making one of his frequent trips to the subcontinent, decided that a village conference similar to the one in Rampur should be held in central India. As a result, in January of

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[39] Bahá'í Newsletter (India), # 93, March, 1958, p.3

that year a conference was held in village Sangimanda,[40] located in Shajapur

district of Madhya Pradesh in the region known traditionally as Malwa. At

the conclusion of the conference a great many villagers enrolled in the

Faith, and word of this occurrence spread to nearby villages. Chapter 3

will examine in greater detail the subsequent events that followed the

conference, but for now, suffice it to say that within the next few years

a great tide of villagers declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh. In other

areas of India the Bahá'í communities having taken note of the events in

Malwa began directing their teaching activities towards village communities.

Consequently, in the following years the number of both declared believers

and local spiritual assemblies in India mushroomed. A message from the

Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land to the National Conventions of the

Bahá'í World in April of 1962 reflected this increase:

> India, one of the first countries in the world to receive
> the light of a newly-born Revelation has, during the past
> year, witnessed a tide of mass conversion not only wholly
> unprecedented in that country but without parallel anywhere
> in the entire world during the last one hundred years of
> Baha'i history.[41]

The statistical report issued by the Indian National Spiritual Assembly

in July of 1973 (Table 1) graphically demonstrates the growth of the Faith

during recent years.

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[40] This event will be elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

[41] The Bahá'í World, vol. XIII, 1954 - 1963, (Haifa, 1970), p. 298

Table 1[42]

Year	A. Local Spiritual Assemblies	B. Believers	C. Population of India
1961	78	(less than 1000)	439,234,771
1963	723	89,217	
1964	1,064	109,815	
1965	1,322	141,508	
1966	2,137	206,391	
1967	1,543	226,554	
1968	1,988	240,390	
1970	3,350	312,602	
1971	4,467	356,774	547,367,925
1972	4,817	380,349	
1973	4,369	394,081	

As the statistics reveal, the number of declared believers in India jumped from less than a thousand in 1961 to close on ninety thousand by March of 1963, an increase of approximately eighty-nine thousand in two years. By the end of the Universal House of Justice's Nine-Year Plan in 1973, this number had risen to close on four hundred thousand. It had taken nearly ninety years for the Bahá'í community in India to reach the thousand mark in population, and then suddenly within a twelve year period this figure was multiplied four hundred times.

The natural question which arises when one examines these figures is, 'What was the cause of this sudden upsurge?' In many instances the

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[42] The above figures indicate that the Bahá'í Faith is a growing organization in India. Although the accuracy of the figures in both columns B and C cannot be exactly determined, the former coming from the organization in question and not an independent source, and the latter being the Indian census figures for 1961 and 1971 (the difficulties involved in Census taking in India detracting from the accuracy), they are the only statistical guides available, and therefore, in order to give the reader a general picture of the increase in the number of Bahá'í declarations during the last thirteen years, use has been made of them. The large increase in declarations between 1961 and 1963 is no doubt a structural jump; that is, it reflects the change in teaching approach which provided the movement with a larger audience. The steady growth between 1963 and 1973, however, would indicate that declarations are increasing at a greater rate than the general population.

question is not an easy one to answer. Many of the Indian Bahá'ís claim
that the recent growth was a sprouting of the seeds that had been planted
by earlier teachers. While this answer may contain some grain of truth,
it seems evident that during these years there were certain new approaches
in teaching methods which set them off from earlier programs.

The most obvious change was that after 1961 teaching activities were
for the most part directed towards the village population of the
subcontinent. The Rāmpur conference had been the forerunner of this shift
in emphasis, and with the advent of the Sangīmandā conference the Bahá'í
teaching mission in India was converted from a primarily urban movement to
a rural oriented crusade. As a result, the Indian Bahá'í community became
known throughout the Bahá'í world as a 'mass teaching' community, that is,
a community whose resources are directed towards teaching the Bahá'í Faith
to the rural uneducated masses of humanity. In fact, India was one of the
first countries in the world since the time of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh to
orient itself towards the masses.

In conjuction with this shift in goal direction, the community out of
necessity began to reorient its teaching methods. Before the mass teaching
era the Bahá'í community in India was more closely allied with Islám than
with Hinduism. This development was only natural, as the early pioneers
to India had come from Persian backgrounds and were therefore more apt to
communicate with individuals who shared a similar cultural heritage.
Thus, in terms of language, theology, and cultural symbols the Bahá'í Faith
had much more in common with Indian Islám than it did with Hinduism. In the
1960's a conscious effort was made to relate the Bahá'í message to the
Hindu tradition. The masses of Indian villagers were rooted in this
tradition, and if the Bahá'í Faith was to speak to these people it would
have to do so in concepts and symbols that they could understand. For
example, Bahá'ís in India had tended to identify the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh
with the Shi'ite religio-cultural symbols of the qá'im and the Imám Husayn.

Needless to say, in Hinduism these symbols have no meaning. There is

in Hindu cosmology, however, a concept of the Sacred manifesting Itself

into the world in order to destroy evil doers and re-establish righteousness.

This is the doctrine of the avatāra, most succinctly expressed in the

Bhagavad Gītā. In order to more adequately communicate their message,

Bahá'í teachers spoke of Bahá'u'lláh as an avatāra.[43] He was identified

with that One who periodically descends into the world. As Kṛṣṇa explains

to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gītā:

> Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise
> of unrighteousness, O Bhārata (Arjuna), then I send
> forth (create incarnate) Myself. For the protection
> of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and
> for the establishment of righteousness, I come in
> to being from age to age.[44]

Furthermore, the only requisite for becoming a Bahá'í was acceptance of

Bahá'u'lláh as an avatāra, a marked contrast to earlier teaching approaches

which demanded a new declarant to have a relatively thorough knowledge of

the Faith before he was allowed to become a member of the community.

One innovation during this period which may have been partly

responsible for the large increase in declarations was the opening of three

teaching institutes in Indore, Mysore, and Gwalior.[45] One of the main

functions of these institutes was to train travelling teachers, and

consequently, special courses were given in methods of explaining the basic

teachings and institutional structure of the Faith to uneducated villagers.

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[43] This is not to say that before the mass teaching era Bahá'ís in India
had not referred to Bahá'u'lláh as an avatāra. For example, at the
First All-India Bahá'í Convention in 1920 Mr. Ayer gave a lecture
which identified Bahá'u'lláh with the avatāra tradition. Rather,
it is to point out that during the 1960's Bahá'í teachers in India
made a conscious effort to direct their message towards the Hindu
tradition, and as a consequence this approach became more
predominant.

[44] Bhagavad Gītā, IV, 7-8, English trans. by S. Radhakrishnan, (New York,
1948), p. 154-155

[45] One of these institutes will be examined in Chapter 6.

For added incentive examinations were given at the end of training

periods, and as a result Bahá'í teachers were better equipped to relate the

Bahá'í message to the Hindu villager.

Of course, the efforts of individual Bahá'í teachers during these

years cannot be underestimated. The upsurge in enthusiasm which saw its

initial display following the first signs of mass conversion in Malwa in

1961, seemed to boost the confidence of the Indian Bahá'í community. Men

and women who were before hesitant to move in the rural areas now began to

actively teach to this segment of society. The Indian National Spiritual

Assembly spoke of this new dedication in the following dispatch:

> There is a young man who is going to many parts of the
> country with his car, leaving behind his young wife and
> children and aunt to look after his business, just to
> serve the Cause of God for the love of the beloved
> Guardian. There are many like him who have left their
> jobs - whether in business or the medical profession to
> move among the people. There are a few young men who
> have given up their college studies for one year to
> teach the Faith, saying that the studies could wait but
> the Crusade of the beloved Guardian would not last
> forever. These are a few examples of the upsurge of
> enthusiasm which have made our previous exploits pale.[46]

Today there are 397,054 registered believers and 4,412 local spiritual

assemblies in India, and the Universal House of Justice has set a goal of

greatly increasing both of these figures within the next five years. The

Bahá'í Faith has now reached a position in Indian society where it is no

longer unknown. Since the time of its inception in the subcontinent the

Faith has passed through several stages of development. Initially a small

band of Persian immigrants, it subsequently evolved into a small yet

internationally linked group of educated elite, and finally into a community

characterized by its large number of uneducated rural constituents. This

last phase has no doubt been the most important, and it is one in which a

specific region in Madhya Pradesh has played an important role. This region

is Malwa.

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[46] Bahá'í News (United States), ✸ 386, April, 1963, (Wilmette, Illinois),
p. 9

Chapter 3   The Growth of the Bahá'í Faith in Malwa

The region in India known as Malwa is the area of the modern day state
of Madhya Pradesh that is bounded on the north by the Gwalior hills, on the
east by the Betwa river, on the south by the plains of Nemar, and on the
west by the Chambal river.   Malwa proper may be described '... as a
tabel-land, in general open and highly cultivated, varied with small
conical and table-crowned hills and low ridges, watered by numerous rivers
and small streams, and favoured with a rich productive soil, and a mild
climate, alike conducive to the health of man, and the liberal supply of
his wants and luxuries.'[1]

The agricultural productivity of the region has always been widely
acclaimed in India.   In 1880 Sir John Malcolm commented in his A Memoir
of Central India that '... few parts of India will be found to possess more
natural advantages, or to produce greater variety of grain.'[2]   Included in
these crops are wheat, barley, corn, millet, sugar cane, and cotton.   In
addition, certain districts are known for their opium crops, the sale of
which is controlled by the government.

The region contains two major cities: Ujjain of traditional fame, and
Indore, a modern industrial center.   The former is situated on the banks of
the sacred river Sipra and was once the capital of Avanti, one of the sixteen
principal states in India during the time of the Buddha.   It was a renowned
trading center where caravans travelling from as far away as Antioch
unbuckled.[3]   'Oojein [Ujjain] ... has perhaps more undoubted claims to

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[1] Sir John Malcolm, A Memoir of Central India, vol. I, (London, 1832), p. 3-4

[2] Malcolm, p. 8

[3] Upadhyaya, p. 2

remote antiquity than any inhabited city in India; it being not only
mentioned in the sacred volumes of the Hindus, but in the Periplus of the
Erythrean sea, and by Ptolemy.'[4]   Indore, on the other hand, is largely a
product of modern India, having only developed during the nineteenth
century.   Today with a population of 572,622 it ranks as the largest city
in Malwa.

Malwa has always been known as a cultural center of the subcontinent.
The renowned Guptan poet, Kālidāsa, was a native of the region, as were
numerous artists and musicians of classical India.   Even today the Vindhya
hills are spotted with temples and shrines of both local and All-India
importance, and the city of Ujjain with its famed Mahā Kāl temple (the Great
Time) is still a pilgrimage spot for both Vaisṇavite and Śaivite Hindus.

'Malwa has had an eventful history, partly because it provides by far
the best route from northern India to the Deccan and so has attracted
conquerors, and partly because, when there has been peace, the fertility
of the area has supported prosperous kingdoms.'[5]   Having been annexed by
Aśoka, Ujjain became one of the four district capitals of the Mauryan
Empire.   Then in the second century B.C., a powerful Central Asian tribe
known as the Śakas entered the Punjab and slowly moved southwards.   'One
section of this horde entered Mālwā, and founded a line of Saka princes who
are known as the Western Kshatrapas or Satraps.'[6]

Malwa was rescued from Śaka domination by the legendary Vikramāditya
who wrestled authority away from the invaders in the first century B.C.
It was this occurrence which marked the beginning of the Vikrama Era, an
event similar in Calenderic importance as the birth of Christ or the Hijra
of Muḥammad.   Malwa was dominated by Hindu rule until the thirteenth

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[4] Malcolm, p. 22

[5] Adrian Mayer, Caste and Kinship in Central India, (London, 1960), p. 11

[6] The Imperial Gazetteer of India, vol. IX, (Oxford, 1908), p. 335

century A.D. when the Slave Sultan Iltutmish invaded the region which he
proceeded to plunder but did not occupy.[7]   'Ala-ud-dín Khaljí's forces
occupied Malwa in 1305, but it was not until the time of Fírúz Shah (1351 -
1388) that it was completely conquered.

From 1398 until its absorption into the Mughal Empire during the reign
of Akbar, Malwa was governed by several Muslim rulers who had asserted
their independence from the central authority in Delhi.   After Akbar's
invasion, the country remained part of the Empire for the next 138 years.
However, during the rule of Aurangzeb there began a period of breakdown;
'The year 1698 brings to an end the long period of peace and prosperity
in Malwa.   It also closes the century of united Malwa under Mughal rule.'[8]
By the middle of the eighteenth century the region had passed into the
hands of the Marāthā chieftans.

The peak of Maratha power in Central India was reached during the reign
of Mahādji Sindhiā.   Having made the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II his puppet,
he became the virtual ruler of most of northern India.   His successor,
however, met with ill times and was finally forced to sign a subsidary
alliance with the British in 1817.   The other dominant Marāthā chieftan
of the period, Malhar Rao Holkar, was likewise forced to conclude a peace
treaty with the British.   Consequently, although the Marāthā princes
retained their domains and titles in Malwa, by the early nineteenth century
their power had come to an end.   Until 1947 it was the British rulers of
India who held the real power in Malwa.

When India's independence was finally recognized in 1947, the Holkar
State of Indore, the Sindhiā State of Gwalior and Dewas (both in which
parts of Malwa were politically situated), and twenty other states acceeded
to the Dominion.   In May of 1948 these states formed the Madhya Bhārat

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[7] The Cambridge History of India, vol. III, ed. by Sir Wolseley Haig,
    (New York and Cambridge, 1928), p. 55

[8] Raghubir Sinh, Malwa in Transition, (Bombay, 1936), p. 27

Union.   When the government of India decided to reorganize its member
states on a linguistic basis, the new state of Madhya Pradesh was formed
in 1956.   The state included within its borders the former states of the
Madhya Bhārat Union as well as the British Indian province of Central
Provinces and Berar.

In socio-economic terms the region is characterized by its
predominantly rural population.   Four districts have less than 20% of
their population in cities.   The largest percentage of urban dwellers is
found in Indore district where 60% of the population lives in cities.
As one might expect, in a region which is predominantly rural, literacy
is not high.   Indore district has the highest literacy rate with 38% of
its population being able to read and write.   On the low end of the
scale is Rajgarh district where only 10% of the population is literate.
The percentage of scheduled caste[*] members ranges from 7% in Dhar district
to 23% in Shajapur district.   Table 2 portrays by district statistical
information relating to the above mentioned categories.

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[*] Scheduled castes are those which have been placed on the government
schedule for receiving special social benefits.   In common usage
the term has become synonymous with 'untouchable' or Harijan.

Table 2[9]

District	Population	Rural %	Urban %	Literate %	Scheduled Caste %
Mandsaur	752,085	79	21	22	15
Ratlam	483,521	71	29	21	13
Ujjain	661,720	68	32	23	20
Indore	753,594	40	60	38	14
Dewas	446,901	85	15	17	18
Shajapur	526,135	90	10	13	23
Rajgarh	516,871	91	9	10	19
Dhar	643,774	90	10	13	7

The history of the Bahá'í Faith in Malwa is contemporary; it was only in 1942 that the first Bahá'í pioneer settled in the region. During the early years of India's Six-Year Plan Shoghi Effendi was calling for Indian Bahá'ís who resided in the major cities of the subcontinent to disperse themselves to smaller cities and towns for the purpose of spreading the message of the Bahá'í Faith to a greater range of the country's inhabitants:

> Smallness of numbers, lack of skilled teachers and
> modesty of means should not discourage or deter them.
> They must remember the glorious history of the Cause
> which ... was established by dedicated souls, who,
> for the most part, were neither rich, famous, nor
> well-educated, but whose devotion, zeal and self-
> sacrifice overcame every obstacle and won miraculous
> victories for the Faith of God. Such spititual
> victories can now be won for India and Burma by the
> friends. Let them dedicate themselves- young, and
> old, men and women, alike- and go forth and settle in
> new districts, travel and teach, in spite of lack of
> experience, and be assured that Baha'u'llah has
> promised to aid all those who arise in His name. His

[9] The above figures were taken or derived from the 1961 Census. As Malwa is more of a linguistic than a political entity, agreement on the political districts it encompasses is lacking. The districts cited in this study are those in which Bahá'í activity has been most pronounced.

Map 2

MALWA

INDEX

MOUNTAINS
RIVERS
DISTRICT BOUNDARY
CENTRES
VILLAGES

SCALE 6/15 INCH = 21½ MILES
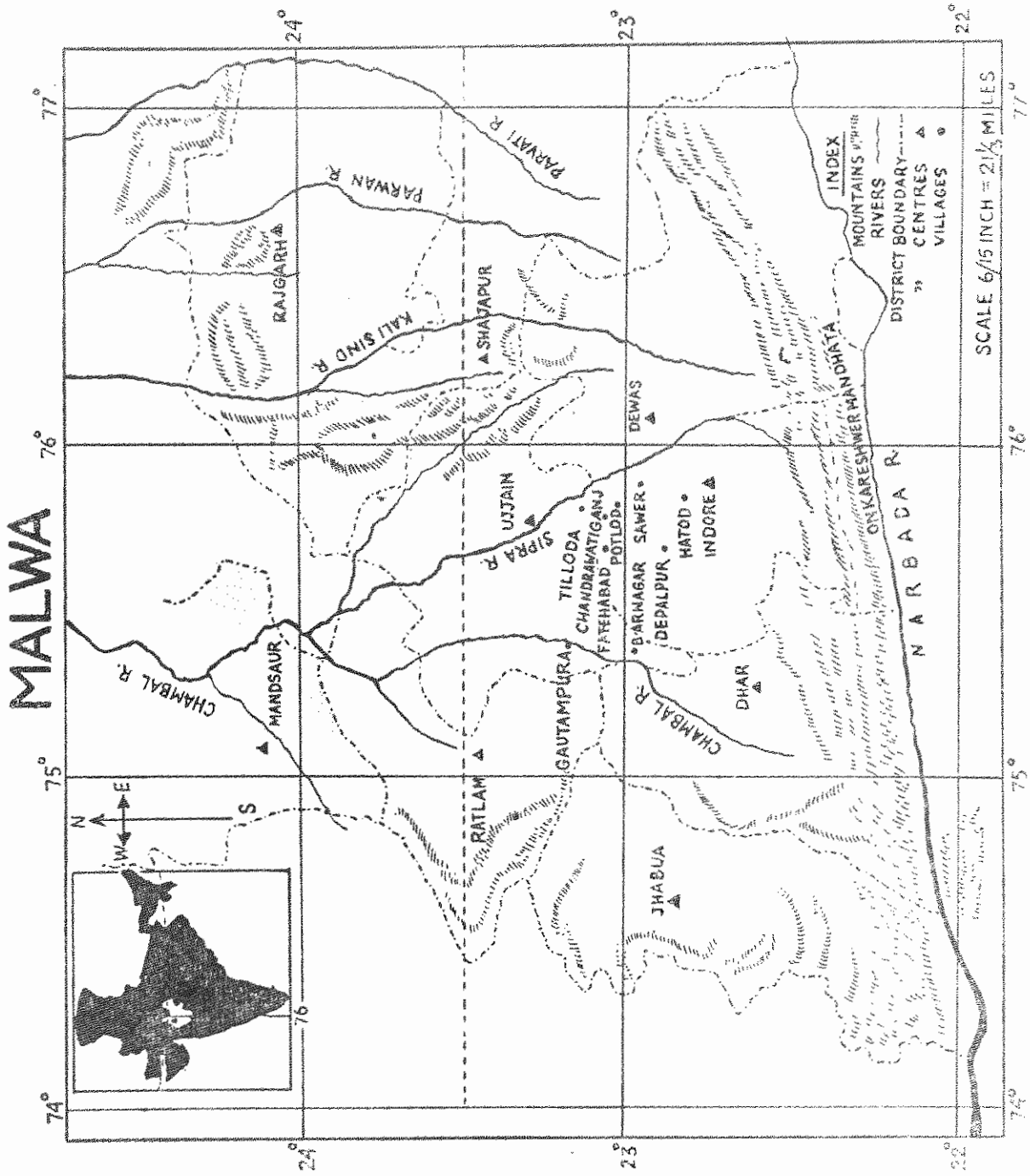
> strength will sustain them; their own weakness
> is unimportant.[10]

As previously mentioned, the policy of establishing residences throughout

the country rather than solely relying on travel visits or lecture tours

was one of the major changes that distinguished the Six-Year Plan from

former plans.

At the time that the Guardian was making appeals, Mrs. Shírín Boman

Meherabání, a Bahá'í of Parsi Ancestry, was living with her husband in

Bombay where she was secretary of the city's Local Spiritual Assembly.

For several years she and her husband, along with several other Bahá'ís

in the Bombay community, had been making teaching trips to various cities

in Maharashtra and Gujarat. While being aware of the Guardian's plea

for Bahá'í pioneers to pick up their belongings and move to isolated

areas, she had not made a step in this direction, as both the family's

business and close relations were rooted in Bombay. Finally in 1942,

having decided that she could no longer excuse herself from the Guardian's

call, Mrs. Meherabání approached her husband about moving away from

Bombay. Mr. Meherabání was initially unresponsive to such a request,

but after a vivid dream in which he felt the Guardian call on him to make

a sacrifice for Bahá'u'lláh, he consented.

The Meherabánís had not decided in which city they planned to settle.

At first they travelled with their children to Bhopal, but finding the

city unsuitable they decided to move on. Mrs. Meherabání prayed for an

answer. The next morning they went to the railway station having

determined that they would settle in the first town in which the afternoon

train from Bhopal would stop. This town was Ujjain.

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[10] 'Letter written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf to the National Spiritual
Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma, June 29, 1941',
Arise to Serve, (New Delhi, 1971), p. 69

In Ujjain the Meherabánís initially supported themsevles by using some of the family's savings. At first Mr. Meherabání was forced to make frequent and extended trips to Bombay in order to ensure the transference of his business to other hands,but after these problems were settled he set up a new business in Ujjain and began to spread the message of the Faith.

In the beginning the Meherabánís'teaching activities were limited to speaking to friends and acquaintances within the confines of their own home. In Bahá'í parlance this type of teaching is referred to as 'fireside teaching',where the message is spread by means of open discussion within intimate groups. From these discussions, as well as from general investigation, it soon became evident to the Meherabánís that before their coming to Ujjain the Bahá'í Faith was virtually unknown in Malwa.

In 1943 another Bahá'í family from Bombay, the Munjes, joined the Meherabánís. Dr. Munje was one of the most prominent Bahá'í scholars in India, and he and his wife were a welcome addition to the Bahá'í community in Ujjain, which after a year of teaching still consisted of the Meherabánís and their children.

The year 1944 was a significant one for the Bahá'í community in Ujjain. During that year several important landmarks were established including the formation of the city's first Local Spiritual Assembly and the holding of the first Bahá'í public meeting in Malwa.

The Bahá'í Newsletter of May, 1944, mentioned the formation of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ujjain, an event which earned the Meherabánís and the Munjes a place on the Bahá'í honor roll for distinguished service.[11] After the arrival of the Munjes, five new converts had been added to the group, four Muslims and a Hindu. On April 21, having gathered nine believers in one community, the Bahá'ís of Ujjain

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[11] Bahá'í Newsletter (India), # 31, May, 1944, p. 13

brought into being the city's first Local Spiritual Assembly.

The year 1944 also marked the centenary of the movement's origins; it was 100 years earlier in Shíráz that the Báb made his first declaration. The Bahá'í community in Ujjain, like many other local communities both in India and throughout the world, used this occasion to proclaim the message of the Faith publicly. On the night of May 23, 1944, the recently established Bahá'í center was illuminated with lights, and pamphlets were distributed. On the same evening a drama depicting the major events in the life of the Báb was presented in the town hall. Both of these events signify the first public proclamation of the Bahá'í Faith in Malwa.

Two other opportunities for the Bahá'ís of Ujjain to publicly proclaim the Faith arose within the same year. The first was the occasion of a Bahá'í marriage ceremony, and the second was the convening of an Arya Samaj conference.

The marriage of one of Mrs. Meherabání's daughters to a newly converted Muslim boy caused some commotion within the city. According to Mrs. Meherabání, several of the leading mullás of Ujjain hinted that violence might erupt if the Muslim boy was allowed to participate in the ceremony. Mrs. Meherabání was personally threatened, and one mullá declared he would carry the black flag to the ceremony. Although there were continual grumblings within the Muslim sector of Ujjain, the ceremony proceeded as planned, and the uniqueness of an inter-Faith wedding gave the Bahá'ís an opportunity to inform the public of the universality of their religion.

Perhaps the most significant event in the year 1944 for the Ujjain Bahá'í community was their participation in one of the city's Arya Samaj conferences. In terms of the future development of the movement in Malwa this conference was of great importance. During the meeting the Bahá'ís established contact with several individuals who would later be instrumental in helping them teach the message of Bahá'u'lláh in rural Malwa. Mr. Mahfúz-'ul' Haq'Ilmí, a well known Bahá'í travelling teacher, was asked

by the Bahá'ís of Ujjain to address the assembled group on the subject of
the social principles of the Bahá'í Faith.   His speech attracted the
attention of one Kiśan Lāl, a scheduled caste leader from Shajapur (a
district located north-east of Ujjain).   Following the conference, Kiśan
Lāl came into active contact with the Ujjain Bahá'í community, which finally
resulted in his declaring himself a Bahá'í.   He then returned to Shajapur.

In Shajapur Kiśan Lāl informed many of his low caste compatriots
about the movement.   As a result, the Bahá'í center in Ujjain was soon
frequented by interested Harijans from the villages of Shajapur, but the
elitist attitude that dominated the thinking of the Indian Bahá'í community
at this time prevented them from being enrolled.   The significance of
this attitude and its later transfiguration is of vital importance to an
understanding of the growth of the Bahá'í movement in Malwa, and it
therefore warrants closer examination.

Outside of Írán, the Bahá'í Faith had to a large degree been associated
with middle class urban intellectuals.   This was true during its early
years of development in the Americas and Europe and was no less
characteristic of its early years of growth in India.   The attitude
concerning new believers which tended to characterize the Bahá'í community
in India until the launching of the Ten-Year Crusade was the following:
Before new believers could be enrolled into the movement they should not
only have an adequate knowledge of the basic doctrines and principles of
the Faith, they should also possess an acute awareness of its administrative
organization and devotional procedures as well as a good understanding of
its historical development.   This approach to finding converts virtually
excluded the illiterate segments of society, as it was impossible for
villagers to grasp the finer details of the movement's structure and
organization.   As a result, although there were several instances of lower
caste interest in the Faith before the commencement of the Ten-Year Crusade,
Bahá'í communities in India did not take advantage of this interest.   Their

understanding of what it meant to be a Bahá'í was not acceptance of
Bahá'u'lláh as a manifestation of God, it also included the ability to
grasp the Bahá'í Faith in all its complexity.   For example, for many years
it was standard procedure in India for local administrators to examine a
potential new believer before accepting his declaration.   If they did not
feel his knowledge was adequate, he would not be enlisted.   Hence, in 1944
the Bahá'ís of Ujjain did not even consider that illiterate Harijans could
be enrolled.

Between the years 1944 and 1947 several new believers were enrolled
in Ujjain, and a Bahá'í community was established in nearby Indore where
Mrs. Meherabání's brother had recently set up residence.   In addition, a
few individuals from surrounding villages who were judged capable of
meeting Bahá'í standards were enrolled.   One of these individuals was
Dayā Rām Mālvia who, like Kiśan Lāl, was a scheduled caste leader.   He
resided in village Harsodan, situated approximately fifteen miles outside
the Ujjain city limits.   Dayā Rām in turn enlisted several prominent
scheduled caste members of his village, thereby establishing the first
Bahá'í village community in Malwa.

The type of teaching activities carried out by the Bahá'í communities
in Malwa during these years can be gleaned from the National Spiritual
Assembly's Annual Report for the year 1946-47, parts of which are quoted
below:

> Teaching work: This was done through distribution
> of literature, personal contacts and also by correspondence.
> Many souls have been interested in the Cause and we pray
> that in this new year the fruits of the last year's seed
> sowing may appear ... there was an All-Faiths Conference
> organized by the Theosophists at Ujjain when Mrs. Shírín
> Boman, as a Bahá'í delegate, spoke on "Universal
> Brotherhood" ... On Guru Govindsingh's birthday
> anniversary, a Bahá'í speaker having been invited by the
> local Sikh community, who have come to look upon the
> Bahá'í Faith as an universal Faith, Mrs. Shírín Boman
> addressed that meeting...   The N.S.A's valuable suggestion
> to write to the various radio stations for Bahá'í broadcast
> has been duly complied with.   Several letters of request

in this regard have been sent to the various Indian
broadcasting stations from Ujjain, Indore and Gwalior.[12]

With the coming of independence to British India, and the partition
of the subcontinent into the independent states of India and Pakistan, the
Bahá'í communities in Ujjain and Indore were dealt a severe blow.   A
large percentage of the communities' believers had come from Islamic back-
ground, and therefore, when partition was announced in July of 1947 most
of them left for Pakistan.   It seemed to the Meherabánís that all of their
efforts had come to nought.   The Ujjain Local Spiritual Assembly (the only
one in Malwa) was lost, as there were no longer nine believers within the
city.   Also, the great tension that immediately followed partition made
any type of religious proselytizing dangerous, especially for a religion
that was so closely related to Islám.   In this situation the Meherabánís
decided to leave Ujjain and move north to Gwalior.   Consequently, Malwa
was left with only a few scattered believers, but the name Bahá'í was now
known in the region, and the seeds which the Meherabánís had sown would
later sprout and grow.

For the next twelve years Malwa lay virtually dormant; local spiritual
assemblies were established, lost, and re-established in Indore, but that
community did not provide any real support for teaching activities.
Travelling teachers, however, frequented the region.   In one report it
was said of Ujjain:

> This is a place where some of our pioneers had worked
> against great odds some years ago. It was pleasing
> to note that still there were some sympathisers to be
> found there who are keen that the centre be opened.
> Although they were non-Bahá'ís, they offered to keep
> the centre going until some Bahá'í could take it over.[13]

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[12] 'Annual Report of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of
India and Burma; 1946 - 1947', p. 61

[13] Bahá'í Newsletter (India), # 86, January, 1957, p. 5

The outstanding event of the period was a visit to Malwa following

the 1953 Intercontinental Conference in New Delhi of one of the newly

appointed Hands of the Cause, the American Dorothy Baker.   Upon the

conclusion of the Delhi Conference, she was asked by Shoghi Effendi to stay

in the subcontinent.   She spent a fortnight in central India visiting

Gwalior, Indore, and Ujjain.   In all three cities she gave public lectures

in colleges and town halls, and in Indore alone she gave ten addresses between

December 23rd and 25th.[14]   However, the most important aspect of Dorothy

Baker's trip was not the numerous lectures she delivered but her excursion

to village Harsodan.

Following her lecture program in Ujjain, Dorothy Baker made an

unscheduled afternoon excursion to village Harsodan.   There she met not

only with the local Bahá'ís, but with a large number of the lower caste

inhabitants of the village.   Her attitude was one of love and concern for

the villagers as a whole – she ate with them and participated in their

activities.   To her, all men were Bahá'ís regardless of their economic or

educational backgrounds.   She seemed to exude that quality of unristricted

love that has manifested itself periodically in saints of such varied religious

backgrounds as St. Francis or Jalálu'd-Dín-i-Rúmí.[15]   Mrs. Meherabání,

her travelling companion during the excursion, later said of Dorothy Baker:

> She gave us a completely new outlook. Before her trip
> we knew that the Faith was for all men, but we were
> concerned that those who entered its fold should have
> an understanding of the Faith.   Dorothy Baker taught
> us that the most important thing in the Faith was
> love of Bahá'u'lláh and our fellow men.   The details
> were minor. She really opened our eyes.*

The attitudes expressed by Dorothy Baker during her stay in Malwa

seemed to characterize the general change in teaching approach throughout

the Bahá'í world that followed the inauguration of the Ten-Year Crusade.

[14] Bahá'í Newsletter (India), # 66, January, 1954, p. 4

[15] Dorothy Baker was killed in early 1954 when the plane which was carrying
her from India exploded and crashed in the Mediterranian.

* Mrs. Meherabání expressed this during an interview in New Delhi in
March of 1974.

Emphasis was now placed on going out to the people and accepting them as individuals rather than expecting them to immediately conform to Bahá'í ideals and institutions. Consequently, the feeling was slowly being generated within the Bahá'í community by certain far-sighted believers that the hope of the Bahá'í movement in India lay with the masses who lived in the villages. Before this vision became a reality another eight years would pass.

Malwa was resuscitated from its period of stagnation in 1959 when Mr. K.H. Vajdí and his wife settled in Ujjain. Mr. Vajdí, a businessman born in the Parsi community of Bombay, converted to the Bahá'í Faith during his youth and subsequently served the movement both in India and Africa, working on various committees and participating in numerous teaching projects. Mrs. Vajdí, a daughter of Mrs. Meherabání, had just obtained a teaching position at Ujjain's Vikram University in the Faculty of Economics, and it was this appointment that brought the couple to Malwa.

When the Vajdís arrived in Ujjain there was only one other Bahá'í in the city. However, as mentioned earlier, there was a substantial group of sympathisers in Ujjain, and the Bahá'í community in Indore, although not active in teaching activities, had once again attained assembly status. The Vajdís' work of reconstructing the Bahá'í community in Ujjain was carried out in much the same manner as earlier attempts; teaching activities were primarily directed towards the upper stratum of society, and accordingly, the membership of the city's new Local Spiritual Assembly, which was re-established in 1960, reflected an upper class composition. The members included a secondary school teacher, three businessmen, and three clerks as well as the Vajdís. All the members were educated at least to the secondary level, and, moreover, the new converts were all from high caste Hindu backgrounds, a marked contrast to the previous community in Ujjain which had been dominated by former Muslims. This change was partly a consequence of the Ten-Year Crusade's new approach of consciously directing

the teachings of the Bahá'í movement towards Hindus. Bahá'ís were now better versed in the Hindu tradition and could present the Faith in a context that was meaningful to their listeners.

During the year 1960 the Ujjain community increased by four with the addition of three Hindus and one Muslim. Thus, by the end of the year, the community consisted of thirteen members, twelve men and one woman. These individuals together with the small Bahá'í community in Indore and the Bahá'ís of Harsodan and Shajapur constituted the Bahá'í community in Malwa. Little did they know that the movement was on the verge of great expansion, the likes of which had not been experienced in the Bahá'í world since the time of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

For years Shoghi Effendi had been calling on the Bahá'ís of the world to take the message of Bahá'u'lláh to the masses of mankind. As early as 1936 he had said:

> What the Cause now requires is not so much a group
> of highly cultured and intellectual people who can
> adequately present its Teachings, but a number of
> devoted, sincere and loyal supporters, who, in
> utter disregard of their own weaknesses and limitations,
> and with hearts afire with the love of God, forsake
> their all for the sake of spreading and establishing
> His Faith. In other words, what is mostly needed
> nowadays, is a Bahá'í pioneer and not so much a Bahá'í
> philosopher or scholar.[16]

During the Ten-Year Crusade this plea was intensified. The beginnings of small-scale mass conversion in Africa during the mid-1950's presented Shoghi Effendi with an opportunity to reiterate the necessity of taking the movement to the masses. His aim was to remove from the believers' minds any misconceptions of what it meant to be a Bahá'í and thus clear the way for all segments of society to become part of the Bahá'í community. His secretary, writing to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa, in July of 1957, relayed the Guardian's feelings:

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[16] Bahá'í News (United States), # 102, August, 1936, p. 2, quoted in Directives from the Guardian, (New Delhi, 1973), p. 75

> ... the friends should be very careful not to place
> hindrances in the way of those who wish to accept the
> Faith. If we make the requirements too rigorous, we
> will cool off the initial enthusiasm, rebuff the
> hearts and cease to expand rapidly. The essential
> thing is that the candidate for enrolment should believe
> in his heart in the truth of Baha'u'llah. Whether he
> is literate or illiterate, informed of all the Teachings
> or not, is beside the point entirely.[17]

In February of 1959 the Indian National Spiritual Assembly voiced its
new attitude towards teaching the masses:

> On the other hand we should not deprive people
> to embrace the Faith pending their acquiring
> elaborate knowledge of the Faith and details of
> administration, etc. If conviction in Faith has
> been established in mind and heart of our friends,
> no matter how little they know about the Faith,
> we should not deprive them to have rights and
> privileges of being Bahá'ís.[18]

In accordance with this policy, in 1960 Dr. R. Muhájir, Hand of the
Cause, met in special session with the Indian National Spiritual Assembly
to discuss the implementation of mass teaching in India.   His main advice
was for Bahá'í teachers to go to the villages.   He called for volunteers
from the National Spiritual Assembly to launch the new campaign.   Mrs
Meherabání, who was now a member of this body, volunteered her services
and left for the area of India she knew best, Madhya Pradesh.

In Indore Mrs. Meherabání took council with her brother.   He informed
her that some Bahá'í contact had previously been made with a Bhil tribal
village located forty-five miles from Indore.   Accordingly, Mrs. Meherabání
left the next day for village Kweitiopani, where she remained for several
days, sharing the villagers' food and bedding and giving them the message
that Bahá'u'lláh, the universal _avatara_ whose religion would unite men of
all religious and cultural backgrounds, had appeared.   During the next
few weeks she periodically returned to Kweitiopani, each time elaborating

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[17] 'Letter written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf to the National Spiritual
   Assembly of the Bahá'ís of South and West Africa, July 9, 1957',
   Arise to Serve, p. 97

[18] _Bahá'í Newsletter_ (India), # 100, January-February, 1959, p. 2

upon different teachings. She then invited those who believed in
Bahá'u'lláh to join the Bahá'í Faith. As a result, nearly 75% of the
village of 200 declared themselves believers by placing their thumbprints
on enrolment cards (they could not write) which were subsequently sent to
the national office in New Delhi. Thus, Kweitropani was the first village
in India to experience the mass teaching activities of the Bahá'í Faith,
and its conversions signalled the coming of a new period in the history of
the movement in India.

Having initiated mass teaching in the Indore area, Mrs. Meherabání
decided to carry out similar activity on the Ujjain side. Before her
departure from Indore, however, she was informed that Dr. Muhájir had
returned to India and was desirous of holding a village conference in
Malwa similar to the conference that had been held in village Rampur
several years earlier. In consultation with the Vajdís it was decided
that village Sangimanda, a predominantly scheduled caste village in
Shajapur - the district where interest in the movement had arisen years
before - would be a suitable site. With the aid of Kisan Lal, arrangements
for the conference were made, and in late January of 1961 Dr. Muhájir
arrived in Ujjain and proceeded by jeep to the village. The report of
the Indian National Spiritual Assembly reveals the scene that awaited him:

> When the Bahá'ís started for Samgimanda on foot
> and in bullock carts, they did not know what was
> awaiting them. The approach to the mud huts of the
> village was decorated with simple coloured papers.
> A number of villagers came out several miles to
> receive their guests ... Amid the beating of drums,
> booming of guns and devotional songs, cries of
> 'Alláh-u-Abhá' and 'Bahá'u'lláh Jai' were heard ...
> The conference was publicized within a few hours and
> attracted over 300 people.[19]

A great open air meeting was held at which Bahá'í speakers spoke of
Bahá'u'lláh as bhagavān kalkin, the tenth avatāra of Viṣṇu whose return
in Vaiṣṇavite theology will mark the end of the kali-yuga.[20]   They also

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[19] The Bahá'í World, vol. XIII, p. 299

[20] Visnupurāna, IV, 24, 98-101, English trans. by M. N. Dutt, (Varansi,1972)

emphasized that within the Bahá'í Faith all men are considered equal, for God makes no distinction between rich and poor, high caste and low caste. The latter point was particularly attractive to the villagers of Sangīmandā who, coming from the scheduled castes, were often shunned by higher caste members of society. When the meeting concluded those who wished to declare their belief in Bahá'u'lláh were asked to thumbprint an enrolment card. Over two hundred villagers declared themselves, and 'Representatives from neighbouring villages did not leave the place till they were assured by the Bahá'ís that they would send somebody to their places...'[21] With the holding of the Sangīmandā conference mass declaration in Malwa had begun.

The flame that was lit in Sangīmandā soon spread. Word had circulated to nearby villages of the new 'casteless' religion whose avatāra considered all men equal, and, as a result, members of these villages were soon appealing for Bahá'í teachers to come to their communities and explain the teachings and principles of the movement. In addition, the National Spiritual Assembly purchased several jeeps and sent Bahá'í teachers on village tours throughout the various districts of Malwa. Mrs. Meherabání and her son-in-law Mr. Vajdí were the spearheads of the new campaign, and they spent long hours travelling the pathways of rural Malwa proclaiming the new religion wherever they went. Their message was always the same: Bahá'u'lláh, the new avatāra, had appeared to lead men out of the age of darkness. As the momentum in teaching activity was accelerated, the response of rural Malwa grew. In fact, the large increase in declarations in India between the years 1961 and 1963, as revealed in the statistics presented in Chapter 2, was primarily the outcome of the mass teaching campaigns in Malwa and the nearby districts surrounding the city of Gwalior.

During the first few years of mass teaching in Malwa the movement

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[21] The Bahá'í World, vol. XIII, p. 299

enlisted individuals primarily from the lower castes, particularly the scheduled tribes and castes. This was due to two basic factors. The first and perhaps most obvious reason was the teachings of the movement itself. Being anti-caste and proposing a world brotherhood of men, they spoke to the specific plight of the Indian Harijan. The second concerned the initial rural contacts made by Bahá'ís in Malwa. As shown earlier, two of the original Bahá'í converts in rural Malwa came from scheduled caste background; Kiśan Lāl from Shajapur, and Dayā Rām Malvīa from Harsodan. When the Indian National Spiritual Assembly decided to activate a campaign of mass teaching it turned to these individuals for help, and the two men naturally took the Bahá'í teachers to those communities they knew best—the Harijan communities. Hence, a large percentage of declarants during these years came from the ranks of the scheduled castes.

The Vajdí household in Ujjain suddenly became a hub of activity where numerous new Bahá'ís from surrounding villages often congregated. It soon became evident that a Bahá'í center was necessary to accommodate the visitors. Consequently, a location in the city was obtained, and Bahá'í activity in Ujjain was focused around this center until 1965 when a new building and grounds situated approximately one mile outside of the city was purchased.

During these years of rapid expansion the Faith was not free from opposition. The Ārya Samāj, which was happy to accommodate the movement as long as it was an intellectual philosophy, became actively hostile when the Faith began to enter the arena of action and enrol the masses. Ārya Samājists began to follow the Bahá'í teachers in the rural areas attempting to reconvert anyone who had declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh. Their main point of attack was that the movement was actually a form of Islám in disguise. Villagers were told their wives would be taken from them and they would be forced to eat the holy mother cow.[*] Animosity became so

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[*] This information was revealed to the author by Bahá'í village teachers.

great that the Indian National Spiritual Assembly in their Teaching Report

of December 1963, wrote to the Universal House of Justice:

> The greatest welcome news is the rising opposition
> of the Arya Samajists in Madhya Pradesh.   May the
> One in whose hand are the reins of the Cause give an
> opportunity to India to prove her mettle and occasion
> to the friends to purify and sanctify themselves.
> Dr. Munje, Mrs. Shirin Boman, Mr. K.N. Pradhan and
> Mr. K.H. Vajdi toured the erupting area at a great
> personal hazard.[22]

Bahá'í teachers answered these charges by insisting the Bahá'í Faith was

an independent world religion which, far from being disdainful towards

Hinduism, wanted to purify it from the dross of man-made convention.   By

the end of 1964 the anti-Bahá'í activities of the Ārya Samaj in Malwa had

subsided though there existed a rather bitter peace which at any time was

liable to lead to confrontation.[23]

In February of 1964 a prominent visitor, Rúḥíyyih Khánum[24] (widow of

the late Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, and a Hand of the

Cause), arrived in India.   In Haifa, Israel, she had received news of the

progress the movement was making in India and soon became desirous of

seeing the situation first hand.   During her nine month stay in the

subcontinent she made a special excursion to Malwa in order to visit some

of the new village believers.   Late in February Rúḥíyyih Khánum arrived

in Indore.

Rúḥíyyih Khánum's initial experience in rural Malwa was her visit to

village Kweitīopānī, the first village in Malwa to experience mass teaching,

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[22] 'Teaching Report of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís
       of India, Dec, 10, 1963', p. 1-2

[23] In this regard, a prominent Bahá'í teacher informed me that Ārya Samājist
       antagonism reached its peak in early 1964 when the Bahá'ís were
       challenged to a verbal confrontation in a Shajapur village.   At the
       meeting the Ārya Samājist spokesman claimed Bahá'u'lláh was a
       Muslim prophet and that Bahá'ís were introducing a foreign god into
       India. The tide turned, however, when a scheduled caste Bahá'í
       offered the Ārya Samājist a glass of water which he refused to drink,
       as to do so would have meant breaking caste commensal barriers, which
       he was apparently unwilling to do.

[24] Rúḥíyyih Rabbani is commonly known throughout the Bahá'í world as
       Rúḥiyyíh Khánum.

and the first Bahá'í 'model village' in India.   Her talk in Kweitíopání
exemplified the Bahá'í teaching method.   She told the gathered villagers:

> ... that they should be proud of their heritage
> as tribal peoples and should never feel ashamed
> of it ...   She then explained that the very
> essence of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is unity
> in diversity and is not unity in uniformity; that
> the beauty of the society of the future will be
> that each people will bring its own unique gift
> to enrich the whole.[25]

Following her excursion to Kweitíopání, Rúhíyyih Khánum visited the mass
teaching district of Shajapur where she attended a regional conference.
Before departing the area she also made numerous stops in local villages
where the response to her arrival was always one of joy and acclamation.
In the village of Jahāngirpur she was greeted by a brass band playing
royal marches, and as she walked down the village lanes people shouted
'... Dharm-Mata Ki Jai Ho'[26] (long live our spiritual mother).

Returning to Indore, Rúhíyyih Khánum presented her last talk in Malwa
in the newly acquired Bahá'í teaching institute.   Here she addressed forty
travelling teachers on the importance of continuing the mass teaching
campaign.   She told them that consolidation of these new gains was
necessary, and a program directed towards this end would be initiated, but
the Bahá'ís of Malwa having begun the fire of mass teaching in India must
now turn it into a conflagration; all believers, new and old, should be
brought into active participation.

The advice which Rúhíyyih Khánum gave to the travelling teachers was
heeded by the Bahá'ís of Malwa.   Active teaching was continually pursued
throughout the remaining years of the 1960's, so that by the end of the
decade there were over one hundred thousand declared believers in Malwa.
There was one major change, however, that distinguished the teaching methods

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[25] Violette Nakhjavani, Amatu'l-Bahá Visits India, (New Delhi, n.d.),
     p. 50-51

[26] Nakhjavani, p. 53

of the early 1960's from those of the mid and late 1960's. During the latter period a conscious effort was made to attract other than 'low' caste members to the movement. As was stated earlier, a large majority of the early mass teaching declarations came from among the lower castes, and, as a result, the upper castes tended to identify the Bahá'í Faith as a scheduled caste movement and would have nothing to do with it. When mass teaching began in the Gwalior area in 1962, the Bahá'ís in that region used a new method. Rather than going directly to the scheduled castes they would first approach the leading castes of the village, a technique that allowed for a greater range of castes to join the movement, as the 'clean' castes were not alienated by teachers entering the villages and converting 'low' castemen. Consequently, since the Bahá'í Faith claimed to be a religion for all men, the approach used in the Gwalior area was soon realized to be the most advantageous, and accordingly, the mid 1960's saw this method of teaching introduced into Malwa with the result that during this time a number of higher caste members declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh.

The enrollment of new believers was not the only arena of activity in which the Bahá'í teachers in Malwa participated. As Rúhíyyih Khánum had noted during her presentations in Indore, consolidation programs were a necessary corollary to mass teaching. As the main objective of the Bahá'í Faith was not just to present a set of idealistic beliefs to mankind but to educate declarants in the various aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's religion so that a unified world order of belivers co-ordinated by a system of local, national, and international institutions could evolve, a systematic plan for 'deepening' new adherents had to be initiated. As a result, a spirited program designed to educate specific believers in all phases of the movement's teachings was launched.

Consolidation procedures had been set in motion as early as 1963 with the opening of the Indore Teaching Institute. One of the primary functions of this institution was to 'deepen' a number of village believers in all

facets of the Faith's teachings so that upon returning to their respective villages they would be able to disseminate this information among the remainder of the new declarants. Special resident instructors were brought to the Institute to teach both week-long and week-end classes in Bahá'í history, administrative organization, consultation methods, and ethics. Dr. Munje, one of the first Bahá'ís to settle in Malwa, and Mr. Dushyant Kumar were both active in this program. By 1964 the Indore Teaching Institute was having regular courses and had already trained many declarants to teach their fellow villagers.[27] In 1965 similar courses under the direction of Mr. Jadav were initiated in the new Bahá'í Center in Ujjain.

Another institution designed to help educate new believers was the village primary school. The schools served two purposes: first, they educated village children in the fundamentals of primary education and introduced them to the basic teachings of the Bahá'í Faith; and second, they served as Bahá'í village centers where new believers could hold meetings. Such schools were only established in villages where government schools were not present or functioning. The first school was introduced into village Kweitiopani where the inhabitants were instructed in Hindi, arithmetic, and Bahá'í history and social principles.

The tremendous growth of teaching activity that characterized the 1960's, and the initiation of an energetic consolidation program that followed in its wake, necessitated the creation of new administrative institutions. Consequently, in the mid-1960's the National Spiritual Assembly created the Area Teaching Committee of Central India. The function of this body was to formulate and supervise both teaching and consolidation activities in the mass teaching areas of Malwa and Gwalior, thereby relieving the already overburdened National Spiritual Assembly of

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[27] 'National Spiritual Assembly Circular of August 27, 1964'

having to deal with these matters directly.   After consulting, the Committee notified the National Spiritual Assembly of its decisions, and the national body either ratified the proposals or sent them back for re-evaluation.

With the continued expansion of the movement in Madhya Pradesh the National Spiritual Assembly in the late 1960's divided the Area Teaching Committee into two Regional teaching committees: one for northern Madhya Pradesh and the other for southern Madhya Pradesh.   The former held its meetings in Gwalior, while the latter alternated its meetings between Indore and Ujjain.

In the 1970's the organization of the teaching committees was once more rearranged.   The State Teaching Committee of Madhya Pradesh was established in January of 1973 and had under its charge two Regional teaching committees whose areas of jurisdiction were the same as those mentioned above.   Consequently, by the end of the Nine-Year Plan there were three administrative institutions directing teaching and consolidation activities in Malwa: the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee, the Madhya Pradesh State Teaching Committee, and the National Spiritual Assembly.

Since 1970 the Bahá'í Administrative Order has been primarily concerned with consolidation and 'deepening' work.   Teaching has continued, but not with the same pace or zeal that characterized it during the 1960's. Bahá'í administrators have now set a goal of trying to develop a specific number of 'model village' communities in Malwa.   Before examining the various aspects of Bahá'í community life that the movement's leaders hope to develop in such communities, the structure of both the administrative system directing Bahá'í activities and the social system into which they are being introduced will be examined in greater detail.

Part II   The Sociological Framework

Chapter 4   The Local Village

If we are to correctly understand the current activities of the Bahá'í
Faith in Malwa, and comprehend the position the movement holds within the
total sociological panorama of the region, then it is necessary from the
beginning to make several typological distinctions.   First, there are the
local villages of Malwa.   The life patterns of the individuals who inhabit
these communities are largely determined by a traditional value system.
The traditional system,however,is by no means homogeneous; it is
continually coming under attack from certain modern-secular values and
institutions which have emerged as a result of India's contact with the West.
Second, there exists the Bahá'í Faith's administrative system consisting of
local, regional, national, and international bodies which is characterized
by a set of socio-religious values markedly different to the value system
and corresponding institutional manifestations of the traditional village.
Finally, there are those villages in which the Bahá'í Administrative Order
is attempting to introduce its valuational and institutional components.
While the members of these communities are still largely influenced by
traditional patterns of behavior, they are in some cases slowly coming
under the influence of Bahá'í socio-religious attitudes and modes of
conduct.

Part II will examine the structures of both the contemporary village
social system and the Bahá'í Administrative Order.   The analysis will not
be detailed; such a task would in itself demand two separate volumes.
Rather, the chapters in this section will point out the distinguishing
characteristics of each system, creating in the process a sociological
framework that will hopefully facilitate an understanding of Bahá'í
propagation and consolidation efforts in rural Malwa.

A social system '... is a mode of organization of action elements relative to the persistence or ordered processes of change of the interactive patterns of a plurality of individual actors.'[1]   That is, it is a complex network of values and corresponding institutions which determines where an individual in a given group is located in relationship to other individuals (status), and defines what the individual does in his relations with other members of the group (role).[2]

The social system of the contemporary Malwa village is made up of a combination of traditional and modern elements.   Traditionally it has been characterized by

1) its rigid hierarchical classification of status groups
   in this world (caste) and its belief in a corresponding
   hierarchy of deities in the other world;

2) its propensity towards ritual specialization;

3) its incarnation of religion in perpetual symbols or
   images;

4) its concepts of ritual purity; and

5) its regional orientation.

However, since the coming of the western powers to the subcontinent modernizing elements have slowly been finding their way into village life.   In all spheres of life, economic, political, social, religious, and educational, these elements have infiltrated the inner sanctum of tradition.   The increasing economic dependence of the village on urban centers, the expansion of democracy, and the spread of public education

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[1] Talcott Parsons, The Social System, (London, 1952), p. 24

[2] According to Leonard Broom and Philip Selznick a role may be defined as
    a pattern of behavior associated with a distinctive social position,
    while status is used to designate an individual's place within a
    system of social ranking. Sociology A Text with Adapted Readings,
    4th ed., (London, 1968), p. 18 and 44

are but a few examples of the forces of modernization that are continually affecting the contemporary village, and, as a result, traditional socio-religious values and institutions are finding themselves more and more in a state of stress. In order to better understand this phenomenon we must take a closer look at traditional village norms and their corresponding modern counterparts.

Perhaps the most well known aspect of the village social structure, and one which has had a vast number of investigators, is the caste system. The outstanding characteristic of the system is group exclusiveness; in any given village there exists a range of status groups known as castes whose members' roles as regards occupation and ritual performance are rigidly defined. These groups are endogamous and have strict rules regarding commensal relations; individual members of a given caste can only find mates within their own caste group, and, generally speaking, they will not eat unripe or kacca foods from a caste lower than their own.[3] In addition, there is an entire galaxy of rules and regulations ranging from modes of address to styles of clothing that mark off the exclusiveness of each caste. The hierarchical ordering of castes is justified by religious ideals. The traditional and largely theoretical account of the ordering of the castes is the well-known four varna classification in which the Brāhmaṇs (priests) receive the highest position, followed by the Kṣatriyas (warriors), Vaiśyas (merchants and artisans), and Śūdras (labourers).[4] Within each varna (class) there are

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[3] Kacca foods are those cooked in water and/or salt. Included in this group are staple foods of cakes, unleavened sorgham meal, rice, curries, and chutneys. Kacca foods are distinguished from pakka foods, which are those prepared in clarified butter (ghi). The latter can be shared by a greater range of castes.

[4] The Ṛg Veda (X, 90) gives an account of creation whereby a primeval man (puruṣa) sacrifices himself, thereby creating the universe. From various parts of his body were produced Brāhmaṇ, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra. Over the millennia another category, 'untouchable', was added to the list making five basic classifications.

numerous subdivisions, castes , and the position of a given caste in
the hierarchical structure can vary from one region to another, but in
every region the ranking of each caste is firmly established.

The major assumption that underlies the entire system is the
inequality of status groups. A Brāhman is considered superior both in
terms of occupation and ritual status to a Ksatriya, and a Ksatriya
superior to a Vaiśya. The main distinction in terms of ineqaulity,
however, is drawn between 'clean', 'unclean', and 'untouchable' castes. Castes of
the first three varnas, being considered 'clean', would have more extensive
social intercourse with one another than they would with the Sūdra ('unclean')
and 'untouchable' castes. 'There are no common feasts between these two
divisions of castes. Castes of the "unclean" and "untouchable" divisions
are regarded as "servant castes", who must dine only after the "master
castes" have taken their meals.'[5] Accordingly, the political and
economic power in the village is dominated by the 'clean' castes, and among
them Brāhmans and Rājputs (Ksatriya) stand out.

The doctrine of karma, a type of cosmic law of cause and effect,
justifies the inequality. Individuals are born into certain castes
because of the deeds they have committed in past lives, and their actions
in the present life will determine their status in future lives. Hence,
nearly every aspect of village life is influenced by one's caste, as the
village is the cosmos in microcosm.

While caste exclusiveness still characterizes village life in Malwa
and determines one's status and role within the community, anti-caste
ideals are slowly finding their way into the system. The two main sources
of agitation are the political arena and the educational system. Article
14 of the Indian Constitution states that India as a secular state holds
all of its citizens equal before the law.[6] Theoretically, each citizen

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[5] K.S. Mathur, Caste and Ritual in a Malwa Village, (Bombay, 1964), p. 127

[6] Constitutions of Asian Countries, prepared by The Secretariat of the
Asian-African Legal Consultative Committee, (Bombay, 1968), p. 194

regardless of caste has an equal vote in the democratic process of electing the nation's leaders. An awareness of their new rights as citizens has begun to manifest itself within the minds of many 'low' caste members, the result being that numerous 'low' caste and particularly scheduled caste political factions have arisen within the past two decades. A prominent example of this phenomenon is the rise of the politically oriented Neo-Buddhist Movement[7] in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Also, the introduction into the rural areas by the Indian government of elected administrative bodies, pancāyats,[8] is helping to undermine the traditional village power structure, as these institutions provide opportunities for lower castemen to hold positions of authority in the village.

In addition to a growing political awareness, the expansion of public education is also having a disruptive influence on caste exclusiveness. Many villagers now have the opportunity to leave their communities and go to urban centers where they can take part in higher education, and their introduction to new ideas often creates psychological conflicts resulting in the rejection of traditional rigidity. For example, the author met several village students in Ujjain who told him they would not necessarily marry into their own caste, and while there is often a difference between what a person says he will do and what he actually does, the fact that these students even considered breaking caste rules regarding marriage exemplifies the growing conflict that is manifesting itself in contemporary Malwa villages as a result of the collision of traditional and modern values.

One of the principal precepts of popular Hinduism, and one that is closely related to the hierarchical ranking of status groups in the village

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[7] Concerning the Neo-Buddhist Movement see Eleanor Zelliot, 'Gandhi and Ambedkar - A Study in Leadership', and Adele Fiske, 'Scheduled Caste Buddhist Organizations', in The Untouchables in Contemporary India, ed. by J. Michael Mahar, (Tuscon, 1972).

[8] For an elaboration on this institution see Chapter 10.

is the concept of purity and pollution. 'Hindus regard purity as the supreme virtue. Of the three major attributes of God and dharma, viz. satyam (truth), sundaram (beauty), and sivam (purity, auspiciousness), the last is the most important.'[9] According to the Hindu view of life everything in existence is either intrinsically impure, neutral, or pure. Being intrinsically neutral, man must continually purify himself throughout his life by performing certain prescribed rituals known as samskāras (rites of passage).[10] The number and form of these rituals vary according to caste; while the Brāhman is required to perform nine samskāras, the Śūdra castes are required to perform only three. Moreover, contact with anything impure[11] requires that the polluted object or person be purified by means of special ritual ablution. Two of the most well known agents of purification are fire and water, and hence bathing in a holy river such as the Sipra is often prescribed as a remedy for removing the taint of impurity. Again, differences in purification methods vary according to caste.

In terms of social interaction the concept of purity and pollution plays an important role in village life. Taking improper food from a caste lower than one's own is considered polluting, and as a result an elaborate system of rules regulates village commensal activity. In general, the higher a caste's ranking, the fewer the number of castes from which its members are allowed to accept food. Consequently, a Brāhman will rarely take food from anyone but a fellow casteman, although he can prepare food for all castes.

Purity and pollution concepts are not just limited to their effect on commensal relationships. Sometimes, as in the case of certain 'untouchable' castes,

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[9] Mathur, p. 97

[10] Rites of this type include those relating to birth, initiation, marriage, and death.

[11] Examples of impure objects include body fluids, leather, meat, alcohol, and feces.

the mere presence of another individual within a specified distance is enough to pollute a 'clean' casteman. Consequently, the Hindu ideal of purity has traditionally acted as a conceptual support for the maintenance of caste exclusiveness.

The rigidity that characterizes the Hindu concept of purity and pollution is also coming under attack. In many instances, however, the pressure for change has not come from voluntary opposition but from involuntary circumstances which have arisen as a result of general social and technological change. While the Indian Constitution forbids the implementation of such inequities as pollution by touch, changing social conditions have done more to eliminate it than enforced legislation. For example, with the growth of industry in India numerous persons from both urban and rural areas were employed in factories.[12] 'The factories attracted workers from all levels of traditional society as they offered comparatively high wages.'[13] As a result, high and low caste members were brought into close physical contact with each other, a situation which according to the traditional concept of purity and pollution would have in many instances necessitated ritual ablution. However, since a factory cannot function efficiently if its workers are constantly having to purify themselves, the traditional pattern of behavior gave way to the more functional one.

The introduction of public transportation, notably buses, has resulted in the same situation. In a bus (as anyone who has travelled on an Indian bus well knows) a Brāhman may find himself at extremely close quarters with an 'untouchable'. Also, as M.N. Srinivas has pointed out, the

[12] Large factories exist not only in Indore and Ujjain but in several other Malwa cities including Ratlam, Nagda and Agar.

[13] M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966), p. 65

popularity of travel and teashops where numerous castes often mix is not confined to city folk but extends to villagers as well.[14] Hence, the changing facts of social reality in both urban and rural India have helped weaken, at least in some areas of social intercourse, the strong notion of purity and pollution that has for so long permeated village life.

Another characteristic of the social system of the contemporary Malwa village is its propensity towards ritual specialization. As with the concept of purity and pollution, ritual specialization reflects both one's status and role within the community. In the religious life of the village,rituals relating to fasts and feasts,rites of passage, and individual worship vary in form and content according to caste , and as a result in each village there is an entire hierarchy of ritual practices, the form and content of which are determined by the relative position within the community of the participant's status group.

Ritual is ' ... a category of standardized behavior (custom) in which the relationship between the means and the end is not intrinsic, ie. is either irrational or non-rational.'[15] In the traditional village numerous areas of life are governed by such 'non-rational' symbolic activity. These areas include the previously mentioned rites of passage and purification rituals as well as numerous fasts, feasts, and acts of individual worship (pūja). In general, most rituals include as part of their content the acting out of certain symbolic formulas (according to the specific circumstance)and the offering of a gift, often food or flowers, to a given deity in return for the god's blessing and protection.

As stated above, both the content and objects of ritual activity vary from caste to caste. While many castes worship common deities, each

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[14] Srinivas, p. 122

[15] Jack Goody, 'Religion and Ritual: The Definitional Problem', British Journal of Sociology, vol. XII, 1961, (London), p. 159

caste generally has its own specific deities to whom its members offer pūja. There are also variations in the procedure of worship. 'These are particularly striking in the matter of food offered to the deity, the caste of the officiating priest, and the hymns or incantations recited in honour of the deity.'[16] For example, Brāhman rituals would contain many more sanskritic elements than would rituals of lower castes, and Sūdra rituals would be devoid of such elements. Rituals even vary according to different clan groups within the village. As Adrian Mayer has pointed out, different clans have different mother goddesses and corresponding rituals.[17] Traditionally, variation in ritual content has symbolized the relative position of each caste in the religio-cosmic hierarchy; the more elaborate and sanskritic the ritual, the purer and therefore higher the caste performing it.

As in other spheres of village life, the world of ritual is experiencing some noteworthy changes. In addition to the changes taking place in purity and pollution rituals, there seems to be a decline in both the elaborateness and frequency of other rituals. For example, the rites of passage rituals, which for higher castes were traditionally characterized by both their number and complexity, are being simplified.[18] Even daily worship patterns are beginning to alter. I was told by a Rājput village informant that the young men of his village did not frequent the local temples as often as had their forefathers. According to K.S. Mathur's findings in village Potlod, the number of persons visiting the temple everyday was very small, ie. the number of devotees regularly visiting any of the four temples being in no case more than ten, seems to support this claim.[19]

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[16] Mathur, p. 168

[17] Mayer, p. 184

[18] See Srinivas' chapter 'Secularization' in Social Change in Modern India.

[19] Mathur, p. 165

Even in those cases where ritual activity has taken on a more
important role in village life (the process of 'sanskritization'[20] whereby
lower castes try to raise their ritual status by adopting the ritual
conduct of higher castes) the traditionalization can in some ways be
understood as a result of modernization; lower castes in an attempt to
attain social equality, a predominantly modern and secular concept, revert
to traditional channels of change as a means of reaching their goal. Seen
in this light the increased emphasis on ritual behavior is not a conservative
backlash but a secular ideal dressed in religious clothing.

In addition, the rise of new secular oriented categories of behavior,
ie. political activity, has caused a shift in the importance of ritual
identity. At one time caste was primarily viewed in terms of ritual-
cosmic meaning. However, in the last thirty years castes have also become
viable political units. In this regard one student of village India has
gone as far as to say that modern political ideology has changed caste
identity from an essentially ritual-cosmic base to a more secular political
orientation.[21] While this may be somewhat of an overstatement, it is no
doubt true that the filtering of modern secular concepts into rural India
has undermined the extent and scope of ritual activity in the contemporary
village.

Anyone who sets foot into a Hindu village is sure to notice almost
immediately the numerous religious images and symbols that permeate the
environment. Rural Hinduism has always been characterized by its graphic
representation of the Sacred (to which the large number of icons inhabiting
village temples and shrines are ample testimony), a fact which has often
brought down upon it the wrath of religious iconoclasts.

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[20] For a more detailed explanation of 'sanskritization' see Srinivas,
Social Change in Modern India and A.P. Barnabas, 'Sanskritization',
The Economic Weekly, vol. 13, #15, April 15, 1961, p. 613-618.

[21] S.N. Eisenstadt, 'prologue: Some Remarks on Patterns of Change in
Traditional and Modern India', Change and Continuity in India's
Villages, ed. by K. Ishwaran, (New York and London , 1970), p. 32-34

While as in caste ranking, the stratification of deities may vary according to the region one is investigating, in general the highest positions are reserved for a select group of All-India deities.   In Malwa the figures of Rāma, Śiva, Hanumant, and Gaṇeśa are included in the highest assemblage.   These gods inhabit the village temples and are worshipped daily by a 'clean' caste priest, generally a Brāhmaṇ.   'Nobody except the priest is allowed to touch the image, and the "unclean" and "untouchable" castes are prohibited from entering the temple premises by express sacred laws of Hinduism.'[22]   The lesser gods and local deities are not housed in the main village temples but find their lodging in smaller shrines.   In contrast to the carved figures of the All-India deities, these gods are usually represented by a pile of painted stones and are often associated with particular castes.   Some of the more prominent members of this classification of gods in Malwa are Śītalā, Bhairu, Nāg, and Poliā Mahārāj. The shrines of these deities are open to all castes and usually do not have officiating priests; the worshipper is allowed to approach the god directly.

Each deity has specific areas of influence for which he or she is well known.   If an individual is embarking on a business venture he will generally make an offering to Gaṇeśa, the god of prosperity.   Likewise, women often approach the Śiva lingam or one of the local mother goddesses when they desire a new offspring.   In this regard one cannot help but notice the similarities in division of labor that exist between the caste system and the Hindu pantheon.

Perhaps more than any other aspect of village life the realm of religious representation has changed the least with the advent of modernism. While many reform groups, such as the Ārya Samāj, and in a more radical manner anti-Hindu factions like the previously mentioned Neo-Buddhist

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[22] Mathur, p. 31 (Although this sanction was banished by the Indian
     Constitution, it has often been adhered to by conservative Hindus.)

A Temple of Śītalā Mātā

Movement, have disdained graphic symbolism as a corruption of 'pure'
religion, their ideas have not been able to penetrate India's villages.
Consequently, Hinduism in rural Malwa is still characterized by its
representation of the Sacred in numerous symbols and images.

Commentators on Indian society have always noted the relative
isolation of the local village. In this regard Sir Charles Metcalf's
Minute immediately comes to mind in which he referred to India's villages
as independent republics:

> The Village Communities are little Republics, having
> nearly everything they want within themselves, and
> almost independent of any foreign relations. They
> seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after
> dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds to
> revolution; Hindu, Pathan, Mughul, Mahratta, Sikh,
> English, are masters in turn; but the village
> communities remain the same.[23]

While the Englishman's emphasis on the isolation of the traditional village
may have been somewhat of an oversimplification, it does point out the
relative localism that has characterized the outlook of the Indian villager.
Although Hinduism has over the millennia spread its influence throughout
the subcontinent, it is the local region that has demanded the villager's
allegiance. Differences in regional dialects, customs, and even deities
reflect this phenomenon. Furthermore, the fact that the experiential
world of the Indian villager rarely spread beyond one of his own kinsman's
villages - which he might visit for marital or other religiously oriented
celebrations - of necessity resulted in his perspective being limited,
causing him to identify himself primarily as a member of a certain caste,
sub-caste, and clan, rather than as member of a nation or adherent to a
particular religious tradition.

With the advent of British rule, the logistic latitude of the
traditional village began to undergo adjustment. Numerous forces,

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[23] Sir Charles Metcalfe, 'Minute of the Board of Revenue, November 17,
1830', quoted in Percival Spear, Twilight of the Mughals, (Cambridge,
1951), p. 117

A village shrine

inhabitant what he thought about Watergate!*

While brief, the above critique hopefully exemplifies the various forces, both traditional and modern, that are affecting the contemporary Malwa village. All aspects of the system have not been dealt with. Only those spheres of village life that are most directly related to the activities of the Bahá'í Faith, namely, caste exclusiveness, ritual specialization, graphic representation of the Sacred, hierarchical ranking of gods and status groups, and dimensions of world view have been examined. Even then, the social 'schizophrenia' that characterizes these areas of life must be apparent; the conflict between traditional values and institutions and modern ideals has resulted in the corroding of one system but has not been complete enough to allow the thorough adoption of another. Thus, the contemporary village stands between two worlds, and while the ties of tradition are still the stronger force in the struggle, like a ship in a storm that is only kept in place by the weight of its anchor, the winds and waves of change may eventually separate it from its moorings.[27] As one interpreter of socio-economic change in rural India has stated:

> The spectacle of social change in rural India during
> the last one hundred years, is truly engaging. While
> many institutional and valuational forms which thrived
> for millennia have been tenatiously holding on, modern
> social forces are making an onslaught which is
> unprecedented in power and speed.[28]

It is into this battleground of competing social forces that the Bahá'í Faith is making its entrance. However, before turning to an examination of the movement's various administrative institutions, it

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* A crisis in United States government leading to the resignation of
   President Richard M. Nixon in August of 1974.

[27] This is not to imply a simple dichotomy of 'modern' and 'traditional'
    which would deny the possibility of Indian society evolving its own
    unique responses. Rather, it is to posit that such responses might
    be so distinct as to bring about qualitative structural change in
    village society.

[28] Indra Deva, 'The Changing Pattern of Rural Society and Culture:
    Significance of the Rural-Urban Nexus', Trends of Socio-Economic
    Change in India 1871-1961, ed. by M.K. Chaudhuri, (Simla, 1969), p.162

is appropriate, since the local village is under discussion, to introduce
at this time the five 'model villages' whose Bahá'í communities provided
the author with the majority of his data regarding the implementation of
Bahá'í values and institutions in rural Malwa.

As of January 1974, there were 113,692 declared Bahá'ís in Malwa
proper[29] scattered among 6,572 localities. The following table reveals
by district the number of Bahá'ís and the types of communities in which
they live:

Table 3[30]

District	Believers	Isolated	Groups	Local Spiritual Assemblies
Dhar	4,163	34	193	104
Dewas	12,235	25	399	341
Indore	2,892	22	102	75
Mandsaur	15,179	27	485	358
Rajgarh	3,538	21	168	89
Ratlam	9,612	13	203	281
Shajapur	30,789	66	1,109	501
Ujjain	35,554	77	1,062	607
	113,962	285	3,721	2,356

As can be gleaned from the above table there are three types of
Bahá'í communities: the isolated believer, the Group, and the Local
Spiritual Assembly. The isolated believer, as the title suggests, is an
individual who is the only Bahá'í in a given locality. As such, he does
not really participate in a community but tries to live up to Bahá'í

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[29] It will be interesting to note when the 1971 Census figures are published
how many of the declarants listed themselves as Bahá'ís. Since they
are not made to denounce Hinduism, it is my contention that most would
still consider themselves Hindus. For further discussion on this
matter see Chapter 7.

[30] The above figures were obtained from the office of the Ujjain Regional
Teaching Committee.

A village belle

traditional and modern values. However, unlike the majority of villages

in the area they are also harboring within their midsts the seeds of a

social system that may provide the institutional and valuational changes

needed to alleviate the friction of colliding worlds. Short descriptions

of five such villages are given below.

Garabelī

Village Garabelī is located in Ujjain district, just fifteen miles

from the city of Ujjain.[*] Its inhabitants are in constant contact with

the city, as much of their produce is sold in her markets. While the

average population of the other villages cited in this study is between

two and three hundred, Garabelī's inhabitants number more than a thousand.

Their caste distribution is as follows: 400 Mālvī Balāis, 300 Deśa

Chamārs, 165 Kumārs, 100 Gujarātī Chamārs, 50 Kurmīs, 25 Rājputs,

25 Nāyaks, 15 Jāts, 10 Sutars, 6 Darjīs, and 6 Nāis. In addition, there

are 25 Muslims living in Garabelī.[32] As the figures reveal, the village

consists predominantly of scheduled castemen.[33]

Village land amounts to approximately five thousand bīghās,[34] of which

80% is owned by inhabitants (ranging in distribution from 200 bīghās to

none) and 20% by the government (grazing land). The main crops farmed

are wheat, barley, cotton, and sugar cane.

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[*] For the location of all villages see Map # 3.

[32] The size of Garabelī made it difficult to take as thorough a census as
in the other villages. Village informants, however, gave a general
estimate of the caste breakdown of the village, which for our
purposes is sufficient.

[33] Balāis were traditionally involved with weaving cloth and were considered
'unclean'. Chamārs were leather workers and labelled 'untouchables'.
In actuality many Balāis and Chamārs are laborers or cultivators, but
the stigma of their traditional caste occupations has remained with
them.

[34] One bīghā is equal to approximately 3/5 of a standard acre.

MALWA
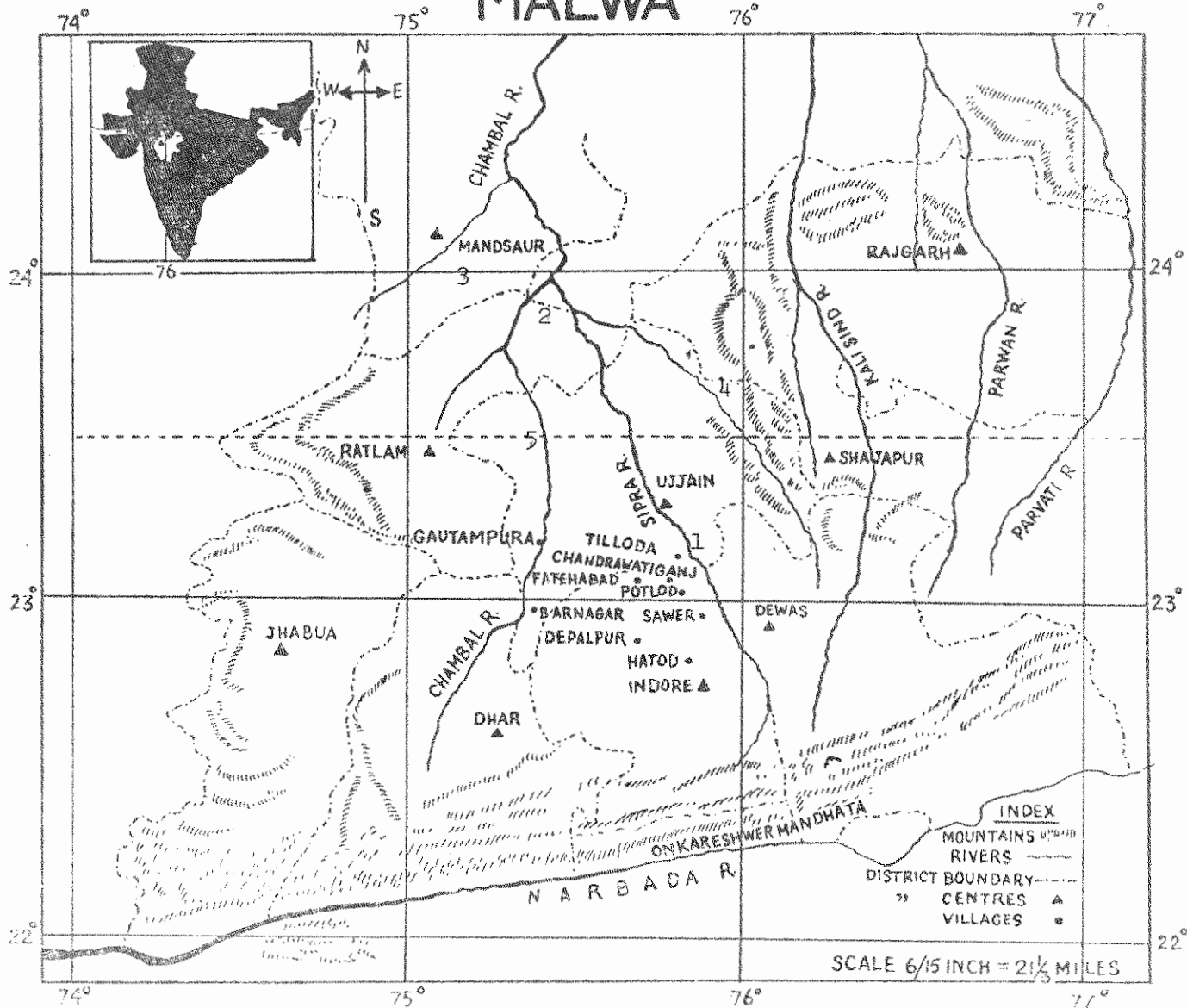
Map 3

Village locations

1. Garabelī
2. Manāsa
3. Karankanī
4. Kāsoḍ
5. Richa

N
W — E
S

74° 75° 76° 77°

CHAMBAL R.

MANDSAUR

RAJGARH

3

2

4

KALISIND R.

PARWAN R.

PARVATI R.

RATLAM

5

SHAJAPUR

SIPRA R.

UJJAIN

GAUTAMPURA

TILLODA

1

CHANDRAWATIGANJ

FATEHABAD POTLOD

BARNAGAR SAWER

DEWAS

JHABUA

DEPALPUR

HATOD

INDORE

CHAMBAL R.

DHAR

ONKARESHWER MANDHATA

NARBADA R.

INDEX
MOUNTAINS
RIVERS
DISTRICT BOUNDARY
"   CENTRES   ▲
VILLAGES   ●

SCALE 6/15 INCH = 21½ MILES

Garabelī is approximately a thousand years old. Its founders were Rājputs who were at one time more predominant in terms of numbers but over the centuries have been slowly displaced. During the modern era the village has been torn by antagonism between Rājputs and scheduled caste factions. Apparently, forty years ago there was an outbreak of violence when Rājputs attempted to take some land away from a scheduled caste Balāi. Garabelī was visited by Bahá'í travelling teachers during the early years of mass teaching (1961), and the village was one of the first rural communities in Malwa to establish its Local Spiritual Assembly. Today the Bahá'í community numbers 127.[35] Listed below is statistical information regarding caste background, educational achievement, age, and occupation of the Bahá'ís of Garabelī.

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[35] Due to the difficulty involved in contacting women in the villages, and their general lack of participation in Bahá'í activities, only male declarants over the age of fifteen have been listed in the statistics for each village.

Table 4[36]

Caste	No. Bahá'ís	Education				Age						Occupation			
		Ill	P	S	T	15/20	21/30	31/40	41/50	51/60	61↑	fm	lab	crft	std
Mālvi Balāi (ucl)	91	65	15	10	1	8	31	16	20	10	6	69	20	0	2
Deśa Chamār (untch)	13	10	3	0	0	0	2	3	3	4	1	7	6	0	0
Gujarātī Chamār (untch)	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	0
Nāyak (ucl)	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Kurmī (cl)	5	0	5	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	5	0	0	0
Jāṭ (cl)	4	0	0	3	1	1	0	2	1	0	1	4	0	0	0
Rājput (cl)	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	4	0	0	0
Darjī (cl)	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0
Kumār (cl)	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	0
Sutar (cl)	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0
TOTAL	127	79	33	13	2	9	33	27	31	19	9	89	27	9	2

Key

    cl = 'clean'
   ucl = 'unclean'
untch = 'untouchable'
   ill = illiterate
     P = primary
     S = secondary
     T = tertiary
    fm = farmer
  crft = craftsman
   std = student
  tchr = teacher

[36] Statistical information was obtained from members of the Local Spiritual Assembly in each village.

Manāsā

Approximately three miles west of the town of Alot (forty-five miles
north of Ujjain) lies the village of Manāsā.   The village is joined to
Alot by an unmettled road which is traversed daily by a local bus.   Of
the 202 inhabitants, 188 are Rājputs; the remaining 14 members belong to
'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes (8 Mālvī Balāis and 6 Deśa Chamārs).
Its lack of numerous castes (many of which perform essential services) means
that Manāsā relies on nearby villages to supply sweepers, barbers and
craftsmen.   In addition, a neighboring Brāhmaṇ offers daily pūja in
Manāsā's temple.

Close to nine hundred bīghās of land produce harvests of wheat, barley,
millet, and cotton.   Land distribution ranges from approximately one
hundred bīghās, owned by the village headman (Rājput), to a small five
bīghā plot farmed by a Balāi family.

The village is very young, having been founded only ninety years ago
by Rājputs who left a nearby community because of land shortage.   There
are no written records concerning Manāsā's history, and it seems that besides
the occasional feast or wedding party and the intermittent boundary
quarrel, no outstanding event marked its existence until the coming of
Bahá'í teachers early in 1963.   At that time Mr. K.H. Vajdí and
Mrs. Shírín Boman Meherabání were touring the districts of Malwa by jeep.
During their first visit to Manāsā nine inhabitants declared (all Rājputs),
and thus in April of 1963 the communities first Local Spiritual Assembly
was established.   In 1968 a Bahá'í primary school was built, and today
it is officially recognized by the government of Madhya Pradesh.   At
present there are fifty-two declared believers in Manāsā.

Table 5

Caste	No. Bahá'ís	Education				Age						Occupation		
		Ill	P	S	T	15/20	21/30	31/40	41/50	51/60	61↑	fm	lab	tchr
Rājput (cl)	42	30	11	1	0	3	9	12	14	4	0	41	0	1
Mālvī Balāi (ucl)	6	6	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	6	0
Deśa Chamār (untch)	4	4	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	2	2	0
TOTAL	52	40	11	1	0	3	15	14	16	4	0	43	8	1

Karaṅkanī

Karaṅkanī is located twenty miles northwest of the small town of Tal in Mandsaur district. It is the most isolated of the villages cited in this study – one must travel over twenty miles of winding dirt roads to reach its first fields. The village is inhabited by 230 souls who are distributed among eight castes: 90 Gūjars, 89 Rājputs, 18 Brāhmaṇs, 7 Darjīs, 16 Gujarātī Chamārs, 7 Mālvī Balāis, and 3 Pañjābīs.

Karaṅkanī's main crops are similar to those grown in other Malwa villages. In addition, a large opium crop (which is grown under government contract) brings lucrative returns to many families. Land holdings are fairly well distributed, the largest amount of land owned by a single cultivator being fifty bighās.

The village is over seven hundred years old. It was founded by Gūjars, a wandering people who gave their name to the state located to the northwest of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat. In 1968 a Bahá'í travelling teacher from Mehidpur (a small local town) came to Karaṅkanī to give the message of the Bahá'í Faith. He met with the village headman (patel) and explained about the coming of Bhagavān Bahā (Bahá'u'lláh). After spending the night in the village, the teacher enrolled the patel, a member of the Gūjar caste, and a Rājput. Two months later, having obtained assistance from the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee, these two men constructed a small building which was subsequently used as both a Bahá'í bhavan (center) and a primary school. Over the next five years twenty-two inhabitants declared themselves believers in Bahá'u'lláh, and today the Bahá'í community totals twenty-four.

Table 6

Caste	No Bahá'ís	Education				Age						Occupation		
		Ill	P	S	T	15/20	21/30	31/40	41/50	51/60	61↑	Farm	lab	tchr
Gūjar (cl)	12	5	7	0	0	1	4	4	3	0	0	12	0	0
Rājput (cl)	4	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	4	0	0
Brāhmaṇ (cl)	4	0	4	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	4	0	0
Mālvī Balāi (ucl)	3	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	0
Pañjābī (cl)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	24	9	14	1	0	4	9	6	5		0	21	2	1

Kāsod

Village Kāsod is located in Shajapur district, approximately ten
miles south of the small gown of Agar (forty-five miles north-east of Ujjain).
It is connected to the main highway that runs between Ujjain and Agar by
a series of winding dirt roads which at times are not more than footpaths.
The village has a population of 299, among which there are 206 Rājputs,
46 Deśa Chamārs, 38 Mālvī Balaīs, and 9 Brāhmaṇs. Hence, Kāsod is
divided into two main groupings; Rājputs are ranked near the top of the
caste hierarchy, while the Balāi and Chamār castes are categorized as
'unclean' and 'untouchable' respectively. Since there are no middle
range castes in Kāsod, many of the services provided by these status
groups must be obtained in nearby villages or in Agar.

Village lands amount to fifteen hundred bīghās. The largest
landholding is that of the headman who owns almost a hundred bīghās.
On the other hand, the local Chamārs own no land, their livelihood being
earned from laboring in higher castemen's fields. The main crops farmed
are wheat, barley, red pepper, sugar cane, and opium.

While there are no written records concerning the history of the
village, the patel claimed Kāsod was several hundred years old and that it was
founded by his Rājput ancestors. In 1967 a travelling Bahá'í teacher from
Tarana came to Kāsod. He met with the patel and a meeting was arranged
for that evening. After the meeting, ten persons signed declaration
cards, and the village's Local Spiritual Assembly was formed in April of the
next year. Another ten inhabitants declared in 1968, and by the time a
Bahá'í primary school was established in 1971, there were twenty-five
Bahá'ís in Kāsod.

Table 7

Caste	No. Bahá'ís	Education				Age						Occupation			
		Ill	P	S	T	15/20	21/30	31/40	41/50	51/60	61↑	Farm	lab	crft	tch
Brāhmaṇ (cl)	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Rājput (cl)	11	6	4	1	0	1	3	2	3	1	1	11	0	0	0
Mālvī Balāi (ucl)	5	4	0	0	1	0	3	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	1
Deśa Chamār (untch)	8	8	0	0	0	0	5	1	1	1	0	0	7	1	0
TOTAL	25	18	5	1	1	1	12	4	5	2	1	13	9	2	1

Rīchā

Situated ten miles north of the small town of Nagda (a main junction
on the Bombay-Delhi line) in Ujjain district is the village community of
Rīchā. Like Kāsod it is linked to the outside world by a rugged unpaved
road which during the rainy season - late June to mid-September - is
virtually impassable. Rīchā is inhabited by 324 people including
78 Brāhmaṇs, 58 Rājputs, 42 Gujarātī Balāis, 40 Gujarātī Chamārs,
32 Muslims, 21 Sādhus, 20 Gujarātī Lohārs, 18 Telīs, 7 Bhangīs, 4 Nāīs,
and 4 Jains. Of the five villages, Rīchā and Garabelī maintain the
widest range of castes. Also like Garabelī, Rīchā harbors a small
Muslim community, and therefore, in addition to Hindu temples, Muslim
shrines dot the landscape.

Like other rural communities in Malwa, Rīchā's fields yield ample
harvests of wheat, barley, cotton, and sugar cane. Thirteen hundred
bīghās of land are owned by the inhabitants, and only a small number of
families from among the scheduled castes fail to own any land.

Rīchā was founded over a thousand years ago by Brāhmaṇs, and the
patel traces his ancestry back to these original settlers. The village
contains a large shrine dedicated to Śītalā Mātā, and inhabitants claim
it dates from the time of the community's founding. The shrine is quite
well-known throughout the Nagda area, and numerous members of nearby
villages come to offer pūja at its threshhold. In 1971 a Bahá'í
travelling teacher from Ujjain visited Rīchā. During his stay he managed
to convert a young tertiary-educated Rājput who subsequently attended
'deepening' classes in Ujjain. Upon returning he was able to enlist
another eight persons into the movement, and thus in April of 1972 the
first Local Spiritual Assembly in Rīchā was formed. During the next
year forty additional inhabitants declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh,
and today there are forty-eight declarants in Rīchā.

Table 8

Caste	No. Bahá'ís	Education				Age						Occupation			
		ill	P	S	T	15/20	21/30	31/40	41/50	51/60	61↑	farm	lab	shop keeper	sweeper
Brāhmaṇ (cl)	15	0	10	5	0	0	13	2	0	0	0	15	0	0	0
Rājput (cl)	3	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Gujarātī Balāi (ucl)	13	8	5	0	0	0	8	5	0	0	0	11	2	0	0
Gujarātī Chamār (untch)	10	10	0	0	0	1	3	5	1	0	0	7	3	0	0
Bhaṅgī (untch)	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Jain (cl)	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Muslim	4	0	2	2	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	3	0	0
TOTAL	48	20	18	8	2	1	31	14	2	0	0	37	8	1	2

It is not the intention of this study to present the above communities as 'ideal types' of Bahá'í 'model village' communities in Malwa. Rather, the primary purpose for presenting the reader with a short description and statistical synopsis of each village has been to put before him a general sociological picture of the five communities from which the author's later examples of the implementation of Bahá'í doctrines and institutions in rural Malwa were taken, and thereby provide him with an existential base to which he can orient himself. It seems apparent, however, that the data reveals certain facts about each community which might shed some light on the variety of sociological factors that characterize Bahá'í 'model villages' in general. Consequently, before closing this chapter a few remarks concerning the dominant sociological characteristic of each community will be made.

The outstanding sociological characteristic of the Garabelī Bahá'í community is its large number of low caste constituents. The community was established during the early years of mass teaching in Malwa when the Bahá'í teaching approach was oriented towards the scheduled castes. In addition, intra-village strife seems to have alienated many lower casteman from their social superiors, thus creating a situation in which the Bahá'í Faith provided a symbol for scheduled caste grievances. Consequently, Garabelī appears to be a good example of scheduled caste attraction to the movement.

In Rīchā a different factor predominates. Unlike Garabelī, there is a greater balance between high and low caste membership. However, in terms of declarant's age distribution, Rīchā's community is characteristically young. For example, 66% of the members are under thirty years of age, and 95% under forty. Here it seems the Bahá'í Faith speaks to the idealism of youth, as the village teacher - who is himself only twenty-seven years old - has been able to enlist many of his own age group from among both high and low castes.

The other communities appear to revolve around specific individuals. Karankanī, Manāsā, and Kāsod's headmen are Bahá'ís, and accordingly, a number of people under their influence have enrolled. Similarly, the Balāi teacher in Kāsod has been able to enrol a number of his fellow castemen.

Consequently, there appear to be three main sociological agents affecting the composition of Bahá'í communities in the five villages: caste background, age, and personal status. While it is not possible to draw finalized conclusions from these examples as to the nature of Bahá'í 'model village' communities in general, they do provide some insight into the types of factors influencing the declarations of Hindu villagers in Malwa (a theme which will be explored at greater length in Chapter 12), and therefore they deserve to be noted.

It is into village communities like Garabelī, Manāsā, Kāsod, Karankanī, and Rīchā that Bahá'í doctrine and institutions are being introduced. This chapter has attempted to present a general picture of the sociological milieu in which such villages function. It is now time to look at the structure that is directing the activities of the Bahá'í Faith in Malwa: the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

Chapter 5   The Bahá'í Administrative Order

The Bahá'í Faith is an international movement, and hence its administrative institutions act like links in a chain; they help connect individual Bahá'í communities with the larger body of believers throughout the world.   The administrative system is multi-levelled in construction, containing local and regional, national, and international institutions. It is this system that is conducting the world-wide advancement of the Bahá'í Faith, and its influence can be seen wherever Bahá'í communities exist.   This is no less true in Malwa where mass teaching has resulted in strenuous organizational activity on all three administrative levels. Therefore, it is essential that we take a closer look at the administrative institutions of the Bahá'í Faith.

The heart of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the Universal House of Justice, a body of nine whose headquarters is located in Haifa, Israel. The members of this body are elected every five years by the members of the various national spiritual assemblies throughout the world.   The first Universal House of Justice was elected in 1963, six years after the death of Shoghi Effendi; the second in 1968; and today the Bahá'í world community is under the guidance of the third duly elected Universal House of Justice.

The authority of the Universal House of Justice is derived from the Faith's scriptures.   According to the official Bahá'í translation of The Tablet of Ishráqát, Bahá'u'lláh states:

> The affairs of the people are in charge of the men
> of the House of Justice of God. They are the trustees
> of God among His servants and the sources of command in
> His countries... It is incumbent upon all to obey them.[1]

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[1] Bahá'u'lláh, The Tablet of Ishráqát, trans. by Shoghi Effendi, in The Bahá'í Revelation, p. 159

Elaborating upon this theme ʻAbduʼl-Bahá wrote:

> By this House is meant that Universal House of
> Justice which is to be elected from all countries,
> that is, from those parts in the East and West
> where the loved ones are to be found, after the
> manner of the customary elections in Western
> countries such as those of England.[2]

Being the supreme institution in the Bahá'í world, the Universal House

of Justice has the right to interpret the Faith's scriptures, that is, the

writings of Bahá'u'lláh and ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, and to legislate on any matter

not found in the writings.   Again, this right is claimed from scriptural

authority: 'It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to

take counsel together regarding such laws as have not been expressly

revealed in the Book.   Of these whatever they deem advisable and proper

that must they enforce.'[3]

Unlike elected representatives of contemporary parliamentary systems,

once elected, members of the Universal House of Justice are not responsible

to those they represent; they have no constituency to whom they must answer.

In fact, the election process is devoid of any type of electioneering or

campaigning.   Rather, the assembled members of the various national

spiritual assemblies cast nine votes, each containing the name of any

person they feel worthy of holding such a position.   The nine who receive

the most votes then form the Universal House of Justice.   In this regard

Shoghi Effendi stated:

> In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the
> Faith, the enactment of the legislation necessary
> to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the
> members of the Universal House of Justice, it should
> be borne in mind, are not, as Bahá'u'lláh's utterances
> clearly imply, responsible to those whom they represent,
> nor are they allowed to be governed by the feelings,
> the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass

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[2] ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, trans. by Shoghi Effendi,
    (Wilmette, Illinois, 1944), p. 20

[3] Bahá'u'lláh, Words of Paradise, in Bahá'í World Faith. Selected Writings of
    Bahá'u'lláh and ʻAbdu'l-Baha, 2nd ed., (Willmette, Illinois, 1966),
    p. 182

> of the faithful, or to those who directly elect
> them. They are to follow, in a prayerful attitude,
> the dictates and promptings of their conscience...
> "God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He
> willith," is Bahá'u'lláh's incontrovertible assurance.[4]

Thus, the decisions of the Universal House of Justice are considered free
from all error.[5]

Included among the duties of the Universal House of Justice are the
following: to analyze, classify, and co-ordinate the Bahá'í writings;
to defend and protect the Faith and emancipate it from the fetters of
repression and persecution; to propagate and teach its message; to expand
and consolidate its institutions; to enact laws and ordinances not found
in the scriptures; and to provide for the arbitration and settlement of
disputes between peoples.[6]

Some of the Universal House of Justice's most active work is rendered
in the areas of propagation and consolidation, and it is in reference to
these activities that the institution most directly influences Bahá'í work
in Malwa. The systematic programs of expansion that characterize the
world-wide Bahá'í teaching effort are both conceived and guided to fruition
by the Universal House of Justice. For example, in 1964 the Universal
House of Justice issued to the Bahá'í world its first international teaching
project. Known as the Nine-Year Plan, it set out goals to be achieved in
every part of the world. In terms of the Indian community the Plan called
for, among other things, the raising of the number of localities where
Bahá'ís resided to 20,000,[7] which in effect meant the continuation of the
mass teaching campaign in the subcontinent. Between the years

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[4] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 153

[5] ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 14

[6] The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, (Haifa, 1972), p. 5-6

[7] Nine-Year Plan for the Bahá'ís of India 1964 - 1973, (New Delhi, n.d.),
   page numbers not listed.

1964 and 1973 Bahá'í activities in Malwa,therefore, were geared to mass
teaching.

During the course of the Nine-Year Plan the Universal House of Justice
gave constant support and advice to the Indian Bahá'í community.   By means
of written as well as personal communication[8] the Universal House of
Justice encouraged the Indian National Spiritual Assembly to outline and
execute small teaching plans of their own which would help bring about
the overall objectives.   For example, in November of 1968 they wrote to
the National Spiritual Assembly:

> Your six-month teaching plan by which specific goals
> are assigned to various centres made us very happy and
> reassured us that the beloved friends in India are once
> again determined to seize the palm of victory and go
> on to new heights of achievement in the path of the
> Cause of God.[9]

Consequently, it is the Universal House of Justice that determines the
pace and direction of Bahá'í teaching activities throughout the world, and
its decisions have a direct influence on propagation activities in Malwa.

The Universal House of Justice is also involved in supervising the
consolidation efforts of the movement in Malwa.   All major decisions in
the area of mass education, such as the creation of teaching institutes and
the development of village primary schools, must be ratified by the
Universal House of Justice before they can be put into effect.   In
addition, the Universal House of Justice advises the national and regional
administrative bodies as to the best way of using such institutions.   In
general, they outline the purpose and function of each institution and
ensure that it is used in the most efficient manner.   For example,
concerning the institution of the travelling teacher (see Chapter 6),

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[8] This refers to the Hands of the Cause, see p. 146-147

[9] 'Message of Nov 3, 1968', Extracts from Communication of the Universal
House of Justice, unpublished, p. 152

the Universal House of Justice has written:

> One of the most important duties of such travelling
> teachers should be to develop nuclei of devoted and
> active believers in the many centres who would inspire
> and assist the friends in active participation in
> the work to be done in their villages and towns.[10]

The dimension of the Universal House of Justice's influence in the

formulation of consolidation plans in India can be gleaned from their new

Five-Year Plan[11], in which they call on the Indian community to:

> Plan and carry out a program for the training of one
> or more believers from local communities having a
> Local Spiritual Assembly which will enable them to
> assist their fellow believers to deepen in the Cause
> and to work for the consolidation of the community; ...
> increase the number of village tutorial schools, ...
> and organize correspondence courses for deepening the
> friends in the knowledge of the Cause.[12]

While the Universal House of Justice is the focal point around which

all administrative activity revolves, the administrative system of the

Bahá'í Faith is by no means characterized by an overt centralism; national,

regional, and local institutions play a profound role in directing the

affairs of the movement.   In India these institutions are particularly

oriented towards the phenomenon of mass teaching, and consequently they

greatly influence activities in Malwa.

The most prominent Bahá'í administrative institution in India is the

National Spiritual Assembly.   Like the Universal House of Justice, the

National Spiritual Assembly is composed of nine members elected annually

in convention by delegates who represent the various local Bahá'í

communities throughout the country (see Chapter 10).   The first National

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís. of India and Burma was elected in 1923,

and in 1973 the Indian Bahá'í community celebrated the fiftieth

anniversary of the founding of this institution in the subcontinent.

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[10] 'Message of Feb 13, 1968', Extracts from Communication of the Universal
House of Justice, p. 154

[11] The Five-Year Plan was initiated in April, 1974

[12] Five-Year Plan for the Bahá'ís of India, unpublished manual, page
numbers not listed

The immediate purpose of the National Spiritual Assembly as outlined
by Shoghi Effendi:

> ... is to stimulate, unify and co-ordinate by frequent
> personal consultations, the manifold activities of the
> friends as well as the local Assemblies; and by
> keeping in close and constant touch with the Holy
> Land, initiate measures, and direct in general the
> affairs of the Cause in that country.[13]

Specifically, these purposes, as stated in the Declaration of Trust and
By-Laws of a National Spiritual Assembly are to be realized by means of:

> ... devotional meetings; by public meetings and
> conferences of an educational, humanitarian and
> spiritual character; by the publication of books,
> magazines and newspapers; by the construction of
> temples of universal worship and of other institutions
> and edifices for humanitarian service; by supervising,
> unifying, promoting and generally administering the
> activities of the Baha'is of (India) in the fulfilment
> of their religious offices, duties and ideals; and by
> any other means appropriate to these ends, or any of
> them.[14]

As the fountainhead of the movement within India, the National Spiritual
Assembly both unifies and directs the work of Bahá'ís throughout the
country. What the Universal House of Justice does on the international
level, the National Spiritual Assembly does on the national level.[15]

The headquarters of the Indian National Spiritual Assembly is located
in New Delhi. Some of its meetings, however, are held in other cities of
the subcontinent, as it is generally the desire of the National Spiritual
Assembly to be present in a specific area when special projects or programs
relating to that area are being discussed. Consequently, the National
Spiritual Assembly occasionally meets in the cities of Gwalior and Ujjain
where the need for teaching and consolidation plans is the greatest.

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[13] Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, (Wilmette, Illinois, 1968), p. 39

[14] Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of a National Spiritual Assembly,
    Article II, para. 2

[15] The National Spiritual Assembly, however, is not considered infallible.
    The Universal House of Justice has the right to revoke their
    decisions.

The current National Spiritual Assembly[16] is composed of members from four religious backgrounds: Parsi (4), Hindu (3), Jain (1), and Muslim (1). Of these nine, two are women, and six live in either of the two mass teaching areas of Madhya Pradesh.

The Indian National Spiritual Assembly is one of a group of national spiritual assemblies in the Bahá'í world that have been designated 'mass teaching' assemblies, as 90% of its work is directed towards the mass teaching effort.   Accordingly, the National Spiritual Assembly's consultative sessions are largely consumed by hours spent in both formulating teaching plans to fulfill the Universal House of Justice's conversion goals and outlining specific projects designed to bring new declarants into direct contact with the Faith's institutions.   For example, it was the National Spiritual Assembly that formulated the original mass teaching program in Malwa whereby paid travelling teachers took to rural pathways to announce to the common people the arrival of the new avatāra. Likewise, the development of the Indore Teaching Institute, where numerous early converts were 'deepened' in the knowledge of the Faith, was largely the work of the Indian National Spiritual Assembly.

The National Spiritual Assembly appoints numerous committees to help it carry out its designated functions.   The most important of these committees as they influence Malwa are the State and Regional Teaching Committees, the Publishing Trust Committee, and the National Youth Committee.

The National Youth Committee is composed of five members whose main functions are to co-ordinate and develop Bahá'í groups in colleges and universities throughout India, and direct the movement of Bahá'í youth to vital areas of the country where assistance in teaching and consolidation work is required.   In terms of Bahá'í activities in rural Malwa the latter of these two functions is the more important.   Periodically,

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[16] Elected in April, 1973

Bahá'í youth from Poona and Bombay travel to Malwa to help in specific teaching and consolidation projects. As shall be seen in Chapter 6, such groups form one of the communicative links between the Bahá'í village communities in Malwa and the greater administrative system.

Another of the National Spiritual Assembly's committees which has a direct influence on 'deepening' and consolidation work in Malwa is the Publishing Trust Committee. This committee is responsible for making decisions concerning the type and amount of material to be printed and its subsequent publication into various regional languages. One of the committee's main tasks since the advent of the mass teaching campaign has been to develop suitable educational materials for a largely illiterate population. Consequently, it has seen fit to produce large numbers of books and pamphlets written in clear and simple Hindi for semi-literate individuals as well as pictorial publications for those members of Bahá'í communities who are unable to read. Since it is difficult for Bahá'í administrative institutions to maintain continuous personal contact with the numerous village communities in Malwa, written and visual teaching aids have assumed a strategic position in the Administrative Order's overall teaching objectives, and therefore the Publishing Trust Committee continues to play an integral role in propagation and consolidation programs in Malwa.

While the National Spiritual Assembly formulates national propagation and consolidation strategy, it is the various teaching committees that are the arms of the administrative structure in India. These institutions work at the grass root levels in the mass teaching areas and are largely responsible for the implementation of both the Universal House of Justice's and the National Spiritual Assembly's plans and programs.

Individual teaching committees were first created by the National Spiritual Assembly during the mass teaching era. Before this time a single teaching committee was in charge of propagation and consolidation

activities for the entire country. However, after the sudden increase in declarations the National Spiritual Assembly decided that special teaching committees whose jurisdiction would cover specific areas of the country were necessary to the overall development of the Faith, as a unitary body could no longer handle the immense amount of work required to continue mass teaching projects and develop 'deepening' programs. Consequently, in 1962 area teaching committees were formed. During the following years, however, the organization of teaching committees was rearranged, so that today there exist two types of teaching committees: the State Teaching Committee, which as its name implies is in charge of the overall direction of teaching and consolidation activities within a specific state of India; and the subordinate Regional Teaching Committee, which manages similar activities in specific regions of a given state. The latter generally exist in areas where mass teaching has resulted in a large number of declarations and the work of educating new declarants therefore cannot be accommodated by a single committee. Such is the case in Madhya Pradesh where two regional committees have been established, one for northern Madhya Pradesh (Gwalior), and another for southern Madhya Pradesh (Ujjain). Propagation and consolidation activities in Malwa are under the supervision of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee.

The primary function of these committees is to implement in the form of specific projects the teaching and consolidation goals of the National Spiritual Assembly. Although under the supervision of that body, teaching committees have been given the authority to act on all matters relating to teaching and consolidation work in their areas. For example, they can institute publications, adopt translation and printing programs, appoint teachers, and organize institutes and conferences. Therefore, the teaching

committees are the custodians of the teaching and consolidation work in
India. As the Universal House of Justice wrote, they are the 'strong
hands' of the National Spiritual Assembly.[17]

In Madhya Pradesh the State Teaching Committee is primarily a
managerial body. It makes decisions concerning a wide range of activities
and then passes on its resolutions to the Ujjain and Gwalior committees
for consideration. Its main duties as outlined by the National Spiritual
Assembly are: to assist the development of regional committees into
efficient teaching centers; to help said committees in formulating
teaching and consolidation plans; and to guide and assist them in the
publication and translation of literature.[18]

The Madhya Pradesh State Teaching Committee consists of seven members
appointed annually by the National Spiritual Assembly. It meets monthly
in either New Delhi, Gwalior, or Ujjain. An examination of the minutes
of its opening session for the year 1973 reveals the types of questions on
which it consults. The first item of business concerned the sending of
pioneers[19] to areas in the state where local groups needed assistance in
consolidating their communities. Next the members discussed sending
travelling teachers to localities where mass teaching projects were to
be implemented. Finally, they reviewed the questions of strengthening
village administrative institutions and organizing teacher training
classes and special 'deepening' sessions to be held at the Indore Teaching

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[17] Bahá'í News (India), # 6, July-August, 1973, (New Delhi), p. 3

[18] 'Annexure to the minutes of the second meeting of the National Spiritual
Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, May 19-21, 1972', unpublished,
p. iii

[19] In Bahá'í parlance a pioneer is a person who moves his residence
to an area where a local community is in need of assistance.

Institute.[20] In each instance suggestions were made for the setting in

motion of specific plans to fulfill the particular goal. These suggestions

were then sent to the Ujjain and Gwalior Regional Teaching Committees.

The Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee, like the Madhya Pradesh State

Teaching Committee, is composed of seven members appointed annually by the

National Spiritual Assembly. Its headquarters is located in Ujjain, where

it meets bi-monthly. Its specific duties include the following: to assist

local Bahá'í groups in consolidating and strengthening their communities;

to supervise mass teaching activities for the region; to organize the

activities of travelling teachers; to arrange deepening classes, conferences,

and teacher's training classes; to implement plans for the education of

village Bahá'ís in the knowledge of the laws and institutions of the Bahá'í

Faith; to establish direct contact with all the localities under its

jurisdiction through written and personal means of communication; and in

general to implement the projects of the State Teaching Committee and the

National Spiritual Assembly.[21] These duties can be distilled into two

essential categories:

> a) the generation and co-ordination of teaching activities,
>   and
>
> b) the education of village communities in the various aspects
>   of Bahá'í community life.

In terms of teaching work it is the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee

that is responsible for organizing the manpower and assets of the Bahá'í

communities in Malwa. Accordingly, it is in charge of sending pioneers

and teaching teams to those districts in the region which the State Teaching

Committee has selected as goal areas. In addition, it selects, trains,

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[20] 'Minutes of the Madhya Pradesh State Teaching Committee, July 24, 1973',
    (Hindi), unpublished

[21] 'Annexure to the minutes of the second meeting of the National Spiritual
    Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, May 19-21, 1972', unpublished, p. iii

The Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee Office - Ujjain

and supervises the activities and movements of the region's corps of travelling teachers (see Chapter 6), and earmarks funds for specific teaching projects. Consequently, the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee is the nerve-center from which all propagation activity in Malwa is directed.

The second responsibility of the Committee is to assist in the development of Bahá'í 'model village' communities in Malwa. In this regard it helps educate village declarants to understand and use the Faith's socio-religious institutions. The Committee implements its 'deepening' projects by making use of four main channels of communication: written sources, teaching institutes, travelling teachers, and consolidation teams. An entire chapter (Chapter 6) will be devoted to discussing these communicative channels. For now, suffice it to say that the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee employs such institutions to maintain contact with local communities under its jurisdiction and thereby keep an open flow of communication between said communities and the Bahá'í Faith's greater administrative system.

In short, the National Spiritual Assembly and its various committees are the driving force behind Bahá'í propagation and consolidation work in Malwa. They formulate mass teaching plans, create institutions to carry out these plans, and devise methods and means by which Bahá'í values and institutions can be introduced into village life. In so doing they direct the resources of the Indian Bahá'í community towards accomplishing the Universal House of Justice's prescribed teaching goals, and thereby fulfill their 'grave responsibilities'.[22]

The bedrock of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the Local Spiritual Assembly. In each community where there reside nine or more Bahá'ís, this locally elected body supervises and administers to the needs of believers. Since a more detailed analysis of its functions will be made

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[22] Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 74

in Chapter 10, where they will be discussed in light of the institution's
introduction into two 'model villages', for the present it will only be
pointed out that the Local Spiritual Assembly is the foundation stone of
the Bahá'í national community, and its proper and efficient functioning
is a pre-requisite for the development of teaching and consolidation
plans within a given country.

Running parallel to the elected administrative institutions of
the Faith, the Universal House of Justice, the National Spiritual Assembly,
and the Local Spiritual Assembly, is a group of institutions whose members
are appointed rather than elected. In descending order of authority
they are: the Hands of the Cause, The Continental Board of Counsellors,
and the Auxiliary Board. Individuals assigned to these institutions
counsel and advise both the elected administrative bodies and individual
believers in matters pertaining to the advancement of the Faith: the
Hands of the Cause work at the international level; counsellors perform
at the continental and national level; and board members work within
specific countries.

The Hands of the Cause are a select group of appointed believers
whose main function is to help propagate and protect the Bahá'í Faith on
an international scale. Their origin as an institution is traced back
to the time of Bahá'u'lláh. According to the Faith's records, Bahá'u'lláh
appointed four Hands, about whom he said: 'Ere long will God raise up
through Thee conquering Hands and subduing Helpers who will come forth
from behind veils and will arise to win victory for the Manifestation of
God, the All-Merciful amongst all mankind.'[23]   Although 'Abdu'l-Bahá
did not assign any Hands during his years of leadership, he testified to
their station and provided for their appointment by Shoghi Effendi.[24]
Hence, in December of 1951 Shoghi Effendi appointed twelve Hands of the

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[23] Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Haykal, quoted in The Bahá'í World, vol. XIII,
    p. 333

[24] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 1 .

Cause, and several months later he assigned another seven persons to this rank, bringing their total to nineteen. This number was maintained until 1957, when a few months before his death Shoghi Effendi added eight more names to the list of Hands of the Cause, thus finalizing their number at twenty-seven.[25] During the last seventeen years fifteen Hands have passed away, and since only the Guardian had the authority to appoint them, no further Hands of the Cause have been or will be appointed.[26]

The Hands of the Cause form a personal communicative link between the Universal House of Justice and the various Bahá'í communities throughout the world. Each Hand has been assigned a specific area of the world in which he meets and consults with national spiritual assemblies and oversees the general range of Bahá'í activities. Hands are especially instrumental in advising national spiritual assemblies concerning the formulation of teaching plans. This duty was assigned to them by Shoghi Effendi during the Ten-Year Crusade. In June of 1957 he cabled: 'TO ITS NEWLY ASSUMED RESPONSIBILITY ASSIST NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES BAHA'I WORLD SPECIFIC PURPOSE EFFECTIVELY PROSECUTING WORLD SPIRITUAL CRUSADE...'[27] Since that time, Hands of the Cause have been actively involved in helping national spiritual assemblies develop national teaching projects.

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[25] Between the years 1952 and 1957 five Hands of the Cause passed away, and their positions were filled by another five appointees. Thus, there were in all thirty-two Hands of the Cause appointed by Shoghi Effendi.

[26] In its message of June 24, 1968, the Universal House of Justice said it saw no way in which additional Hands of the Cause could be appointed. (Wellspring of Guidance, p. 140)

[27] The Bahá'í World, vol. XIII, p. 338 (In the same cable Shoghi Effendi emphasized the necessity of the Hands working with such national bodies for the protection ot the Faith: 'EVIDENCES INCREASING HOSTILITY WITHOUT, PERSISTENT MACHINATIONS WITHIN, FORSHADOWING DIRE CONTESTS DESTINED RANGE ARMY LIGHT FORCES DARKNESS, BOTH SECULAR RELIGIOUS... NECESSITATE THIS CRUCIAL HOUR CLOSER ASSOCIATION HANDS FIVE CONTINENTS BODIES ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES NATIONAL BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES...'

Periodically the Hands return to the Holy Land where they apprise the Universal House of Justice of the current state of affairs in the countries under their jurisdiction. Hence, the Hands of the Cause provide a direct channel of communication between the International Center and the various national administrative bodies throughout the world.

One Hand of the Cause who has been intimately involved with the mass teaching movement in Malwa is Dr. Raḥmatu'lláh Muhájir. Being assigned his position by Shoghi Effendi in 1957, he was one of the last Hands of the Cause to be appointed. During his years of service he has worked closely with the Indian National Spiritual Assembly, and (as was mentioned in Part I of this study) it was his decision to hold a village teaching conference in Malwa in early 1961 that set the mass teaching movement in Madhya Pradesh in motion. For years he had advocated taking the message of the Faith to India's masses. With the breakthrough in Malwa his vision became a reality, and from that time on the entire orientation of the Bahá'í Faith in India changed; after 1961, teaching plans, consolidation activities, and communicative channels were all steered in the direction of mass teaching.

Dr. Muhájir has also been active in advising the Indian Bahá'ís how to consolidate and strengthen their new village communities. He played an instrumental role in both the establishment of India's first teaching institute in Indore and the purchase of a Bahá'í Center in Ujjain. In addition, he makes occasional trips to the mass teaching areas to meet with and encourage local Bahá'ís in their teaching work. For example, in March of 1974 he made a special visit to Ujjain to help organize a consolidation project whereby teams of Bahá'í youth visited selected village communities in order to encourage local believers to attend 'deepening' classes at the Indore Teaching Institute.

The increasing responsibilities that fell on the Hands of the Cause as a result of the continuous growth of the movement throughout the world led the Universal House of Justice in 1968 to create a new institution designed to aid the Hands in the performance of their dual duties of propagating and

protecting the Bahá'í Faith. In June of that year the Universal House of Justice announced to the Bahá'í world that they had established eleven continental boards of counsellors which would be responsible for the propagation and protection of the Faith in their respective zones. The activities of the continental boards were to follow the pattern of the relationship between the Hands of the Cause and national spiritual assemblies as outlined by the Guardian in various communications.[28] Thus, counsellors were to carry out many of the same activities that had at one time been the sole responsibility of the Hands of the Cause.

India is under the jurisdiction of the Continental Board of Counsellors for South Central Asia. The four members who make up this body meet periodically with the Indian National Spiritual Assembly in order to consult on the range of Bahá'í activities within the country. In addition to their capacity as advisors, counsellors are often directly involved in specific teaching and consolidation projects. In both instances they maintain close contact with the Hands of the Cause to whom they supply information and with whom they consult and collaborate.

Counsellor Shírín Boman Meherabání has been personally involved for many years with the development of the Bahá'í Faith in Malwa. She was the first Bahá'í to settle in Malwa, establishing residence in Ujjain in 1942, and years later she was in the forefront of the region's mass teaching campaign. After her appointment as a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for South Central Asia in 1968, her role in the mass teaching areas became one of general overseer. While not directly involved in the formulation of teaching and consolidation projects, she offers advice regarding their implementation and on several occasions has taken to the field to help carry them out. For example, in January of 1974 she consulted with the National Spiritual Assembly concerning the formulation of a consolidation project whereby groups of more experienced Bahá'ís would travel to several village communities in Malwa to meet with and instruct

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[28] Wellspring of Guidance, p. 144

the local declarants in the workings of Bahá'í community institutions.
Following the National Spiritual Assembly's framing of a definite plan,
Mrs. Meherabání headed one of the consolidation teams.

The continental counsellors have at their disposal another institution –
the Auxiliary Board.   This institution was established by Shoghi Effendi
in October of 1952.   In a cablegram dated October 8, 1952, he relayed the
following:

> CALL UPON FIFTEEN HANDS FIVE CONTINENTS, VIRTUE SUPREME
> FUNCTION CHOSEN INSTRUMENTS PROPAGATION FAITH, INAUGURATE
> HISTORIC MISSION THROUGH APPOINTMENT, DURING RIDVÁN, 1954,
> FIVE AUXILIARY BOARDS ONE EACH CONTINENT, NINE MEMBERS
> EACH, WHO WILL, AS THEIR ADJUNCTS, OR DEPUTIES, AND
> WORKING IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE VARIOUS NATIONAL
> ASSEMBLIES FUNCTIONING EACH CONTINENT, ASSIST, THROUGH
> PERIODIC SYSTEMATIC VISITS BAHA'I CENTRES, EFFICIENT,
> PROMPT EXECUTION TWELVE PROJECTED NATIONAL PLANS.[29]

Today there are two auxiliary boards for South Central Asia.   The
first contains three members who are primarily concerned with protecting
the movement from external attack and internal division, while the second,
composed of fifteen members, is responsible for helping propagate the
Faith.   Members' activities are directed by the Continental Board of
Counsellors for South Central Asia (by whom they have been appointed), and
they report to this body on a regular basis.   In Malwa, auxiliary board
members are especially instrumental in stimulating and encouraging local
communities to implement teaching and consolidation projects, and hence
they perform on the regional level many of the same functions that
counsellors fulfill on the continental and national levels.

Being in direct contact with regional and local institutions,
auxiliary board members submit recommendations concerning teaching and
consolidation projects in their areas of jurisdiction to the Continental
Board of Counsellors which can in turn approach the National Spiritual
Assembly.   The National Spiritual Assembly may then decide whether or not
to act on the recommendation.

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[29] The Bahá'í World, vol. XIII, p. 335

Continental counsellors and auxiliary board members are not

initiators of teaching and consolidation projects, neither do they

personally implement these activities; this is the function of the National

Spiritual Assembly and its appointed committees. While they can give advice

to the National Spiritual Assembly, the latter is by no means bound by their

suggestions. Rather, the main function of these individuals is to help

the elected institutions implement their projects by providing personal

communicative links between the movement's various administrative levels.

Consequently, they maintain the flow of information and ensure that the

efforts of the Indian Bahá'í community will result in consistent and

unified action. For example, 'If a National Spiritual Assembly has

adopted one goal as pre-eminent in a year, the Auxiliary Board members

should bear this in mind in all their contacts with the believers and

should direct their attention to the plans of the National Assembly

and stimulate them to enthusiastically support them.'[30]

As can be gleaned from the foregoing outline, the administrative

machinery of the Bahá'í Faith is organized towards the propagation

and implementation of the movement's doctrines and ideals. In order

to better understand how these institutions interact with one another,

and to exemplify the influence their decisions have on the local

village communities of Malwa, the evolution of a specific project will

be traced from its origin in the Holy Land to its actualization in

central India.

Several times during the course of this study reference has been made

to the important station the Local Spiritual Assembly occupies within the

overall framework of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Accordingly, the

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[30] Bahá'í News (United States), ⚹ 474, September, 1970, (Wilmette,
Illinois), p. 2

establishment of these institutions in various countries throughout
the world is one of the Bahá'í Faith's primary teaching goals.   In 1964
the Universal House of Justice issued to the Bahá'í world the Nine-Year
Plan, in which the Indian Bahá'í community was called upon to raise the
number of local spiritual assemblies in the subcontinent to 4000.[31]
At the time of the Plan's initiation there were barely a thousand local
spiritual assemblies in India, and therefore the Universal House of
Justice had given the Indian National Spiritual Assembly the task of
directing a teaching campaign that within a nine year period would
quadruple the number of local spiritual assemblies within the country.

Having received the Nine-Year Plan goals from the Universal House of
Justice, the Indian National Spiritual Assembly consulted on the means
and methods by which the number of local spiritual assemblies could be
increased.   During the course of the Plan they mapped out several
smaller plans which lasted anywhere from six months to two years.   In
these plans different areas of the country were assigned specific teaching
goals, and communities were called upon to support travelling teachers
and pioneers within the boundaries of their various states.   Meanwhile,
Dr. Muhájir and the Continental Board of Counsellors for South Central
Asia maintained frequent communication with the National Spiritual Assembly,
offering their advice and guidance.   Periodically, Dr. Muhájir notified
the Universal House of Justice as to the progress of the Nine-Year Plan
in India.

The teaching committees were assigned the responsibility of implementing
the National Spiritual Assembly's various teaching plans.   Before 1973
this meant that local spiritual assembly objectives were given directly
to the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee.   The committee would then
draw up specific proposals designed to fulfill their assigned goals.

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[31] Nine-Year Plan for the Bahá'ís of India, page number not listed

Having calculated the number of travelling teachers needed to accomplish
a particular objective, the Committee would begin to mobilize the
resources under its sway: veteran teachers would be assigned specific
localities; training courses for new teachers would be arranged; and
follow-up groups to help in the formation of new assemblies would be
organized.

At the same time, the Continental Board of Counsellors for South
Central Asia would direct auxiliary board members to visit local communities
such as Ujjain, Indore, and Shajapur where they would encourage individual
believers and local spiritual assemblies to give their support to the
teaching effort by offering prayers, financial assistance, manpower, or
whatever additional help they could offer.

Travelling teachers would then be dispatched to their assigned areas.
For the duration of the project they would keep the Ujjain Regional
Teaching Committee informed of the numbers of declarations they had
obtained and the names and locations of the villages in which these
declarations had taken place.   The Committee would in turn inform the
national office in New Delhi.   Subsequently, plans for officially forming
the new assemblies would be drawn up, and on the first day of Riḍván
(April 21),[32] specially designated teachers, often under the supervision
of an auxiliary board member, would be sent to those villages in which
nine or more declarations had been received, and there supervise the
election of the local spiritual assemblies.

In this way, working through its system of elected and appointed
institutions, the Bahá'í Administrative Order carries out its teaching
and consolidation projects.   What begins as a general goal in Haifa

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[32] The day Bahá'u'lláh declared his mission in Baghdád.

is rareified by means of multi-levelled consultative planning and finally
transformed into a social reality in the rural tablelands of Malwa.

In the preceding pages the essential features of the administrative
system that is directing the advancement of the Bahá'í Faith both in
Malwa and in numerous countries of the world have been surveyed. Before
closing, however, it would be appropriate to say a few words concerning
the metaphysical and sociological assumptions that underlie the system,
for although they will be elaborated upon at greater length in Part III,
the timeliness of the occasion warrants a brief discussion.

The administrative institutions of the Bahá'í Faith reflect in their
structure and modes of operation some of the basic ideals found in the
movement's 'world view.' Just as a direct relationship can be seen
between the values and ideals that constitute the 'world view' of popular
Hinduism and its corresponding institutional manifestations, a similar
correlation can be observed between Bahá'í ideals and social institutions.

The Bahá'í view of man as a social being is influenced by both
authoritarian and egalitarian ideals; while all believers are considered
equal, they are held to be subservient to a higher authority.

As in Islám, the faithful are conceived to be equal in the eyes of
God; 'In the estimation of God all men are equal...'[33] On the institutional
plane this has resulted in the structure of the Faith's administrative
system being strongly marked by democratic features.[34] For example,
members of local spiritual assemblies are selected by means of popular
election, the vote of each believer in the community holding the same
weight. Moreover, although they are not chosen by direct democratic
election, members of both national spiritual assemblies and the Universal

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[33] ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í World Faith, p. 240-241

[34] By democratic is meant majority rule.

House of Justice are elevated to their positions of authority by electors whose powers can be traced back to the votes of individual believers (see Chapter 10). Even the appointed institutions are indirectly linked to the democratic principle. Except for the Hands of the Cause (of which no more can be appointed) the members of these institutions are appointed by elected bodies and are responsible to them.

The democratic principle is not just limited to the selection of administrators; it is also part and parcel of the decision making process within council chambers. All Bahá'í administrative institutions from the Universal House of Justice to a local committee are organized around the concept of Bahá'í consultation whereby each member of the said body equally presents his or her opinion on a given matter. 'When meeting for consultation, each must use perfect liberty in stating his views and unveiling the proof of his demonstration.'[35] After discussion, all decisions are reached by majority vote.

It would be incorrect, however, to perceive Bahá'í administrative institutions only in the light of democratic ideals. In the first place, they are all subservient to higher laws - the laws of God as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and interpreted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Accordingly, the powers of any given Bahá'í institution are limited by scriptural revelation; an assembly cannot change the laws of the Book. Likewise, members of appointed institutions are bound by the laws of their office. Only the Universal House of Justice has the right to interpret the laws of Bahá'u'lláh, but even this institution cannot change the divine text.[36] Secondly, as previously mentioned, once elected, assembly members are not responsible to those who elect them. As Shoghi Effendi aptly stated:

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[35] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í World Faith, p. 406

[36] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 149-150

> The Administrative Order of the Faith of
> Bahá'u'lláh must in no wise be regarded as purely
> democratic in character inasmuch as the basic
> assumption which requires all democracies to
> depend fundamentally upon getting their mandate
> from the people is altogether lacking in this
> Dispensation.[37]

Consequently, while the administrative system is characterized by

democratic principles in terms of method of election and means of decision

making, as a whole it must be viewed as a type of autocracy in which the

law of Bahá'u'lláh stands supreme.

Since the beginning of mass teaching, Bahá'í administrative

institutions in India have not only directed propagation activities in

Malwa; they have also been responsible for maintaining contact with

the new declarants and educating a number of them in the various aspects

of Bahá'í community life. In performing these tasks they rely on several

important channels of communication, the operation of which will be the

subject of Chapter 6.

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[37] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 153

Chapter 6   Channels of Communication

One of the foremost obstacles facing the Bahá'í Administrative Order
in India is the maintenance of regular channels of communication with
individual Bahá'í village communities.   The large number of communities,
the slow means of transportation, and lack of manpower have all added to
this difficulty.   In an attempt to mitigate this problem, the Bahá'í
Administrative Order has established four channels of communication.   The
principal function of these institutions is to keep village Bahá'ís in
contact with the movement's regional, national, and international
administrative institutions, and thereby help facilitate the implementation
of Bahá'í concepts and values into their lives.   The four channels of
communication include written material, teaching institutes, travelling
teachers, and consolidation teams.

The villagers' initial contact with written communication takes place
Not being dependent on the movement of specific persons, the written
word provides the most extensive communicative link in Malwa; circulars and
newsletters can be produced in great quantity and then mailed to numerous
communities.   Bahá'í communities in Malwa receive written communication
from two sources: the national office in New Delhi, and the Regional
Teaching Committee office in Ujjain.   It takes several forms, ranging from
letters and memos to newspapers and books.

The villagers' initial contact with written communication takes place
when they declare their belief in Bahá'u'lláh.   At that time Bahá'í teachers
read to them the official Bahá'í declaration form which they must sign by
either applying their signature or impressing their thumbprint.   In
cities, where converts are generally literate, individual enrolment cards
are used, but in the mass teaching areas one large sheet for each village
is employed.   The following is a translation of the declaration sheet used
in Malwa.

Declaration Sheet

O God, Guide me, protect me, illumine the lamp of my heart
and make me a brilliant star. Thou art the powerful and
the mighty.

On signing this form I make a declaration of my faith in Bahá'u'lláh,
the manifestation (avatāra) of the Bahá'í Faith. I believe in the
spiritual station of his herald the Báb and the ideals of the religion
of God, and in the revealed teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh. I
accept the sacred station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

With this knowledge I knowingly submit for enrolment in the Bahá'í
community, of which the principles, laws and institutions were founded
by Bahá'u'lláh, and are compulsory to the faith of every loyal believer.

These forms are collected by village teachers and returned to the
Regional Teaching Committee office in Ujjain from where they are forwarded
to New Delhi. In some cases the forms are not gathered up immediately
but are left behind with a responsible person in the village so that the
villagers can have sufficient time to make their decision.[1] The forms are
later returned by mail to the Regional Teaching Committee office.

Upon receiving the declaration sheets, the Regional Teaching Committee
Secretary addresses a letter to the declarants, welcoming them into the
Bahá'í community and again reminding them of their new responsibilities as
Bahá'ís. The following is a translation of a typical welcoming letter:

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[1] Unpublished correspondence of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís
of India, 'Letter to the Universal House of Justice, July 16, 1966'.

Dear friend (name)
village

Alláh'u'Abhá (God is most great)

The knowledge of your acceptance of the supreme manifestation (yugavatāra) of this age is very joyous. On this holy and sacred occasion please accept in a personal way the cordial congratulations of the Bahá'í community.

Having made manifest our faith in the divine teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh, our responsibility as Bahá'ís is not finished, rather it increases. Because, after becoming a Bahá'í, it is our sacred duty, having obtained this message, to inform others of the sheltering canopy of Bahá'u'lláh so that his spiritual message can progress.

It is hoped that after becoming a Bahá'í, while receiving the benefits of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh, you will give the proper time to all of your Bahá'í duties, and that you will prove yourself to be of an ideal devotee of Lord Bahá'u'lláh.

> In His service
>
> Secretary RTC

Once a community has been established within a village, the group receives on a regular basis two newsletters: one from the national office in New Delhi, and the other from the Regional Teaching Committee.

The national office publishes quarterly a small circular entitled Bahai Samacar Patra (Bahá'í Newsletter). Its main purpose is threefold: to introduce villagers to some of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá; to familiarize them with Bahá'í principles; and to inform them of Bahá'í activities both in India and throughout the world. For example, the Bahai Samacar Patra for February, 1974, contained a passage from The Hidden Words, a commentary on meditation and reflection by 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

several references to the duties of the Local Spiritual Assembly, and news

of Bahá'í activities in other parts of the country.   To give an example of

just one of these items, reproduced below is a translation of part of an

article written to inform village believers of the Universal House of

Justice's new Five-Year Plan initiated in India in May of 1974:

> The supreme institution the Universal House of Justice
> addressing the Bahá'í world by means of their message
> to the national spiritual assemblies dated November 26,
> 1973, has made the announcement of the auspicious news
> that on the holy occasion of Ridván 1974 (April 21 -
> May 2) the next plan for the spiritual conquest of the
> world will be launched, whose duration will be five years.
>
> To inform the friends concerning the significance and
> aims of this five year plan your National Spiritual
> Assembly has made preparations for the arrangement of
> a series of conferences in all parts of the country.[2]

The Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee also produces a news bulletin

which is distributed to local Bahá'í village communities in Malwa.   Its

form is essentially the same as Bahai Samácar Patra, except, being a local

publication, more emphasis is placed on Bahá'í activities in the immediate

areas of Malwa and Madhya Pradesh.   The importance of this bulletin as a

means of keeping contact with the villages was emphasized by the Universal

House of Justice when they wrote:

> The strength of the Regional Teaching Committees in
> India is one of the important matters to which your
> National Spiritual Assembly must constantly pay
> attention. The contact of these communities with
> the believers is vital and we are therefore doubly
> appreciative of the frequent publication and circulation
> among thousands of Centres of this Bulletin by the
> Regional Teaching Committee of Ujjain.[3]

Furthermore, the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee periodically publishes

a newspaper entitled Bahai Darśan which contains a variety of articles,

ranging in content from Bahá'í history to techniques of agricultural

production, and is distributed in numerous village communities.   The

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[2] Bahai Samácar Patra, Feb 25, 1974, (New Delhi), p. 8

[3] 'Message of July 25, 1972', Extracts from Communication of the Universal
House of Justice, p. 30

popularity of the newspaper among local inhabitants prompted the National

Spiritual Assembly to write to the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee:

> We are happy to receive your letter of the 6th of
> 'Izzat and to note that each issue of Baha'i
> Darshan is read with great interest by the friends
> and that you have been able to add more deepening
> material to it. Please rest assured that all
> possible assistance and co-operation will be given
> by the National Office to make your efforts more
> fruitful and effective.[4]

In addition to the newsletters and Bahāī Darśan, the Bahá'í

Administrative Order in India also produces books and pamphlets printed in

simple language for semi-literate readers and picture cards and visual aids

for those who are unable to decipher the written word. In all cases,

however, the main purpose of these publications is to keep an open channel

of communication between the infant communities and the Bahá'í Administrative

Order, and in the process help deepen new declarants in the teachings of the

Bahá'í Faith.

In return, Bahá'í village communities are requested to send written

communication to the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee or the National

Spiritual Assembly informing those bodies of their activities. In this

way the administrative institutions learn which communities are actively

functioning and which are not - information which enables them to organize

future consolidation plans.

Written communication, however, faces one serious problem in Malwa -

illiteracy. As is revealed in the statistics of the five model villages

cited in Chapter 4, less then half of the members would be competent enough

to read even simple Hindi with any degree of efficiency. The Bahá'í

Administrative Order has long been aware of this situation. From the

beginning of the mass teaching campaing in Malwa serious thought was given

to the problem of developing means of communication that would not be

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[4] Unpublished correspondence of the National Spiritual Assembly of the
Bahá'ís of India, 'Letter to the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee,
December 13, 1973'

completely dependent on the written word.   This consultation eventuated

in October of 1961 in the purchase of a building and grounds in Indore

and the subsequent establishment on that site of a Bahá'í teaching institute,

the first of its kind in the Bahá'í world.   One of the main functions

of the Institute was to educate new village declarants in the finer teachings

of the movement.[5]   During visits to village communities Bahá'í teachers

would encourage specific believers to attend weekend or week-long classes

in Indore.   Transportation costs were payed for by the Ujjain Regional

Teaching Committee, and participants were provided with free room and

board.   During their stay they were instructed in all aspects of Bahá'í

life.   'The subjects taught usually consist of Bahá'í History, Laws

and Teachings, and the Administrative Order.   Special emphasis is laid

upon living the Bahá'í life, the importance of teaching, prayer, fasting,

Nineteen Day Feasts, Bahá'í elections, and contribution to the Fund.'[6]

In 1964, following the success of the Indore Teaching Institute, three

more institutes were established in India: one in Gwalior, one in Devali,

and one in Mysore.   Also, as mentioned earlier, in 1965 grounds were

purchased in Ujjain, and many declarants from surrounding villages

began attending similar classes at this site.

In December of 1973 a special nine-day 'deepening' session was

held at the Indore Teaching Institute.   In order to better understand

the institution's educational function, a short account of the session

will be given.

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[5] While being limited in the number of declarants it can accommodate,
the Indore Teaching Institute provides the most thorough form
of Bahá'í education in Malwa. Hence, the general policy of the
Administrative Order has been to extensively educate a limited
number of declarants from key villages who can in turn act as
community leaders in rural areas   thereby helping to educate a
larger number of believers than the Institute can personally reach.

[6] 'Letter of the Universal House of Justice, December 24, 1964', Bahá'í
Institutions. A Compilation, (New Delhi, 1973), p. 103

Villagers at 'deepening' session

The Indore Teaching Institute is located in the Mill section of the
city of Indore. Situated on several acres of land, the one-story, seven-
room building provides the class rooms and sleeping quarters for
particpating villagers. Between December 25, 1973, and January 2, 1974,
a special 'deepening' session was conducted in which twenty-eight English
speaking members and twenty-five Hindi speakers took part. The English
speaking group was composed of persons primarily from urban areas, while
the Hindi classes were comprised of Malwa villagers. The form and
content of both classes was identical.

The daily format of the session was as follows: 8 am to 9 am
individual prayer and meditation; 9 am to 10 am group prayer (individuals
take turns saying prayers - not congregational prayer)[7]; 10 am to 12 am
class; 12 am to 2 pm free time; 2 pm to 3pm individual prayer and
meditation; 3 pm to 4 pm group prayer; 4 pm to 6 pm class. In the
evening general social intercourse between the participants took place.
During the nine-day session individuals did not leave the Institute
grounds. The effect of this stipulation was that the session became a
type of 'retreat', where believers could concentrate on what the instructors
termed 'the spiritual realities of the world'.

The classes during the session were centered around the study of
several of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, with the most emphasis being placed
on the examination of a small volume of his utterances - The Hidden Words
(Kalimát-i-Maknúnih). For several years the National Spiritual Assembly
has been advising teaching committees and institute teachers to make use of
this volume in their 'deepening' sessions. As was stated in a letter dated

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[7] For an explanation of Bahá'í group prayer see Chapter 8.

March 5, 1971:

> National Assembly in its recent sessions, while
> considering the subject of Deepening [sic] the
> believers in their Faith and of educating the
> friends in living the Bahá'í life, thought that
> during this year, we encourage all the Bahá'ís
> to study and memorize "Hidden Words" so that
> the creative words of God could help us in our
> efforts to live the Bahá'í life.[8]

The classes were conducted orally so that those who could not read

would still be able to participate in the program.   The institute teacher

would read a given passage from The Hidden Words, after which, discussion

as to its meaning and implications commenced.   The teacher directed the

discussion, emphasizing those points in the passage which he felt were

particularly significant.   For example, the following passage from The

Hidden Words was read:

> The best beloved of all things in My sight is
> Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest
> Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee.
> By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and
> not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of
> thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge
> of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it
> behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift
> to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set
> it then before thine eyes.[9]

During the discussion that followed, the instructors presented the points

listed below:

1) the essence of justice is obedience to the commands of

    Bahá'u'lláh;

2) justice is relative to time and place and therefore justice

    in a given age is determined by the revelation of the avatāra;

    and

3) justice in terms of social action (group or community action)

    should be implemented by Bahá'í institutions and not by individuals.

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[8] Unpublished correspondence of the National Spiritual Assembly of the
    Bahá'ís of India, 'Letter to the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee,
    March 5, 1971'

[9] Baha'u'llah, Hidden Words, trans. by Shoghi Effendi, rev. ed., (Wilmette,
    Illinois, 1963), p. 3-4

In these elaborations one can notice two main lines of thought being stressed. First, individuals are reminded that social harmony is dependent on their obedience to the prophet's utterances; only by living the Law can the maintenance of justice be assured. Second, social justice is dependent on the proper functioning of Bahá'í institutions; without the benefit of a strong administrative superstructure the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are rendered useless. Consequently, one of the principal purposes of such classes is to instil into the minds of village declarants the importance of adjusting their lives both individually and collectively to the commandments of Bahá'u'lláh so that new patterns of behavior will begin to manifest themselves within village communities in Malwa.

In addition to acting as a center for the dissemination of Bahá'í concepts, both metaphysical and social, the Indore Teaching Institute also provides for the education of villagers by means of exemplary conditioning; within the Institute all activities are governed by Bahá'í principles and rules of conduct. Accordingly, participants study, worship, and eat together, with no distinction being made according to caste backgrounds. Even in terms of sleeping arrangements there is no such distinction made, and as a result 'high' and 'low' castemen can find themselves sharing the same room.[10]

During the nine day session various aspects of Bahá'í life were discussed (the study format being the same as the one mentioned above), and at the conclusion of the course trainees were instructed to share the knowledge they had acquired with their fellow village believers. It is in this regard that the Indore Teaching Institute serves its most important function, for while the number of students who pass through its courses are relatively small in comparison to the total number of declared

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[10] During the first few years these provisions caused some friction, as high caste declarants were often unwilling to dine at the same table as 'untouchables'. At present, however, this barrier seems to have been broken — the author saw Brāhmans and Chamārs eating side by side.

Bahá'ís in Malwa, the information they disperse in various village communities ensures that a larger number of declarants will come into contact with the 'deepening' efforts of the Bahá'í Administrative Order in India. Hence, it is as a channel of communication that the Indore Teaching Institute provides its greatest service to consolidation work in Malwa.

Perhaps the most effective channel of communication linking Malwa Bahá'í village communities and the movement's greater administrative system is the travelling teacher. It is the most effective for several reasons. In the first place, while written communication is plentiful and distributed on a regular basis, it faces two difficulties: illiteracy, and lack of personal contact. As previously mentioned, even in the better educated communities the majority of believers cannot read. In this vein it has been estimated that on the whole, less than 25% of the declarants in Malwa can read sufficient Hindi to be able to understand the contents of Bahá'í written material.[11] Consequently, any written material received by village communities must be read to the group by those members who can read, and therefore communication is indirect and often ineffective. Furthermore, even when bulletins, newspapers, and other forms of written communication are read to village believers, the lack of personal contact weakens their effect. A letter received from New Delhi or Ujjain does not carry the emotional impact that characterizes the spoken word, and thus the human aspect of communication is lost. Secondly, while teaching institutes contain within their structure a means for establishing the personal contact so vital to successful communication, they are unavailable to the majority of rural followers; the mainstream of village declarants cannot afford the time away from their fields to attend instructional sessions. Also, the lack of financial resources in the Indian Bahá'í community reduces not only the size but number of institutes. There

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[11] This is the estimate of the Chairman of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee.

are only two such centers for the entire Malwa mass teaching area, a region which includes within its boundaries over a hundred thousand declared believers, and consequently the Administrative Order has had to use them primarily for educating a few community leaders. In an attempt to overcome these difficulties, the institution of the Bahá'í travelling teacher has been created. About such teachers the Universal House of Justice in a letter dated October 26, 1967, said:

> It must be realized that people who are mostly illiterate cannot have the benefit of reading for themselves the written word and of deriving directly from it the spiritual sustenance they need for the enrichment of their Baha'i lives. They become dependent, therefore, to a large extent on their contacts with visiting teachers. The spiritual calibre or moral quality of these teachers assumes, therefore, great importance. The National Spiritual Assembly or the Teaching Committees responsible for the selection of these teachers should bear in mind that their choice must depend, not only on the knowledge or grasp of the teachings on the part of the teachers, but primarily upon their pure spirit and love for the Cause, and their capacity to convey that spirit and love to others.[12]

The duties of travelling teachers fall into two main categories: propagating the Faith, and assisting the consolidation efforts of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee by acting as channels of communication between the Committee's office in Ujjain and various village communities. This chapter is primarily concerned with their role as channels of communication; their activities as propagators of the Bahá'í Faith will be more thoroughly developed in Chapter 11.

As communicative links between the village communities and the Bahá'í Administrative Order, travelling teachers' duties are basically three. First, they carry general information from the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee to the various villages in their assigned localities, an assignment which often involves conducting 'deepening'programs in the villages.

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[12] 'Letter to all national spiritual assemblies engaged in mass teaching, October, 26, 1967', Arise to Serve, p. 118-119

Second, they meet periodically with specific local spiritual assemblies in order to help them better understand the administrative dimensions of the Faith. Third, they keep the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee apprised of the general condition of Bahá'í communities in the rural areas.

Each travelling teacher is assigned a number of key villages within the immediate vicinity of his own town or village. In each village (some of which are the aforementioned 'model villages') he executes his assignment and in turn directs specific believers to carry the given information to surrounding communities, thus establishing a small scale network of verbal communication.

There are thirteen such travelling teachers presently working in Malwa, all of whom come from villages and towns throughout the region. All are literate in Hindi; one or two can converse in English; and several are college graduates. Every month the teachers assemble in Ujjain to submit written reports outlining their previous month's work and to receive their briefing instructions from the Secretary of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee. After being examined on their instructions they return to their various districts.

An example of the travelling teacher can be seen in the person of Bakṣī Rām Varmā, a twenty-six year old Bahá'í who lives in a rural community located in Ujjain district, not far from the small railway junction of Nagda. He comes from a Rājput family, and together with his two brothers farms ten acres of land. He attended Mādhav College in Ujjain where he received his B.A. in Arts in 1971.

Bakṣī Rām first came into contact with the Bahá'í Faith in 1971 when he met a travelling teacher in his village. After declaring his belief in Bahá'u'lláh he took part with fifteen other new believers in a three week 'deepening' course designed to familiarize declarants with all aspects of the Bahá'í Faith from ritual and devotion to administrative

organization. Upon passing a written examination the participants were qualified to carry out teaching and consolidation activities in village areas.

Bakṣi Rām has in his charge a number of village communities (located near Nagda junction) spread out over a radius of approximately fifteen miles. Each month he visists a certain number of them, often spending the night in the visited community. Every month he receives the equivalent of ten Australian dollars to help support his field work. The type of activity in which Bakṣi Rām engages is exemplified in the following paragraphs.

Bakṣi Rām's specific assignment for the month of January, 1974, was to inform local spiritual assemblies in his area to promote two projects in their respective communities: to implement the use of the phrase 'Alláh'u'Abhá'; and to encourage individual contribution to the Bahá'í Fund.[13] His journey began in Ujjain where in conjunction with the other travelling teachers he received his briefing instructions from the Secretary of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee. He then travelled by train to Nagda from where he took a bus to his village. The next day he set out for his assigned destinations.

The importance of prayer as a preparatory act for commencing teaching and consolidation work has been greatly stressed by the Universal House of Justice, and the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee therefore instructs every teacher to engage in one hour of prayer before starting his mission. Accordingly, during his travels Bakṣi Rām spends much time chanting prayers and singing Bahá'í devotional songs. As he stated, 'I am doing the work of Bhagavān Bahá'u'lláh, therefore I prepare myself by singing his verses.'

The next evening Bakṣi Rām met with the assembly members in the first of his designated communities. As is the rule, the meeting began with a prayer read by the chairman of the assembly, a Rājput farmer:

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[13] The propagation and consolidation activities of the Bahá'í Faith are sustained by funds contributed by individual believers. In each country of the Bahá'í world there exists a national fund which supports the work of the movement within its boundaries. Only Bahá'ís are allowed to contribute to the Bahá'í Fund – money from outside sources is not accepted.

> O God, refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my
> heart, Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs
> in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I
> will no longer be sorrowful and grieved, I will
> be a happy and joyful being. O God, I will no
> longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble
> harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant
> things of life. O God, Thou art more friend to
> me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee,
> O Lord.[14]

Having expressed the well-wishes of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee,

Baksī Rām proceeded to elaborate upon his assigned topics. First, he

relayed the Committee's wish that the phrase 'Alláh'u'Abhá' be employed by

assembly members when greeting each other, and that its use among all

village declarants be encouraged. The phrase means 'God is most great',

and it used by Bahá'ís throughout the world as a greeting, just as in the

rural areas of Malwa Hindus greet each other with the traditional 'Jay

Jay Rāma' (long live Rāma).[15] Second, Baksī Rām explained the significance

of the Bahá'í Fund, emphasizing that the amount of money given by the

community was not important, but that universal participation was

desirable. He also stressed that the donated money was used for paying

teachers, supporting schools, printing books and pamphlets, and generally

promoting the movement in India.

During the next week Baksī Rām carried these instructions to the local

spiritual assemblies of several nearby villages. In each instance he met

members of the assembly individually in their fields and again collectively

in the evening. In some of these communities he also stressed to assembly

members the importance of maintaining written communication with the

Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee, as regular contact with the higher

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[14] Bahá'í Prayers. A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, The
Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, (Wilmette, Illinois, 1967), p. 80-81

[15] From a sociological point of view the object of inducing new village
declarants to use this expression is to give the Bahá'í Faith a
separate identity within village life. The Bahá'í Administrative
Order hopes the active use of the phrase by villagers, both in their
meetings and during their daily routines, will hasten this phenomenon
thus giving new believers a feeling of brotherhood in Bahá'u'lláh.

administrative institutions of the movement was essential to the development of the Faith in Malwa.

While a major part of Baksī Rām's duties are involved in relaying information and directives from the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee to local communities, this is not his only function; he also carries communications from the villages to the Committee. In this respect he notifes the Committee's members of specific problems and concerns of individual communities. For example, in one village, community leaders notified Baksī Rām that their Bahá'í bhavan had been damaged during the rainy season and was in need of certain repairs. They requested the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee give them assistance in paying for reconstruction costs. Accordingly, in his monthly report Baksī Rām reiterated the request.

Baksī Rām's activities exemplify the work being carried out by the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee's travelling teachers. Yet, because 'deepened' Bahá'í villagers can afford little time away from their fields, the number of such teachers in Malwa is few, and therefore all of the local spiritual assemblies in the region cannot be personally contacted. As a result, travelling teachers must concentrate their efforts on those villages which the Bahá'í Administrative Order feels have the greatest potential for developing strong communities. Although the process is a slow one, and the range of contact limited, the personal communication they provide establishes the travelling teachers as the best source of communication between village communities and the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and consequently in the future their numbers will be increased.[16]

The final channel of communication employed by the Bahá'í Administrative Order in Malwa is the consolidation team. This institution is somewhat akin to the travelling teacher in that it moves within the rural areas, meeting with local Bahá'í assemblies and community members and

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[16] This was the opinion of Hand of the Cause Dr. Muhájir.

helping with consolidation and 'deepening' programs. It is different to the travelling teacher, however, in that while the latter comes from the villages and is paid for his work on a regular basis, the consolidation team generally consists of individuals (often youth under the age of twenty-five) from outside areas who come to Malwa or other mass teaching areas for specific periods to perform specific tasks. Therefore, unlike the travelling teacher the consolidation team does not provide a continuous and on-going communicative link, but acts as a temporary channel designed to implement particular programs or projects. In addition, a consolidation team generally travels by jeep; since time is limited and the National Spiritual Assembly and the Regional Teaching Committee want a team to meet with as many communities as possible during its stay in the region, travel time must be shortened.

Three consolidation teams were in the field in Malwa between February 12 and February 23, 1974. Each team was composed of two Bahá'í youth from Poona and Bombay and one village teacher from the Malwa region. Their specific task on this occasion was to help administer the unit elections whereby local communities select delegates for the National Convention.[17] They were to see that village believers understood the meaning and methods of Bahá'í elections and ensure that delegates were properly elected. Also, they were asked to select certain villagers whom they felt could act as village teachers and invite them to attend the next training session at the Indore Teaching Institute.

The teams assembled at the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee office where they met with Hand of the Cause Dr. Muhájir and Continental Counsellor Mrs. Shírín Boman Meherabání. Following a round of prayers they were reminded of the importance of proper methodology in the Bahá'í electoral process and advised to make sure that no campaigning or electioneering took place. In addition, Dr. Muhájir emphasized the importance of

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[17] For details concerning this event see Chapter 10.

finding suitable believers who could be trained as travelling teachers, as
the large number of communities in Malwa was making the use of consolidation
teams less practical each year, and therefore in the future, activities such
as election supervising would have to be carried out by local inhabitants.
Furthermore, since the new Five-Year Plan called for great increases in
the number of communities in India, he felt it imperative that the ranks
of India's travelling teachers be increased. After consultation the
three groups left for their assigned districts.

An examination of one of the group's written reports evidences the
type of service the consolidation team renders. In four villages in
Ratlam district they co-ordinated election procedures and saw that the
name of the elected delegate was safely conveyed in writing to the region's
Auxiliary Board member. In addition, they visited six other villages for
the purpose of assessing the district's corps of travelling teachers and
school teachers. In this regard they subsequently made recommendations
to the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee and National Spiritual Assembly
for the recall of one teacher for further training and the addition of
another to the list of full-time travelling teachers.[18] Furthermore,
they left instructions with the district's travelling teachers to send
outstanding literate Bahá'ís from the surrounding villages to the Indore
Teaching Institute for special training classes.[19]

As has been stated both in the introduction to this work and several
times throughout the preceding chapters, the Bahá'í Administrative Order
in India is energetically involved in directing a process of communication
which is primarily educational in nature. Over the last decade a large
number of rural villagers in Malwa have declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh

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[18]'Unpublished consolidation team report written to the National Spiritual
    Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, March, 1974', p. 4

[19]'Consolidation team report', p. 3

as an <u>avatāra</u>.   From this starting point - the declaration of an
individual - the process begins.   The role of the Administrative Order
now becomes one of introducing declarants to Bahá'í values, institutions,
and modes of behavior, for the movement is not primarily concerned with the
question of personal salvation through belief in an <u>avatāra</u>, but with the
construction of a system of values and corresponding institutions which
will change the behavior patterns of men and thereby provide the basis for
a future society whose scope will be universal and whose laws will be the
teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Part III   Aspects of Community Life

Chapter 7   Beliefs and Doctrines

The task which the Bahá'í Administrative Order has set for itself
in Malwa is to educate new declarants in the various dimensions of Bahá'í
community life.   As stated earlier, since the beginning of the mass
teaching campaign in India the sole requirement for becoming a Bahá'í
has been acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh as a manifestation of God.
Consequently, when travelling teachers approach a new village they
emphasize the claims of Bahá'u'lláh as a manifestation of the Sacred
and not the intricacies of the Faith.   While the basic social principles
are also expounded, it is the station of Bahá'u'lláh that is always
stressed.   This point was made clear by the Indian National Spiritual
Assembly when it reminded the local communities that:

> An over-simplification of the Cause in the minds
> of the hearers cannot be avoided if our teachers
> present the Cause of God as a world movement,
> with noble principles, for removing prejudice and
> promoting World Peace. Such an approach may have
> its justification for stimulating inquiry and
> interest, but in the context of our villages, we
> should portray the Cause with simplicity of heart
> and directness of truth:[1]

Therefore, new believers are not expected upon declaring to immediately
manifest within their lives the teachings and principles, both individual
and social, of the Bahá'í Faith.   Rather, becoming a Bahá'í is viewed as
a process.   As Shoghi Effendi stated:

> The process of becoming a Bahá'í is necessarily
> slow and gradual. The essential is not that the
> beginner should have a full and detailed knowledge
> of the Cause, a thing which is obviously impossible
> in the vast majority of cases, but that he should,
> by an act of his own will, be willing to uphold
> and follow the truth and guidance set forth in the
> Teachings, and thus open his heart and mind to the
> reality of the Manifestation.[2]

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[1] Bahá'í News (India), # 6, July-August, 1973, p.6

[2] Bahá'í News (United States), # 213, November, 1948, (Wilmette, Illinois) p. 2

It is the responsibility of Bahá'í administrative institutions in India,
namely, the National Spiritual Assembly and the State and Regional teaching
committees to see that the new declarants are guided in the process of
becoming Bahá'ís, and hence in accordance with the directives of Shoghi
Effendi and the Universal House of Justice these institutions are attempting
to direct a 'deepening' campaign in Malwa. The lack of funds and manpower,
however, has meant that the efforts of this campaign have had to be directed
towards a number of 'model village' communities. The aim of the program
has been to introduce into the 'model village' communities the essential
aspects of Bahá'í community life, with the hope that these communities
will develop into catalysts for further institutional implementation in the
rural areas.[3] The essential elements of community life can be divided
into five categories: beliefs and doctrines, ritual and ceremony, social
principles, administration, and education and propagation.

Part III will examine each of the above categories in detail. In
each case the teaching or institution in question will first be examined
in its theoretical form, that is, as it is presented in Bahá'í literature,
and then as it is being implemented and adapted to the Indian cultural
environment. Finally, a few examples of Bahá'í activity in the 'model
village' communities will be cited. It should be pointed out, however,
that greater emphasis will be placed on the theoretical and adaptive aspects
of Bahá'í teachings, as even in the 'model villages' change has not been
revolutionary, and thus the center of Bahá'í activity in Malwa is still

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[3] This is not to say that contact is only maintained with a select group
of villages. Rather, it is to point out that in terms of
implementing Bahá'í institutions in the rural areas more time has
been given to those communities which Bahá'í administrators in India
feel have greater potential for development. It would appear that
this choice often depends on whether the community has a core of
'deepened' believers who can organize Bahá'í activities and thereby
act as community leaders. It is felt that if these villages can
develop functioning Bahá'í communities they will be able to serve as
examples and resource centers for other rural communities.

the educational process rather than independent community development.
Less than fifteen years have elapsed since the beginning of mass teaching
in India, while the traditional values and institutions of the Indian
village have roots that reach back thousands of years.   Consequently,
systematic change is of necessity a slow and arduous process, and the
Bahá'í movement has just begun to enter the arena.

The belief dimension is perhaps the most important aspect of religious
life; it forms the psychological source of an adherent's view of himself
and the cosmos.   In addition, the modes of action and patterns of behavior
in any given society are directly related to the system of beliefs to
which its members adhere.   Putting aside the argument of whether beliefs
and values are manifestations of socio-economic forces or the source of
the former, the author will be satisfied in acknowledging the direct
relationship existing between values and beliefs and social action.   On
this point he agrees with Peter Berger that the interaction is a
dialectical one.   As Berger states:

> The dialectical relationship between religion and
> society thus precludes the doctrinaire approaches
> of either "idealism" or "materialism". It is
> possible to show concrete instances how religious
> "ideas", even very abtruse ones, led to empirically
> available changes in the social structure. In
> other instances, it is possible to show how
> empirically available structural changes had effects
> on the level of religious consciousness and ideation.
> Only a dialectical understanding of these relationships
> avoids distortions of the one-sidedly "idealist" and
> "materialist" interpretations.[4]

Thus an examination of the belief dimension or 'world view' of the Bahá'í
Faith is essential to an understanding of the values and institutions its
leaders are attempting to introduce into village life.

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[4] Peter Berger, The Social Reality of Religion, (London, 1969), p. 4-5

The beliefs and doctrines of the Bahá'í Faith are religious in nature, as they are claimed to be derived from the Sacred.[5] The form which the Sacred takes in Bahá'í literature is that of a transcendent and omnipotent God. He is indivisible and unchanging, and His essence is eternal:

> Exalted, immeasurably exalted, art Thou above
> the strivings of mortal man to unravel Thy
> mystery, to describe Thy glory, or even to
> hint at the nature of Thine Essence.[6]

Moreover, He is above all names and free from all human likeness. According to The Kitáb-i-Íqán, 'To every discerning and illumined heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress.'[7] Consequently, all things are known by God, but He is concealed from all men.[8]

Through His will God created the universe which has had no beginning in time and shall have no end:

> Know assuredly that God's creation hath existed
> from eternity, and will continue to exist forever.
> Its beginning hath had no beginning, and its end
> knoweth no end.[9]

Commenting on this apparent contradiction, E. G. Browne explained: 'This Emanation of Creation was produced by the Primal Will (Mashiyyat-i-U'lá),

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[5] See footnote 1 in Introduction.

[6] Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 3-4

[7] Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 98

[8] 'Ten thousand Prophets, each a Moses, are thunderstruck upon the Sinai of their search at His forbidding voice, "Thou shalt never behold Me!"; whilst a myriad Messengers, each as great as Jesus, stand dismayed upon their heavenly thrones by the interdiction, "Mine Essence thou shalt never apprehend!"' (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 62)

[9] Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 150 ·

and though eternal in duration, is subsequent to the latter as to
causation.'[10]   Consequently, all creatures including man emanate from
God, and it is by His grace that they have entered the realm of existence.

While the God of the Bahá'í Faith is beyond all human understanding
or reproach, He is a personal God, not a neutral ground of being.   In
this sense the Bahá'í conception of God closely follows the pattern of
conceptual development to be found in the historical religions of the Near
East, Judaism, Christianity, and Islám, in which the Sacred in its most
exalted ideation retains certain anthropomorphic attributes and is capable
of communing with His creation in an I-Thou relationship.   This 'love'
relationship is revealed in the following passage taken from The Hidden Words:

> O SON OF MAN!
>
> Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient
> eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee;
> therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee
> Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.[11]

Furthermore, like Muhammad, Bahá'u'lláh's showering of the Sacred with such
descriptive attributes as the All-Merciful, the Most-Compassionate, the
Giver, the Gracious, the Loving, testifies to the fact that God is conceived
as being a personal deity.

Since it is impossible for created things to comprehend the Divine
Essence, from time to time God sends forth messengers or manifestations
who serve as a liason between Him and His creation.   In this process God
is an active agent;   through the power of His will He reveals Himself to
the manifestation.   Moreover, it is only through the manifestation that
man can know of His will: 'He Who is everlastingly hidden from the eyes
of men can never be known except through His Manifestation,...'[12]   In the

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[10] E. G. Browne, 'The Bábís of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines',
     p. 914

[11] Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words, p. 4

[12] Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 49

<u>Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas</u> this theme is explained in th' following manner:

> By this Word it is intended that no one hath
> any access to the Invisible Essence. In this
> world all men must turn their faces toward
> "Him-whom God-shall manifest". He is the
> "Dawning-place of Divinity" and the "Manifestation
> of Deity".[13]

Hence, a manifestation acts as a communicative link between the Sacred and the profane, an idea which shares much in common with the Islamic concept of the prophet.[14]

The relationship between God and a manifestation in Bahá'í doctrine is one of revelation and not incarnation. The Divinity reveals Himself unto His manifestation, but he does not take human form.[15] Consequently, a manifestation acts like a mirror; he reflects the sun, but he is not the embodiment of the sun itself. According to Bahá'u'lláh:

> These Tabernacles of Holiness, these Primal
> Mirrors which reflect the light of unfading
> glory, are but expressions of Him Who is the
> Invisible of the Invisibles.[16]

A manifestation is a composite of three realities: the physical, the human, and the divine. In the first two forms he shares similarities with his fellow men; he has a physical body and a rational soul.[17] However,

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[13] <u>Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas</u>, vol. III, (New York, 1940), p. 485

[14] As opposed to the Christian concept whereby the Sacred enters the profane sphere.

[15] 'Know thou of a certainty that the Unseen can in no wise incarnate His Essence and reveal it unto men.' (<u>Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</u>, p. 49)

[16] <u>Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</u>, p. 47-48

[17] Again similarities can be seen between the Bahá'í concept of manifestation and the Islamic concept of prophet. Thus Muhammad says in the Qur'án, 'I am but a man like you.' See <u>Qur'án</u>, 41: 6. For Bahá'í reference to this dual station of the manifestation see <u>Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</u>, p. 67

he also has a divine side - he is the spokesman for God.   Accordingly,

only through him does the divine word flow.

According to the Bahá'í view a manifestation is necessary because the

human intellect by itself is incapable of solving the basic problems of

life.   Only by obtaining the knowledge of God's creative purpose can man

come to an understanding of himself and thereby fulfill his ordained

station in life.   Consequently, human unity depends on men following the

teachings of the manifestation,[18] and failure to do so results in the decay

of society.   Hence Bahá'í literature often depicts the manifestation as

a physician whose patient is sick humanity.   For example, the Tablets of

Abdul-Baha Abbas record that:

> Each Manifestation is the heart of the world and
> the proficient Physician of every patient. The
> world of humanity is sick, but that skilled
> Physician hath the healing remedy and He bestoweth
> divine teachings, exhortations and advices which
> are the remedy of every ailment and the dressing
> for every wound.[19]

Consequently, only through obedience to his commands can mankind progress.[20]

During the course of human history God has revealed Himself through

a series of manifestations.   Just as the sun that rises and sets each

day is in reality the same sun, so the numerous messengers through whom

God has manifested Himself are one and the same.[21]   Although in their

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[18] 'The Divine Messengers have been sent down, and their Books revealed,
for the purpose of promoting the knowledge of God, and of furthering
unity and fellowship among men.' (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son
of the Wolf, p. 12)

[19] Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. III, p. 538

[20] 'The beginning of all things is the knowledge of God, and the end of
all things is strict observance of whatsoever hath been sent down
from the empyrean of the Divine Will...' (Gleanings from the Writings
of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 5)

[21] 'The Divine Manifestations are so many different mirrors, because they have
a special individuality, but that which is reflected in the mirrors
is one sun.' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, trans. by Laura
Clifford Barney, rev. ed., (Wilmette, Illinois, 1968), p. 178)

ignorance men speak of Abraham, the Buddha, Moses, Zoroaster, Christ,
Kṛṣṇa, and Muḥammad as separate and distinct realities, in truth the
voice which spoke in each of them was the one and indivisible God:

> Nay, all the Prophets of God, His well-favoured,
> His holy and chosen Messengers, are, without
> exception, the bearers of His names, and the
> embodiments of His attributes. They only differ
> in the intensity of their revelation, and the
> comparative potency of their light.[22]

Therefore, the Bahá'í Faith adheres to a concept of progressive revelation
whereby from the dawn of human history to the present day manifestations
have revealed to mankind the commandments and laws of God which have
subsequently become the catalysts for the advancement of civilization.
While the teachings of the manifestations vary according to the needs of
the time (thus making religious truth relative), they always come from
the same Source.

According to Bahá'í scripture, manifestations have often spoke of
future revelations. However, once a prophet appears and makes his claim,
he is rejected. Thus the Jews were told to expect a Messiah, but they
rejected Jesus because he did not fulfill their expectations. Similarly,
Christians were told to expect the return of their Lord, yet when he
appeared in the personage of the Arabian prophet, Muḥammad, they disdained
him. Likewise, Muslims were expecting the arrival of the mahdí
yet when the Báb made his claim they imprisoned and finally killed him.[23]
The Báb in turn had spoken of the coming of a universal manifestation,
mentioned by all the manifestations of the past, whom he referred to as
'Him whom God shall manifest'. Bahá'ís believe this universal
manifestation was Bahá'u'lláh.

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[22] Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 103-104

[23] Both Sunní and Shí'ah theologies posit the appearance in the last days
of a figure who will make justice triumph, although this expectation
has been more fully developed among the latter, particularly with
reference to the return of the 'hidden imám'.

To Bahá'ís Bahá'u'lláh is the latest manifestation of God. He is
the universal teacher, the promised one of all ages, whose religion will
provide the spiritual base for a new world civilization.[24] Shoghi Effendi
aptly summarized the scope of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation in the following
passage:

> In conclusion of this theme, I feel it should be
> stated that the Revelation identified with
> Bahá'u'lláh abrogates unconditionally all the
> Dispensations gone before it, upholds uncompromisingly
> the eternal verities they enshrine, recognizes
> firmly and absolutely the Divine origin of their
> Authors, preserves inviolate the sanctity of their
> authentic Scriptures, disclaims any intention of
> lowering the status of their Founders or of abating
> the spiritual ideals they inculcate, clarifies and
> correlates their functions, reaffirms their common,
> their unchangeable and fundamental purpose,
> reconciles their seemingly divergent claims and
> doctrines, readily and gratefully recognizes their
> respective contributions to the gradual unfoldment
> of one Divine Revelation, unhesitatingly acknowledges
> itself to be but one link in the chain of continually
> progressive Revelations, supplements their teachings
> with such laws and ordinances as conform to the
> imperative needs, and are dictated by the growing
> receptivity, of a fast evolving and constantly
> changing society, and proclaims its readiness and
> ability to fuse and incorporate the contending sects
> and factions into which they have fallen into a
> universal Fellowship, functioning within the framework,
> and in accordance with the precepts, of a divinely
> conceived, a world-unifying, a world-redeeming Order.[25]

After the manifestations the gem of creation is man, without whom
existence would be meaningless.[26] Man stands out from the rest of creation

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[24] 'The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the
Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most
cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the
pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistable bidding, been
revealed unto men.' (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
p. 5)

[25] Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 100

[26] 'We consider man as the greatest member because, among the creatures,
he is the sum of all existing perfections. When we speak of man,
we mean the perfect one, the foremost individual in the world, who
is the sum of spiritual and apparent perfections, and, who is like
the sun among the beings.(Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions,
p. 206)

by virtue of his rationality.   Like the animal, man has a physical body
and senses which allow him to experience hunger, thirst, heat, and cold,
but his superior intelligence permits him to understand in varying degrees
himself, the world, and the spiritual realities of existence.[27] Man's
power of rationality is a result of his possessing a soul – a non-material
reality connected to the body through the functions of the mind.[28]   The
soul comes into existence when the body is created, but it is independent
of the latter and survives after its demise.   Moreover, it is not affected
by the infirmities of the body or mind.

Man's soul allows him to understand the realities of existence, and
it is the knowledge and love of the source of that existence (ie. God) that
is the sole aim of his being created.[29] Accordingly, in the teachings
of the Bahá'í Faith the purpose of man's life on earth is to know and
love God.[30]

Each man, therefore, is created with the ability to love God, but
this ability is dependent on free will.[31] Accordingly, man requires a
teacher whose guidance will bring his potentialities to fruition.   As man
requires a perfect guide, the master must be at the same time '...not only

[27] For a discussion on man and nature see Bahá'í World Faith, p. 235-241.

[28] 'The temple of man is like unto a mirror, his soul is as the sun, and
his mental faculties even as the rays that emanate from that source
of light.' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í World Faith, p. 346-347)

[29] Bahá'u'lláh, in Bahá'í World Faith, p. 46-47

[30] By knowledge of God is not meant an understanding of His essence, but
an awareness of His attributes, such as love, justice, compassion,
etc.

[31] 'All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only
as a result of your own volition.' (Gleanings from the Writings of
Bahá'u'lláh, p. 149)   For a further discussion on free will see
Some Answered Questions, p. 287-289.

a material, but also a human and spiritual educator; and he must possess

a supernatural power, so that he may hold the position of a divine

teacher.'[32], and it is for this reason that God reveals Himself to a

manifestation. Knowledge of God's attributes alone, however, is not

deemed sufficient, for love of God implies that man manifest his knowledge

in the realm of action:

> If we are true Bahá'ís speech is not needed.
> Our actions will help on the world, will spread
> civilization, will help the progress of science,
> and cause the arts to develop. Without action
> nothing in the material world can be accomplished,
> neither can words unaided advance a man in the
> spiritual Kingdom.[33]

The emphasis placed on action in the Bahá'í teachings demonstrates

that the world is not to be negated or renounced. Rather, the Bahá'í

Faith teaches that far from seeking to abandon the world and withdraw into

a spiritual domain where material concerns are suppressed, man should

develop his spirituality by actively participating in the building of an

ever-advancing civilization. In this sense the Bahá'í 'world view'

contains an element of what Max Weber termed 'inner-worldly asceticism',[34]

whereby the world is seen to be a workshop for doing God's work. However,

unlike the Christian variety of this phenomenon, namely, the Calvinistic

form of Puritanism, the aim of work in the world is not the winning of

individual salvation but the uplift of humanity. As Bahá'u'lláh states:

> I confess that Thou hast no desire except the
> regeneration of the whole world, and the
> establishment of the unity of its peoples, and
> the salvation of all of them that dwell therein.[35]

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[32] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 12

[33] Paris Talks. Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911 - 1912,
    11th ed., (London, 1969), p. 80

[34] Weber, p. 166

[35] Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 243

Therefore, man's growth depends on the way he conducts his life in the world, and for this reason the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith place greater emphasis on ethical activity than ritual observance. The primary goal of man's life is not to purify himself from the dross of the world by means of periodic withdrawl into a realm of symbolic activity but to enter the profane sphere with the intention of regenerating it through consciously directed moral activity based on the teachings of the manifestation of God.

While in Bahá'í doctrine the world is not seen as a place to be shunned or renounced, neither is it viewed as an end in itself. It is an arena for manifesting God's glory and developing man's soul; otherwise it is meaningless. Thus in one passage the worth of the world is compared to the black in the eye of a dead ant.[36] Man's true reality is his spirit (soul), for which the world is but a training ground. After death the soul continues to exist,[37] traversing the innumerable worlds of God and slowly gaining in perfection in a process that has no end.[38]

At first glance the beliefs and doctrines of the Bahá'í Faith appear to be far removed from those of popular Hinduism: the Faith's strong emphasis on monotheism seems to clash dramatically with Hinduism's well-populated pantheon; the ethical prophet of revelation appears to find no place in the Hindu tradition; and the Bahá'í view of man and his role in

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[36] Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 56

[37] 'There is only the human reality and the spirit of man which, after the disintegration of the members, dispersing of the particles, and the destruction of the composition, persists, and continues to act and have power.' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 262) For another reference to the soul's immortality see Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 155-156.

[38] Paris Talks, p. 89

the world seems to contradict the doctrines of samsāra, karma, and moksa,[39] and their implications of fatalism and life negation. However, closer examination reveals that within the Hindu tradition there are certain elements that, if not parallel to Bahá'í beliefs, are at least similar to them. By reason of its age and liberal attitude towards metaphysical speculation, Hindu thought has over the centuries traversed the span of theological concepts from atheism to monism. As a result, doctrines regarding monotheism, revelation, and 'inner-worldly asceticism' are by no means foreign to Hinduism, even at the popular level. For example, two of the largest sectarian groups within the Hindu fold, Vaisṇavites and Śaivites, have from the beginning of the Christian era, if not earlier, looked on Visṇu or Śiva as the only God.[40] In addition, many of the bhakti[41] cults which have periodically flourished in India have held to a concept of monotheism. Even today villagers believe in one Supreme Force who has numerous forms, an expression of qualified monotheism.[42] Similarly, the concept of revelation is not unknown to Hinduism. It is commonly believed, even by villagers, that the Vedas were revealed to the ancient rsis by the gods. As regards fatalism, which has often been claimed to lie at the base of the Indian character, a well-known scholar of Indian civilization states:

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[39] These three concepts form the core of most Hindu religious and philosophical systems of thought. Samsāra poses a world of continual birth and rebirth (transmigration); karma determines one's position in the world (see Chapter 4); and moksa is the state of final release. For an elaboration on these doctrines see A. L. Basham, The Wonder that was India, 3rd rev. ed., (London, 1969).

[40] Basham, p. 311-312

[41] One of Hinduism's four traditional paths to God characterized by devotion to a personal deity.

[42] Mathur, p. 168

> The belief in karma does not necessarily involve
> fatalism. A fatalist strain often appeared in
> Hindu thought, but most teachers disapproved of
> it. Our present condition is inevitable, but only
> because of the karma accruing from our past deeds.
> We cannot escape the law of karma any more than we
> can escape the law of gravity or the passage of
> time, but by judgement and forethought we can
> utilize the law of karma to our own advantage.[43]

Indeed, the Bhagavad Gītā, one of the best known Hindu religious texts,

constantly stresses the importance of action in life:

> Do thou thy alloted work, for action is better
> than inaction; even the maintenance of thy
> physical life cannot be effected without action.[44]

Within the Hindu tradition, however, there is one particular doctrine

that displays many parallels to the Bahá'í concept of manifestation, and

as a result Bahá'í teachers in India have made a conscious effort to

identify their own doctrine with it. This is the concept of the avatāra.

As it is this doctrine that has provided the Bahá'í the Bahá'í Faith with its

breakthrough in terms of comparative theological conceptualization, it

should be examined more thoroughly.

Avatāra means descent, or a coming down, and it is used in Hindu

terminology to refer to the phenomenon of a deity incarnating itself.

The concept is most clearly developed in the doctrines of the Vaisnavite

sect, one of the largest sub-groups within the Hindu fold, but it is by no

means limited to this sect. It is commonly believed that the god Varuna

appeared out of the point of an arrow[45], and in some instances followers of

Siva have made references to their god's appearance in the form of an avatāra.[46]

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[43] Basham, p. 324 - 325

[44] Bhagavad Gītā, III, 8

[45] Geoffrey Parrinder, Avatar and Incarnation, (London, 1970), p. 19

[46] Basham, p. 311

In fact, practically all Hindus are familiar with the concept, as it is expounded in the two great epics, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana, as well as in many of the Purānas (religio-mythical legends), which together form the source of many popular religious beliefs. S. N. Dasgupta goes so far as to say that while the doctrine of the incarnation of God is not elaborated upon by any of the speculative systems of thought in India, it still forms the corner-stone of most systems of philosophy and religion.[47] In the same vein, Aurobindo Ghose claims:

> India has from ancient times held strongly a
> belief in the reality of the Avatar, the
> descent into form, the revelation of the God-
> head in humanity. In the West this belief has
> never really stamped itself upon the mind
> because it has been presented through exoteric
> Christianity as a theological dogma without any
> roots in the reason and general consciousness
> and attitude towards life.. But in India it has
> grown up and persisted as a logical outcome of
> the Vedantic view of life and taken firm root
> in the consciousness of the race.[48]

The most ancient elaboration of the avatāra doctrine can be found in the Bhagavad Gītā, one of the books of the Mahābhārata, often referred to as the New Testament of Hinduism. It is here that Visnu, the Supreme Being of Vaisnavite theology, manifests himself in the form of Krsna for the purpose of revealing to Arjuna, one of the five brothers of an Indian princely line, the true nature of reality. During their discourse many of the central ideas relating to the concept of the avatāra are presented, and it is around these ideas that the principal doctrines of Vaisnavite theology revolve.

One of the more important beliefs relating to the doctrine of the avatāra is the assertion that the Divine actually appears in animal or

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[47] S. N. Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, vol. II, (Cambridge, 1932), p. 525

[48] Sri Aurobindo Ghose, Essays on the Gita, (Pondicherry, 1966), p. 10

human form.[49] In the Bhagavad Gītā Kṛṣṇa is Arjuna's comrade, and although he is a divine figure, he has the same bodily functions as do the purely human characters in the Mahābhārata; he eats, drinks, and sleeps with his companions. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, he also dies. According to the epic, Kṛṣṇa is fatally wounded by the arrow of a hunter.[50] Likewise, the avatāra of the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma, is a man possessing the full range of human needs and emotions, and like Kṛṣṇa he dies, his death being symbolized by a flowing river.[51] However, while the Supreme Being manifests Himself in material form, He is not limited by this imminence. In essence God is formless, and it is only through His will that Viṣṇu enters the profane sphere.[52] Moreover, in both epics the avatāras perform supernatural feats and are always victorious, another sign of their divinity. For example, even in his childhood Kṛṣṇa performed the miracle of lifting Mount Govardhana over the heads of the cowherds, thus sheltering them from a storm,[53] and later it was through his aid that the Pāṇḍavas (Arjuna's family line) were victorious in battle.[54]

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[49] 'The Unknown, the Incomprehensible, That which cannot be described except in negatives, That indeed appears in human form, speaks through human lips, is concerned about human affairs.' (Bharatan Kumarappa, The Hindu Conception of Deity, (London, 1934), p. 58)

[50] Mahābhārata, XVI, 4, 106, 110, 114, 125, English trans. by Pratap Chandra Roy, vol. XII, (Calcutta, n.d.)

[51] Rāmāyaṇa, VII, 110, 1-12, Hindi trans. by Rāmanārāyaṇadatta Shāstrī, vol. II, (Gorackpur, 1961)

[52] 'Though (I am) unborn, and Myself (is) imperishable, though (I am) the lord of all creatures, yet establishing Myself in My own nature, I come into (empiric) being through My power (māyā).' (Bhagavad Gītā IV, 6)

[53] Basham, p. 306

[54] With Kṛṣṇa's help the Pāṇḍavas defeated the evil Kauravas in the great Mahābhārata war, which according to tradition took place in the year 3102 B.C., although other sources list it as taking place in fifteenth century B.C. and the ninth century B.C.

Similarly, during the course of the Rāmāyana Rāma slays many demons, and when he kills Rāvana[55] a rain of flowers falls from heaven.[56] Thus, the avatāra represents a mingling of human and divine elements, an assertion that God is simultaneously transcendent and imminent.

A central teaching of Vaisnavite theology adhered to by most Hindus is the belief that Visnu continually incarnates Himself - He has not limited His appearance on earth to one time and place. According to the most popular classifications there have been nine chief incarnations of Visnu. The first five avatāras were mythical representations, while the last four were semi-historical if not historical figures. The first was Matsya, the fish, who warned Manu[57] of an impending flood and subsequently carried him and his family to safety in a ship, thereby saving the Vedas from destruction. The fish incarnation was followed by Kūrma (the tortoise), Varāha (the boar), Narasimha (the man-lion), and Vāmana (the dwarf), all of whom carried out specific deeds for the benefit of mankind. The sixth avatāra was Paraśurāma, the son of a Brāhman, who is best remembered for his slaying of all Ksatriya males after his father had been killed by a wicked king who was a member of this class. However, it is not until the seventh avatāra of Visnu, the aforementioned Rāma, that the doctrine of the incarnation takes on any real import for contemporary Hinduism, for as the hero of the Rāmāyana he is known across the length and breadth of India. Visnu incarnated Himself in the form of Rāma, Prince of Ayodhyā, in order to stem the activites of the demon Rāvana. The Rāmāyana recounts the events of this divine deed and in the process extols the virtues of Rāma as an ideal king and husband. After much

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[55] A demon who stole Rāma's wife, Sītā.

[56] Rāmāyana, VI, 108, 28

[57] The Hindu Adam

hardship and travail Rāma slays the demon and rescues Sītā, and thus like previous avatāras Rāma saves the world from impending danger.

The most important of the incarnations of Viṣṇu was the eighth avatāra, Kṛṣṇa. He has already been mentioned in the preceding pages as being the central figure of the Bhagavad Gītā, but since it is primarily with this figure that the Bahá'í movement has sought to establish identity, an outline of the legend surrounding Kṛṣṇa will be made here.

According to tradition, Kṛṣṇa was born at Mathura, his parents being members of the Yādava tribe. He was the second cousin of the tyrannical king Kaṃsa who in an attempt to dispel a prophecy which said that he would be killed by his cousin's eighth son set out to kill all of her children. Kṛṣṇa and his brother escaped, however, and grew up in the care of a cowherd called Nanda. Upon reaching manhood Kṛṣṇa slew Kaṃsa and subsequently founded a new kingdom. During his reign he killed many demons and wicked kings and, as mentioned earlier, aided the Pāṇḍavas in their struggle with the Kauravas. It was on the eve of the great battle between the two princely clans that Kṛṣṇa, while acting as Arjuna's charioteer, revealed to him that he was an avatāra of the Supreme Lord and compelled the doubting prince to uphold his rightful dharma (duty) by joining battle with the usurpers. It is this episode that forms the story-line of the Bhagavad Gītā and provides the setting for Kṛṣṇa to inform the dismayed Arjuna of the eternal verities. After the Pāṇḍava's victory Kṛṣṇa returned to his kingdom only to see it marred by internal dissension. After years of attempting to quel the feuding Kṛṣṇa, while wandering in the forest, was mistaken for a deer and shot in the heel. Like Achilles, this was his one vulnerable spot, and the wound resulted in his death.

The Kṛṣṇa story as it is known today is no doubt strongly flavored by myth, although it seems certain that there is some historical basis to

the legend of the hero-god.[58] The actual historicity of Kṛṣṇa, however,

is not of paramount importance. Rather, it is the teachings and

doctrines presented in the Bhagavad Gītā, those elements which contribute

to the Hindu's view of himself and the cosmos, that are of real consequence.

Whether Kṛṣṇa really existed is not critical; the fact that millions of

people believe he did is the important factor, and therefore the true

significance of Kṛṣṇa is to be found in his symbolizatioⁿ of the interest

of the Divine in the affairs of men.

The ninth and most recent of the incarnations of Viṣṇu was the

Buddha, who lived in the sixth century B.C. He is most remembered for his

compassion, particularly to animals, as he is supposed to have put an end

to the practice of animal sacrifice. However, having denied the

authority of the Vedas he was not elevated to a high rank in Vaiṣṇavite

theology, and many scholars argue that he was only included in the list of

avatāras for the purpose of assimilating heterodox elements into

Vaiṣṇavism.[59]

The essential reason for the appearance of avatāras in the material

world is the maintenance of justice and the destruction of evil. This

theme is stated in the Bhagavad Gītā in the following way:

> Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and
> a rise of unrighteousness, O Bhārata (Arjuna),
> then I send forth (create incarnate) Myself. For
> the protection of the good, for the destruction
> of the wicked and for the establishment of
> righteousness, I come into being from age to age.[60]

Consequently, avatāras come with a specific purpose; they do not appear

in the physical world without reason. For example, Kūrma dived to the

bottom of the cosmic ocean to save many of the divine treasures lost in

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[58] Ghose, p. 12

[59] For example, this is the opinion of A. L. Basham. See The Wonder that
was India, p. 309.

[60] Bhagavad Gītā, IV, 7-8

the great flood; Varāha saved the earth from destruction by raising it

with his tusks from the bottom of the cosmic ocean where it had been

hurled by the demon Hiranyākaṣa; and Narasimha slew the demon

Hiraṇyākaśipu, who was persecuting both gods and men.   Moreover, as has

already been mentioned, the human avatāras killed numerous demons in order

that the world could once again be brought back to a state of equilibrium.

Thus, avatāras' great purpose is '...to establish dharma, to restore right

and put down wrong.'[61]

Finally, the avatāras (especially the human incarnations) reveal a

personal God who cares for man.   He is a God of love who personally sets

an example for human beings to follow.   According to Radhakrishnan:

> The emphasis of the Gītā is on the Supreme as
> the personal God who creates the perceptible
> world by His nature (prakṛti). He resides in
> the heart of every being; He is the enjoyer
> and lord of all sacrifices. He stirs our hearts
> to devotion and grants our prayers. He is the
> source and sustainer of values. He enters into
> personal relations with us in worship and prayer.[62]

Moreover, the birth, suffering, and death of human avatāras disclose a

God who is aware of the human condition.   Thus, while avatāras are divine

teachers, their discourses go beyond the realm of systematic philosophy

and reach out to the existential realities of life.   According to S. N.

Dasgupta:

> In the Gītā abstract philosophy melts down to an
> insight into the nature of practical life and
> conduct,...For the God in the Gītā is not a God
> of abstract philosophy or theology, but a God
> who could be a man and be capable of all personal
> relations.[63]

Hence, Rāma has become the epitome of righteous conduct; beyond his heroic

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[61] Parrinder, p. 124

[62] Radhakrishnan, p. 25

[63] Dasgupta, p. 525

and miraculous deeds he is regarded as the ideal ruler and husband.

Similarly, Kṛṣṇa is not only remembered for his supernatural acts but for

his erotic exploits with the gopīs (cowherds' wives), a symbol of the love

relationship between God and man.

In reaching the rural masses of Malwa the Bahá'í Faith has used the

concept of the avatāra as a cultural bridge; it has become the primary

conceptual vehicle by which the movement's teachers present its doctrines.

In this regard India is not an exception, as the practice of presenting

its doctrines in terms and symbols that are culturally meaningful to the

inhabitants of the particular country in which propagation activities

are being implemented has been a marked characteristic of the movement's

missionary work throughout the world.   In Christian countries Bahá'u'lláh

is referred to as the return of Christ; in the Islamic world he is

'The Great Announcement'; and in Buddhist countries he is known as the

fifth Buddha.   This approach was indorsed by Shoghi Effendi when he wrote:

> Nor should any of the pioneers, at this early
> stage in the upbuilding of Bahá'í National
> Communities, overlook the fundamental
> prerequisites for any successful teaching
> enterprise, which is to adapt the presentation
> of the fundamental principles of their Faith
> to the cultural and religious backgrounds, the
> ideologies, and the temperament of the divers
> races and nations whom they are called upon
> to enlighten and attract.[64]

The main link in the identification of the concept of the manifestation

with that of the avatāra has been the personage of the kalkin avatāra.

In Vaiṣṇavite doctrine there is a belief in a future avatāra (kalkin) who

will appear at the close of the kali-yuga, the last of the four great ages

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[64] Shoghi Effendi, Citadel of Faith. Messages to America, 1947 - 1953, (Wilmette, Illinois, 1970), p. 25

in each cosmic aeon.[65] Mention of this figure has been made in several of

the Purāṇas[66] as well as in the Mahābhārata.   As the tenth avatāra of

Viṣṇu, kalkin will appear for the purpose of destroying the wicked and

re-establishing righteousness in the world.   Having purified all things,

he will usher in a new age.   While John Hinnells and W. Weaver claim

that the kalkin avatāra has never assumed an important place in Hinduism,[67]

A. L. Basham points out that many simple Hindus take kalkin very

seriously,[68] and Sir Monier-Williams noted that 'Some of the degraded

classes of India comfort themselves in their present abject condition by

looking to Kalki as their future deliverer and the restorer of their social

position.'[69]

In Hindu cultural terms Bahá'í teachers claim that Bahá'u'lláh was

the fulfillment of the kalkin prophecy.   His advent in nineteenth century

Persia, the symbol of the decadence that characterized the kali-yuga,

marked the beginning of a new age in the history of mankind in which

righteousness will flourish and dharma will be restored.   Through

Bahá'u'lláh, the same Lord that was manifest in Kṛṣṇa has once again

communed with man and re-established the eternal truths of religion.[*]

In using this approach the Bahá'í movement is following much the

same procedure adopted by Ismá'ílí missionaries in India who during the

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[65] In Hindu cosmogony a cosmic cycle (kalpa) equals 4,320 million years.
Each kalpa is in turn subdivided into secondary cycles (manvantaras)
aeons (mahāyugas), and ages (yugas). We are presently living in
the kali-yuga, a time of breakdown and confusion.

[66] See Chapter 3, note 20.

[67] W. Weaver and John R. Hinnells, 'The Doctrine of Avatars', Hinduism, ed.
by John R. Hinnells and Eric J. Sharpe, (Newcastle, 1972), p. 39

[68] Basham, p. 309

[69] Sir Monier Monier-Williams, Hinduism, (London, 1897), p. 108

[*] Although the Bahá'í Faith teaches that religous truths are relative, the
source of these truths is eternal, ie. God.

ninth century presented 'Alí as the promised <u>kalkin avatāra</u>.[70] It should

be made clear, however, that while the Bahá'í Faith speaks of Bahá'u'lláh

in terms of the <u>avatāra</u> tradition, it does not do so at the cost of its

original doctrines.   While the doctrines of the Faith are explained in

terms and concepts that have meaning to a Hindu villager, a compromise is

not made with ideas and beliefs that are contrary or at odds with its

fundamental principles.   In this regard Shoghi Effendi and the Universal

House of Justice continually warned Bahá'í teachers that the doctrines of

the Faith should not be altered for the benefit of others.[71] Therefore,

the Bahá'í Faith is not eclectic in its teaching approach: the movement's

strength lies in its ability to present the essential doctrines of its

founders in the language of various cultural traditions without changing

their original meaning

     Theoretically there are several differences between the Bahá'í concept

of manifestation and the doctrine of the <u>avatāra</u>.   First, as noted earlier,

in Bahá'í belief God does not descend into the physical world, as this

would limit His omnipotence.   Instead, His word is revealed through a human

messenger.   In contrast to the concept of revelation, the <u>avatāra</u> doctrine

seems to suggest the actual incarnation of the Sacred in human form.

Hence Geoffrey Parrinder in his work <u>Avatar and Incarnation</u> concludes that

'...Krishna is not a "human messenger", and his successive appearances are

not human geniuses but divine theophanies.'[72] Second, the <u>avatāra</u> doctrine

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[70] T. W. Arnold, <u>The Preaching of Islam</u>, (Lahore, 1961), p. 215

[71] 'The believers, and particularly those who have not had sufficient
      experience in teaching, should be very careful in the way they present
      the teachings of the Cause. Sincerity, devotion and Faith are not
      the sole conditions of successful teaching. Tactfulness, extreme
      caution and wisdom are equally important. We should not be in a hurry
      when we announce the message to the public and we should be careful
      to present the teachings in their entirety and not to alter them for
      the sake of others.' (Shoghi Effendi, quoted in <u>Directives from the
      Guardian</u>, p. 11)

[72] Parrinder, p. 231

is an Indian doctrine; that is, its list of divine personages does not
go beyond the pale of the Hindu cultural heritage (with the exception of the
Buddha), whereas the Bahá'í concept of manifestation, although strongly
oriented towards Near Eastern messengers, recognizes revelations from
other cultural traditions. However, on the existential level, on a plane
of meaning that is significant to the hopes and expectations of the
majority of men who are not involved in intellectualizing concepts into
abstractions, these differences diminish in importance. To the Indian
villager the distinction between incarnation and manifestation would be
a technical point that might be of some import to philosophy but not a
concern of religion. The fact that the Sacred has communed with the
profane displayed concern for man, and preached a message of love and hope,
is the real issue, and not the technicalities of how this communion occurs.
Moreover, the distinction between the two concepts is not always as clear
as it may at first appear. There is much room in the avatāra doctrine for
interpreting the avatāras as outstanding human beings or manifestations
of the God-head rather than divine theophanies. The modern saint,
Rāmakrishna, called them human beings with extraordinary powers and
entrusted with a Divine Commission.[73] From the other side, some of the
passages from Bahá'í scripture seem to indicate that the Sacred is present
in the personage of a manifestation. For example, one verse reads: 'Were
any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: "I am God", He,
verily, speaketh the truth, and no doubt attecheth thereto.'[74] Consequently,
the Bahá'í approach in India is not a dogmatic one. While Bahá'í teachers
assert that God is unlimited and beyond all physical form, they do not
demand new believers to distinguish between philosophical concepts. Instead,
they emphasize that Bahá'u'lláh is the latest representative of God; that

[73] Quoted in Parrinder, p. 230

[74] Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 54

he has appeared as a fulfillment of Hindu prophetic expectations; and

that he has come for the specific purpose of regenerating a moribund world.

Consequently, what is required of the new declarant is that he accept the

authoritative station of Bahá'u'lláh as the representative of the Sacred

in the world.

Moreover, the fact that the Bahá'í Faith makes mention of avatāras

outside the Hindu cultural tradition is not a real deterrent to the

movement's promotion in India.[75] The freedom of theological conceptualization

which has characterized religious thought in India allows for easier

acceptance of extraneous beliefs than does the dogmatism that has dominated

metapysical speculation in other cultures. For example, Rāmakrishna

found no difficulty in including Jesus as an avatāra, and Gandhi could

speak of Kṛṣṇa, Christ and Muḥammad in the same context.

While the Bahá'í Faith's scriptures give more emphasis to the

manifestations of Near Eastern origin, when speaking to Malwa villagers

teachers place greater emphasis on the Indian messengers, especially the

Buddha and Kṛṣṇa. Both of these figures are officially recognized

manifestations of God, and as such their names appear on any list of

manifestations published by the Bahá'í Faith. In addition, teachers often

use the example of Rāma who, although not recognized as a manifestation,

finds a place as a minor prophet.[76] The other avatāras of Vaiṣṇavite

theology, however, receive no mention.

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[75] The one exception to this rule is the personage of Muḥammad. Because
of historical circumstances Islám has become an evil word to many
Hindus, and as a result Bahá'í teachers try to avoid any direct
correlation between the Faith and Islám.

[76] Bahá'í teachings also contain references to minor prophets. 'Abdu'l-
Bahá distinguished between them as follows: 'The other Prophets
are followers and promoters, for they are branches and not independent;
they receive the Bounty of the independent Prophets, and they profit
by the light of the Guidance of the universal Prophets. They are
like the moon, which is not luminous and radiant in itself, but
receives its light from the sun.' (Some Answered Questions, p. 188)

While the Bahá'í Faith's publications of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh contain no references to either the Buddha or Krsna, 'Abdu'l-Bahá made mention of them and Shoghi Effendi confirmed their positions as manifestations of God. In Some Answered Questions 'Abdu'l-Bahá is recorded as referring to the Buddha in the following way:

> Buddha also established a new religion...The
> founder of Buddhism was a wonderful soul.
> He established the Oneness of God, but later
> the original principles of his doctrines
> gradually disappeared, and ignorant customs
> and ceremonies arose and increased until they
> finally ended in the worship of statues and
> images.[77]

Shoghi Effendi maintained that the Buddha was a manifestation, but added that his followers did not possess his authentic writings.[78] Concerning Krsna 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said that 'The Message of Krishna is the message of love. All God's prophets have brought the message of love.'[79] and Shoghi Effendi referred to Bahá'u'lláh as 'the Immaculate Manifestation of Krishna'.[80]

As a result of these interpretations, Bahá'í teachers in Malwa make continual reference to both Indian avatāras. For example, during her trip to India Hand of the Cause Rúḥíyyih Khánum always stressed to her audiences the oneness of the manifestations. As she stated in Barhana:

> The Bahá'í Faith is a new World Religion;
> when you become a Bahá'í you do not give up
> anything, you add to it; the Hindu adds faith
> in Christ, Muhammad, Buddha and the other
> great Prophets, to his faith in Krishna. The
> same is true of the Christian or the Muslim
> when he becomes a Bahá'í, he has to accept
> Buddha and Krishna.[81]

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[77] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 189

[78] 'Letter to an individual believer, December 26, 1941', Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, (Sydney, 1970), p. 41

[79] Paris Talks, p. 35

[80] Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 95

[81] Nakhjavani, p. 105

Similarly, the most popular introductory book on the Bahá'í Faith in Malwa,

The New Garden, a source specifically designed as a teaching guide for the

Indore Teaching Institute, says of Kṛṣṇa:

> Krishna, the Manifestation of God, brought a
> new civilization. He delivered man from evil
> and sorrow. He assured His followers that in
> future also God would manifest Himself to
> repeat what Krishna had done.[82]

Concerning the Buddha the book states:

> Buddha knew that the way to God was only through
> His Manifestation. He was the Manifestation of
> God, therefore, He did not want people to fight
> against each other in the name of God Whom they
> could not know except through Him.[83]

It would be incorrect, however, to think that previous avatāras

receive paramount importance in the educational programs of the Bahá'í

Faith in Malwa. While an attempt is made to correlate the station of 'Him

who God shall manifest' with the positions of Indian manifestations, the

greatest emphasis is placed on the role of the yugavatāra, the kalkin

of Hindu prophecy, Bahá'u'lláh.

As in other parts of the world, teachers in India emphasize that the

purpose of God's manifestation in this era is no less than the unification

of the entire planet. While previous manifestations have triumphed over

evil and restored righteousness and dharma, they have all been limited to

specific spheres of influence. Hence Rāma and Kṛṣṇa were not universal

manifestations. Bahá'u'lláh, on the other hand, is depicted as a

manifestation for all humanity, in whose yuga righteousness will be

established throughout the world. However, as in the past, the victory

of the manifestation over the forces of darkness requires a struggle.

Thus, Bahá'u'lláh suffered for humanity, subjecting himself to imprisonment

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[82] Hooshmand Fathea'zam, The New Garden, (New Delhi, 1971), p. 18-19

[83] Fathea'zam, p. 20

and banishment:

> The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound
> with chains that mankind may be released from
> its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a
> prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold
> that the whole world may attain unto true
> liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the
> cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the
> earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be
> filled with gladness.[84]

Yet, truth is always victorious. Just as Rāma succeeded in slaying Rāvaṇa,
Bahá'í teachers claim that Bahá'u'lláh's mission will be accomplished, and
it is for the purpose of bringing about this victory that they are spreading
his message to the masses of India.

In village teaching the doctrine of the manifestation is given the
most emphasis, as it is the feeling of the movement's administrators in
India that this concept embodies the essence of the Faith's teachings, and
therefore if the authority of the manifestation can be incorporated into
new declarants' 'world views', other doctrinal elements vill eventually
follow.   Consequently, while the essential doctrines outlined in the
first part of this chapter are currently being taught, they are generally
presented as adjuncts to the doctrine of the manifestation and not stressed
independently of that doctrine.   In the following paragraphs a few
examples of this approach will be given.

The God of which the Bahá'í Faith teaches is a personal God who
communes with men.   He is the Lord (Bhagavān), and His message is a
message of love.   At this point, however, one may ask, 'How does the
strict monotheism of Bahá'í scripture find a place in the villages of Malwa
where the Sacred has traditionally been seen to reside in numerous forms?'
In answering this question it must be realized that at this point in time
the Bahá'í Administrative Order is not overly concerned with the way
individuals conceive of the Divine.   The fact that any human conception

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[84] Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 99

of God is realized to be only a partial understanding of the Sacred leads

to a tolerant attitutude towards conceptualization.[85] This is not to say

that Bahá'í teachers in Malwa accept the doctrine of polytheism and try

to include it in their presentation of Bahá'í beliefs.   To the contrary,

the oneness of God is always preached.   Rather, it means that in the

Bahá'í Faith individual interpretation is not condemned: the approach to

metaphysics is a positive one whereby the relativity of religious truth is

accepted.   Historically, concepts of the Sacred have differed because room

for speculation about the nature of the Divine is infinite.   This being

the case, man's purpose is not to contemplate the unanswerable but to follow

the teachings of the manifestation, and consequently Bahá'í teachers do

not spend time negating traditional doctrines but constantly return to the

concept of the manifestation and his authority.   Emphasis is placed on

listening to his words and following his commands.   Thus it is believed

that the combination of education and role repetition will in time result

in new believers coming to understand and accept a more transcendent concept

of the Sacred.

There is, however, one way in which many teachers attempt to explain

the unity of the Divine to villagers and that is by describing individual

deities as expressions or attributes of the one Supreme Lord.   For example,

the author was informed by one village teacher that he portrayed God as the

Divine Being whose three most outstanding attributes are represented by the

figures of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva : Brahmā represents God's creative aspect;

Viṣṇu symbolizes His preserving powers; and Śiva exemplifies His destructive

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[85] 'The Divine Reality which is purified and sanctified from the
understanding of human beings and which can never be imagined by the
people of wisdom and of intelligence is exempt from all conception.'
('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 129) ' ''How bewildering
to me, insignificant as I am,''...''is the attempt to fathom the
sacred depths of Thy knowledge! How futile my efforts to visualize
the magnitude of the power inherent in Thine handiwork...'' '
(Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh,
p. 113)

energy.[86]

Regarding man, villagers are taught that his purpose is to know and love God, and that this is best achieved through proper action in the world. In this vein, the Bahá'í teachings greatly resemble those of the Bhagavad Gītā in which Krsna advances a doctrine of action devoid of personal desire. According to Radhakrishnan:

> The Gītā insists not on renunciation of action but on action with renunciation of desire. This is true samnyasa...The Gītā urges that the liberated soul can remain in service even after liberation and is opposed to the view which holds that, as all action springs from ignorance, when wisdom arises, action ceases.[87]

If proper action is the goal of man's life, the natural question which arises is: 'What is proper action?' In the villages of Malwa the sources of proper action (dharma) have traditionally been three: sacred books; myths and legends; and traditions of the ancestors, and of the three the last in the most universally accepted guide. Bahá'í teachers, however, define proper action as adhering to the teachings of the manifestation.[88] Thus the New Garden cites Krsna's demanding Arjuna to surrender himself as an example of man's duty to follow the commands of the manifestation:

> When we find the Manifestation of God and embrace His faith, we must obey His commands. This is what Krishna taught us in the Gita..."Surrendering in thought all actions to Me, regarding Me as the Supreme and restoring to Steadfastness in understanding, do thou fix thy thought constantly on Me"[89]

Of the doctrines being taught by the Bahá'í movement in Malwa the denial of reincarnation or transmigration of souls is at greatest odds with traditional village belief. According to the doctrine of samsara, the

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[86] This approach is by no means new. As early as Gupta times (fourth and fifth centuries A.D.) the trimūrti (triple form) had been propounded.

[87] Radhakrishnan, p. 351

[88] However, to this date they have not challenged conventional social norms. See Chapter 9.

[89] Fathea'zam, p. 18

the present life is only a link in a chain of births reaching back into

the past and extending into the future.   Movement along this chain is

determined by karma, a type of spiritual law of cause and effect.   Every

action has its reaction, and thus if one acquires bad karma through

improper action the consequences will become manifest in the future, which

on the popular level means being born as a member of a lower caste or

as a member of the animal kingdom.   Concerning this belief K. S. Mathur

reported that a Brāhman from village Potlod told him:

> A worldly existence is a stage of transition
> from past existence towards future worldly
> lives. Life is a process. It does not start
> with a child's birth; it does not end with
> a person's death. Birth and death are merely
> landmarks in one of a series of phases of
> worldly existence...Lord Krishna said in the
> Gitaji that just as a man discards old clothes
> and wears new ones, the soul discards worn and
> torn physical bodies and assumes new forms.[90]

As may be recalled, the Bahá'í Faith teaches that man has a soul which

upon passing from the body does not re-enter the temporal sphere of

existence but continues to evolve in other worlds of God.   Bahá'í teachings

do, however, contain a doctrine of the return of qualities. For example,

every year a tree will bring forth flowers. The flowers of this year are

the same as the flowers of last year in terms of their qualities, but they

are not the same individual flowers that actually bloomed. So in the human

world qualities can be said to return, but the individual soul does not.

In clarifying this position Shoghi Effendi stated:

> The Baha'i view of "reincarnation" is essentially
> different from the Hindu conception. The Baha'is
> believe in the return of the attributes and qualities,
> but maintain that the essence or the reality of things
> cannot be made to return. Every being keeps its own
> individuality, but some of his qualities can be transmitted.
> The doctrine of metempsychosis upheld by the Hindus is
> fallacious.[91]

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[90]Mathur, p. 79

[91]Quoted in James Heggie, Bahá'i Concordance, vol. II, unpublished, p. 82

Consequently, Bahá'í teachers explain the clothes referred to by Krsna as realities of the different worlds of God and not the physical bodies of this world. Moreover, while it is agreed that the karma one obtains in life influences his spiritual growth in future worlds, it is not accepted that an individual's position in the world is predetermined by the actions of past lives. Accordingly, one's dharma should not be determined by birth status but by the teachings of the manifestation of God.

In reflecting on the fact that numerous Hindu villagers have declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh, three factors must be kept in mind: first, the relative freedom of thought in Hinduism; second, the historico-synthetic approach of the Bahá'í Faith; and third, the awareness, even at the village level, of the decline of religion.

As noted earlier, theological speculation has always been tolerated to a greater degree in Hinduism than in other religious traditions. The new student of Hinduism is often amazed at the variety of 'religions' that are contained within the Hindu fold, for unlike Christianity or Islám there is no 'church' which controls doctrinal thought. While in Semitic religions acceptance of specific creeds has played an important role in determining one's position in the community, in Hinduism it has been the adherence to specific modes of action as determined by an individual's social status that has been considered crucial. Hence, what is believed is not as important as what is done. A man can be an atheist, a monist, a theist, a Vaisnavite, a Saivite, or a Vedāntin, and still be a Hindu, but if he violates his caste rules regarding marriage and commensality or assumes a ritual role which is not his by birth, he can be excommunicated from the community. Consequently, the fact that many Malwa villagers have accepted the claims of a new avatāra and are learning his doctrines does not mean that they are violating the laws of Hinduism. Moreover, since the Bahá'í movement—unlike other religions which have sought

converts in India - does not demand that a Hindu negate his past heritage
(to the contrary, Hinduism is accepted as a historically valid religious
tradition of which Bahá'u'lláh is the prophetic fulfillment), many
declarants still consider themselves Hindus: they are Hindus who believe
in the yugavatāra, Bahá'u'lláh.

In addition to villagers not having to denounce their Hindu heritage,
a general awareness of the decline of religion has aided the teaching
efforts of the Bahá'í Faith.[92] A villager from Garabeli expressed this
feeling in the following words:

> I used to watch the so-called believers of religion.
> They always spoke about religion,and they always
> uttered the name of God, but for their own selfish
> ends they cheated others in every way. Having seen
> these things I became very sad. I thought, why has
> God created such people who receive benefits from
> cheating and deceiving others.

As a result of such feelings, many villagers, especially the downtrodden,
are open to doctrines and concepts which they feel are advocating a return
to 'true' religion.

As a result of these factors, the belief dimension of the Bahá'í Faith
has not been difficult for village teachers to introduce into 'model
village' communities. However, on the other hand, Bahá'í beliefs and
doctrines have not completely replaced traditional beliefs. Rather, for
the majority of declarants in the five 'model village' communities
examined in this study, Bahá'í and traditional views have become integrated.
According to village teachers,[93] while declarants will admit to the belief
in one God, most of them will still offer pūjā at various village shrines
and temples. Similarly, most accept the concept of heaven (parlok), but
they also accept their predestined dharma. Consequently, it appears that

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[92] As mentioned earlier, Hindu cosmology asserts that we are presently
living in the kali-yuga, a time of religious decline.

[93] In the five communities the village teachers along with several declarants
from each village who have been participants in 'deepening' programs
are the most steeped in Bahá'í doctrines.

for the great majority of declarants in the five 'model villages' the
role of Bahá'í beliefs and doctrines is at the present time one of a 'half-
way house' whereby certain categories of thought are reserved for Bahá'í
concepts while others are the domain of traditional views.   In this
respect the categorization of Bahá'í and traditional beliefs into distinct
spheres of thought seems to some degree to reflect the social schizophrenia
mentioned in Chapter 4 which has become more characteristic of many village
communities as they try to adjust to the strain and stress brought on by
the forces of a changing world.   However, this phenomenon is also
indicative of the Bahá'í teaching approach in rural areas where greater
emphasis is placed on acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh as an avatāra than on such
concepts as the nature of the Sacred or life after death.   As a result,
it is this concept that finds universal acceptance in the 'model village'
communities, and one can hear the name Bahá'u'lláh as often as Rāma, Krsna,
or Śiva.   It is on this fundamental belief that the Bahá'í Administrative
Order is attempting to build, and thus, as we shall shortly see, all
activities in the rural communities are in some way related to the personage
of the yugavatāra.

Chapter 8   Ritual and Ceremony

In Chapter 4 it was noted that behavior patterns of Malwa villagers
have traditionally been influenced by a rigid system of ritual observance,
ritual being defined as a category of standardized behavior in which the
relationship between means and ends is either irrational or non-rational,
or in other words, conventional activity based on mystical notions, whereby
a specific action and its implied end cannot be inferred from observation.[1]
Even today ritual activity is part and parcel of villagers' life patterns,
and it can be manifestly observed on numerous occasions.   For example,
when making an offering to a god a devotee will follow a prescribed formula
in belief that the proper performance of symbolic activity will result in
beneficial consequences.   Similarly, specific events in an individual's
life cycle, such as birth, marriage, and death are commemorated by ritual
observances (samskāras), whose proper enactment insure the participant(s)
of a successful transition.   Thus, the cremated remains of a dead man are
often thrown into holy waters (in Malwa the Sipra river), an act which is
believed to gurantee the individual's salvation.   Ritual mentality even
influences the domain of dining, as it is believed that the improper
performance of eating - ie. eating certain foods which have been prepared
by a member of a caste lower than one's own - will result in personal
pollution, a state requiring the enactment of another ritual (often bathing
in special water) to remove the taint.

In contrast to popular Hinduism the Bahá'í Faith is notably lacking
in ritual content.   In terms of a definition of ritual which implies
standardized activity based on irrational or non-rational connections between
ends and means, one would conclude that the principal modes of behavior in

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[1] Max Gluckman, 'Les Rites de Passage', Essays on the Ritual of Social
    Relations, ed. by Max Gluckman, (Manchester, 1962), p. 22

the Faith's teachings that could be termed ritualistic would be prayer and fasting.[2] In addition, its scriptures prescribe two'passage'rituals which although not as elaborate as the Hindu samskaras, require specific modes of standardized behavior whose enactment implies a type of mystical relationship between ends and means.

There is, however, another type of standardized group activity in the Bahá'í Faith, the primary purpose of which is not the achievement of specific ends based on participants' performance of symbolic action but the development of group solidarity or social cohesion through commemoration of important events in the movement's past. For our purposes this type of activity will be referred to as 'ceremonious', following Max Gluckman's definition which says that ceremony refers to any complex organization of human activity which is not specifically technical or recreational, and which involves the use of modes of behavior which are expressive of social relationships, but which is not characterized by the implementation of mystical notions.[3]

In the following pages various Bahá'í rituals and ceremonies will be examined in greater detail, first in their normative forms, and then as they are being adapted to conditions in rural Malwa. Finally, a few examples of their implementation in several 'model village' communities will be cited.

The core of ritual activity in the Bahá'í Faith is prayer. While God only reveals Himself to a manifestation, Bahá'ís believe that

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[2] Chanting or reading prescribed prayers and abstaining from food for a given period of time are believed to be spiritually beneficial, a belief whose results cannot be inferred from observation.

[3] Gluckman, p. 22-23

individuals can have limited communication with the Sacred:

> There is a "language of the spirit", which is
> independent of speech or writing, by which God
> can commune with and inspire those whose hearts
> are seeking after truth, wherever they are,
> whatever their native race or tongue.[4]

Therefore, in the Bahá'í Faith prayer belongs to that dimension of religious

life that is concerned with 'spiritual experiences', '...those feelings,

perceptions, and sensations which are experienced by the actor or defined

by a religious group (or a society) as involving some communication,

however slight, with a divine essence, that is, with God, with ultimate

reality, with transcendental authority.'[5]   'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed this

connection with the Sacred in the following passage:

> The wisdom of prayer is this: That it causeth
> a connection between the servant and the True One,
> because in that state man with all heart and soul
> turneth his face towards His Highness the Almighty,
> seeking His association and desiring His love and
> compassion.[6]

The attitude of prayer, moreover, should be one of devotion.   God is

the beloved whom the believer longs to praise, and in so doing receives

the spiritual benefits of His returned grace.   Thus prayer is not only

communication with the Sacred but a form of worship inspired by feelings

of respect and love.   The true devotee is detatched from the bondage of

self and seeks his joy in exalting the Lord.[7]

There are essentially two types of prayer in the Bahá'í Faith:

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[4] J. E. Esslemont, Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, 3rd rev. ed., (Wilmette, Illinois, 1970), p. 88

[5] Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, American Piety: the Nature of Religious Commitment, (Berkely and Los Angeles, 1968), p. 15

[6] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í World Faith, p. 368

[7] 'Happy the days that have been consecrated to the remembrance of God, and blessed the hours which have been spent in praise of Him Who is the All-Wise.' (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 138)
'The essence of wealth is love for Me.   Whoso loveth Me is the possessor of all things, and he that loveth Me not is, indeed, of the poor and needy.' (Bahá'u'lláh, Words of Wisdom, in The Bahá'í Revelation, p. 138-139)

individual devotion, and communal worship.

Individual prayer consists of the devotee chanting, reading, or meditating upon the revealed verses of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, or 'Abdu'l-Bahá.[8] Bahá'ís are supposed to pray individually at least once each day, and thus prayer is considered an obligatory act, a requisite for man's spiritual growth.[9] The most important aspect of prayer, however, is not the words but the devotional attitude of love within the worshiper. Consequently, Bahá'í prayers are not viewed as magical mantras whose repetition alone can bring about a state of communion with the Divine but as objects of concentration which help elicit the feelings of selflessness necessary for such communication.

Bahá'í scriptures prescribe three obligatory prayers. The believer is free to choose from among these, but he is under obligation to recite at least one each day. The most commonly used obligatory prayer is the short prayer, which is reproduced below:

> I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created
> me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify,
> at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might,
> to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none
> other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-
> Subsisting.[10]

In addition, the believer is encouraged to chant and sing a variety of verses throughout the day.

The second type of devotional activity in the Bahá'í Faith is communal worship. In Bahá'í communal worship members of the local community gather together to share in the chanting of prayers and the reading of scriptural verse. At these meetings there is no congregational prayer, that is,

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[8] Believers can also offer their own prayers, but the revealed verses of the three prominent figures of the movement are considered to be of special spiritual significance.

[9] Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. III, p. 683

[10] Bahá'í Prayers, p. 117

'...formal prayer which is to be recited in accordance with a prescribed ritual,...'[11]; this practice being reserved only for the burial of the dead.[12] Furthermore, there is no leader who directs devotional activities; unlike Islám, the Bahá'í Faith has no <u>imáms</u> behind whom the faithful stand to recite their prayers. In fact, there are no priests or spiritual leaders of any kind in the Bahá'í community.[13] Rather, members of the faithful take turns reciting prayers and reading scripture, each believer being considered spiritually equal to the next.

The occasion on which community members gather for communal worship is known as the Nineteen-Day Feast. This gathering of the faithful was established by the Báb,[14] and as its title implies it takes place every nineteen days. The meeting also signifies the beginning of each month of the Bahá'í year, the calendar being divided into nineteen months of nineteen days each.

The Nineteen-Day Feast is held in a community's Bahá'í center, or in those communities where a center does not exist it is convened in any spot where the group can assemble, an individual home, or the open air. 'Attendance at Nineteen-Day Feasts is not obligatory but very important, and every believer should consider it a duty and a priviledge to be present on such occasions.'[15] Feasts occur on the following dates:

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[11] <u>A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</u>, (Haifa, 1973), p. 57

[12] As Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote: 'Regarding the practice of congregational prayer, the Guardian wishes you to know that this form of prayer has been enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh only for the dead. In all other circumstances there is no obligation whatever imposed upon the believers.' (<u>Bahá'í News</u> (United States and Canada), ⌗ 79, November, 1933, (West Englewood, New Jersey), p. 3)

[13] For a further discussion of this matter see Chapter 9.

[14] <u>Principles of Bahá'í Administration</u>, p. 17

[15] <u>Bahá'í News</u> (United States and Canada), ⌗ 210, August, 1948, (Wilmette, Illinois), p. 3

Table 9

Date	Feast Name
March 21	Splendour (Bahá)
April 9	Glory (Jalál)
April 28	Beauty (Jamál)
May 17	Grandeur (ʻAzamat)
June 5	Light (Núr)
June 24	Mercy (Rahmat)
July 13	Words (Kalimát)
August 1	Perfection (Kamál)
August 20	Names (Asmá')
September 8	Might ('Izzat)
September 27	Will (Mashíyyat)
October 16	Knowledge ('Ilm)
November 4	Power (Qudrat)
November 23	Speech (Qawl)
December 12	Questions (Masá'il)
December 31	Honour (Sharaf)
January 19	Sovereignty (Sultán)
February 7	Dominion (Mulk)
March 2	Loftiness (ʻAlá)

In these meetings the members must:

> ...assemble and associate with each other in the
> utmost love, joy, and fragrance. They must conduct
> themselves (in these Feasts) with the greatest
> dignity and consideration, chant divine verses,
> peruse instructive articles, read the Tablets of
> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, encourage and inspire each other with
> love for the whole human race, invoke God with
> perfect joy and fragrance, sing the verses,
> glorifications, and praises of the Self-Subsistent
> Lord, and deliver eloquent speeches.[16]

The Nineteen-Day Feast is divided into three distinct parts, only one
of which is devotional in nature. Future pages will discuss the
administrative and social portions of the meeting. As for now, only its
devotional aspects will be examined.

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[16] ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 17

The devotional portion of the Nineteen-Day Feast is considered the core of Bahá'í communities' spiritual activity, for it is at this time that members regularly share in the experience of communal worship. The devotional period takes place at the beginning of each meeting and consists of prayers and verses from the sacred writings[17] read by individual believers. As there are no spiritual leaders who select the verses to be read, the designated host (a duty which alternates between the members of the community) organizes the program, but individual participants are free to offer their own prayers and verses as they feel inspired. The session generally lasts between fifteen minutes and half an hour, but there is no prescribed limit to the length of the devotional period, and it is not concluded until all those who so desire have taken part.

The mood of the devotional period is meant to be one of communion between the believers and the Lord. It should be an experience in love and unity, the faithful freely partaking of the choice wine of the word of God and thereby becoming one in fellowship with Bahá'u'lláh. Hence, Bahá'í communal worship reflects the ideal of the equality of believers, a value which lies at the core of Bahá'í social norms.

As the above description reveals, Bahá'í communal devotion is completely lacking in symbolic drama (a traditional element of ritual activity), its only mode of action being the verbalization of the sacred word. Thus, in the Bahá'í Faith ritual performance is centered on the abstract word, and goal achievement does not depend on the enactment of sacremental gestures but on the experience of the 'mystery of the Holy Utterance'.[18]

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[17] Concerning the sacred writings Shoghi Effendi wrote: '...these should be regarded as the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and only these should be read during the purely devotional part of the Feast.' ('Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand, May 11, 1948', Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, p. 71)

[18] Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 52

A second ritual in the Bahá'í Faith is fasting. The author has

classified this abstention from food and water as a ritualistic act

because it is a standardized form of behavior - all Bahá'ís are required

to fast during the same period - and its enactment is believed to develop,

strengthen, and purify the soul, an implied end which cannot be verified

by observation.[19]

Regarding the regulations related to the Bahá'í fast, A Synopsis and

Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, a publication of the Universal House

of Justice which outlines the various laws and ordinances set down by

Bahá'u'lláh and is used by Bahá'ís throughout the world, cites the

following:

> ...We have enjoined upon you fasting during a
> brief period, and at its close have designated for
> you Naw-Rúz as a feast...The traveller, the ailing,
> those who are with child or giving suck, are not
> bound by the fast...Abstain from food and drink,
> from sunrise to sundown, and beware lest desire
> deprive you of this grace that is appointed in the
> Book.[20]

The fast is an annual event which starts on the second day of March and

ends on the twentieth day of the same month. During this nineteen day

period the believer is meant to abstain from food and drink from sunrise

to sunset.[21] 'It is essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of

spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the

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[19] The author is well aware of the numerous references in Bahá'í publications
to the fact that abstention from food alone does not have any effect
on the spirit. For example, 'But mere abstention from food has no
effect on the spirit. It is only a symbol, a reminder.' (ʿAbdu'l-
Bahá, quoted in Esslemont, p. 184). However,he still feels justified
in making the statement, because the proper fasting attitude of
abstinence from 'selfish and carnal desires' (Directives from the
Guardian, p. 29) is deemed beneficial to one's spiritual development,
an opinion which is beyond the bounds of rational verification.

[20] Shoghi Effendi's translation of Bahá'u'lláh, in A Synopsis and
Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 13

[21] All Bahá'ís between the ages of fifteen and seventy are enjoined to
keep the fast.

necessary readjustments in his inner-life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul.'[22]

The prescribed manner for starting each day of the fast involves arising before dawn to offer prayers of thanksgiving to God.[23] Having taken food and drink before the sun rises, the believer abstains from both during the daylight hours, breaking his fast at sunset after once again chanting prayers.

Like Bahá'í communal devotion, the fast accentuates the spiritual equality of believers; all members of the community regardless of social rank are required to humble themselves before the Lord in uniform abstention from the desires of the world. As a circular distributed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India aptly stated: 'We must fast because we will then in deed demonstrate our willingness to participate in unity with the entire Bahá'í world.'[24]

The final categories of behavior in the Bahá'í Faith that can be termed ritualistic are the 'passage' rites. In Bahá'í teachings there are no prescribed rituals to mark the birth of a child or to symbolize the transformation of an individual from the state of adolescence to that of maturity. According to the Bahá'í concept of independent investigation of truth, a child is not born a Bahá'í. Rather, each person must decide at the age of fifteen* whether or not he or she desires to become a member

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[22] Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Bahá'í News (United States and Canada), # 98, March, 1936, (West Englewood, New Jersey), p. 1

[23] 'For Thine ardent lovers Thou hast, according to Thy decree, reserved, at each daybreak, the cup of Thy remembrance, O Thou Who art the Ruler of rulers! These are they who have been so inebriated with the wine of Thy manifold wisdom that they forsake their couches in their longing to celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy virtues, and flee from sleep in their eagerness to approach Thy presence and partake of Thy bounty.' (Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Prayers, p. 169)

[24] Special circular relating to the Bahá'í fast, February, 1973, p. 3

* The age of maturity in the Bahá'í Faith.

of the community.   Accordingly, there is no ritual to denote social status

until after one has become part of the community, and hence there are only

two life cycle rituals in the Bahá'í Faith: the marriage ceremony, and

the service for the dead.

The Bahá'í Faith upholds marriage as a fundamental institution of

civilization,[25] and consequently there is no room within the community for

celibacy or asceticism.[26]   The scriptures enjoin monogamy,[27] the requirements

for marriage including the mutual consent of the individuals involved as

well as the written approval of their parents.   Accordingly, in the Bahá'í

community there are no arranged marriages without the participants'

consent, but on the other hand, marriage without the approval of parents

is not permitted.   In this vein, Shoghi Effendi reaffirmed that Bahá'u'lláh

had clearly stated that the consent of all living parents was a requisite

step in the actualization of a Bahá'í marriage.[28]

The marriage ritual is not elaborate;   it is simple and free from

dogmatic form.   In fact, there is only one utterance required of the

participants.   In front of at least two witnesses they must state, 'We

will all, verily abide by the Will of God'.[29]   Apart from this, individuals

are free to include in the ceremony whatever writings they please.[*] However,

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[25] 'Know thou that the command of marriage is eternal.   It will never be
     be changed or altered.' (Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. II, p.
     474)

[26] A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 47

[27] A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 39

[28] Bahá'í News (United States and Canada), # 202, December, 1947, (Wilmette,
     Illinois), p. 2

[29] A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 59 (For all laws
     concerning marriage, including those which have not as yet come into
     use in many parts of the Bahá'í world, see p. 39-41 of above
     mentioned synopsis).

[*] These can conclude selections from other religions' scriptures.

'There should be no comingling of the old forms with the new and simple one by Bahá'u'lláh, and Bahá'ís should not be married in the church or any other acknowledged place of worship of the followers of other faiths.'[30] Consequently, a Bahá'í marriage generally takes place in a Bahá'í center or a private home.   Again, as there are no priests in the Bahá'í Faith no one marries the couple.   Rather, by stating their vow in front of God and friends the individuals pronounce themselves married.   Then follows a joyous celebration at which guests partake of food, music, and song.

The prescriptions regarding the means of disposing of the dead in the Bahá'í Faith are more elaborate than those regarding marriage.   The dead are buried, and there is a prohibition against cremation.[31]   As it is believed that the body should be intermed as soon after death as circumstances permit, there is also an interdiction against carrying it more than an hour's journey from the place of death.[32]   Having been wrapped in a shroud of either cotton or silk, and having had a ring placed on its finger bearing the inscription 'I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detatched from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, the Compassionate'[33] the body should be placed in a coffin of stone or hard wood.

The observance should reflect attitudes of solemnity and respect, but there should be no wailing or lamenting on the part of attendants. Having gathered at the gravesight, community members hear the one congregational prayer in the Bahá'í writings – the obligatory prayer for the departed – read by a selected individual from among them.   After paying

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[30] The Bahá'í Community. A Summary of Its Organization and Laws, rev. ed., (Wilmette, Illinois, 1963), p. 44

[31] A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 62-63

[32] A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 62

[33] A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 62

their respects the friends leave, and, there being no post-internment rites
associated with Bahá'í burial, the ritual is completed.

Besides the three categories of ritual: prayer and devotion, fasting,
and rites of passage, Bahá'ís also observe certain occasions which are
ceremonious in nature. These events are known as holy days, and they are
nine in number:

Table 10[34]

Date	Holy Day
March 21	Feast of Naw-Rúz
April 21	Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh
April 29	Ninth Day of Ridván
May 2	Twelfth Day of Ridván
May 23	Declaration of the Báb
May 29	Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh
July 9	Martyrdom of the Báb
October 20	Birth of the Báb
November 12	Birth of Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'í ceremonies can be divided into two main categories: those
which are joyous and are referred to as festivals; and those which are
more solemn, the latter being commemorations of the deaths of the Faith's
founders. Both types, however, present opportunities for believers to be
made more aware of their religio-historical heritage, a process which
strengthens and reconfirms feelings of group solidarity.[35]

On holy days Bahá'ís are meant to suspend work, and in each community
gatherings are held at which the significance of the particular observance
is recounted. While the readings or talks delivered at holy day ceremonies

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[34] According to the Bahá'í calendar sunset is considered to be the end of
each day and the beginning of the next. Therefore, each holy day
commences at sunset of the previous day and ends at sunset on the
day listed.

[35] In this sense Bahá'í holy days perform one of the functions of rituals
outlined by Emile Durkheim. For a discussion of these functions see
Harry Alpert's essay on Durkheim and ritual in Emile Durkheim, ed.
by R. A. Nisbet, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965), p. 137-141.

should be related to the event being commemorated, there are no prescribed

formats for these occasions, and consequently, besides specific times at

which some of them are to be celebrated, Bahá'í ceremonies are generally

lacking in standardized content.   Each observance does have, however, a

general type of ceremonial activity associated with it, and in the

following paragraphs short descriptions of the events will be presented.[36]

The Feast of Naw-Rúz (March 21) marks the beginning of the Bahá'í

year and signifies the end of the fasting period.   This ceremony is one

of the joyous occasions referred to in Bahá'í writings as festivals.   On

the prescribed day members of the local community assemble for the purpose

of sharing in food, song, and general merriment.   Thus, like other New

Year celebrations throughout the world, the Naw-Rúz ceremony commemorates

by means of joyous community interaction the passing of the old and the

advent of the new.

The next three holy days (April 21, April 29, and May 2) take place

during the 'days of Ridván', a twelve day period marking Bahá'u'lláh's

last hours in Baghdád before his exile to Turkey.   Of the three, the

most important is the first, the day on which Bahá'u'lláh declared to

his followers that he was 'Him whom God shall manifest'.   In celebrating

this festival Bahá'ís throughout the world follow the advice of The Ridván

Tablet:

> Rejoice with exceeding gladness, O people of
> Bahá, as ye call to remembrance the Day of
> supreme felicity, the Day whereon the Tongue of
> the Ancient of Days, hath spoken, as He departed
> from His House, proceeding to the Spot from which
> He shed upon the whole of creation the splendours
> of His name, the All-Merciful.[37]

To commemorate the historical event that signified the beginning of a new

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[36] Since there are no priests to arrange or direct rituals or ceremonies,
it is the responsibility of the Local Spiritual Assembly to organize
the programs.

[37] Bahá'u'lláh, The Ridván Tablet, in The Bahá'í Revelation, p. 145-146

era,[38] members of local communities gather to hear writings and stories of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration, an announcement that transformed the sorrow of banishment into a message of eternal joy.

May 23 (two hours and eleven minutes after sunset on May 22), signalizes the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb. On this day the community gathers to hear the story of the meeting in Shíráz of the Báb and Mullá Ḥusayn.   During the observance appropriate passages are read from Bahá'í scriptures by which followers are reminded of the significance of the Báb's station in the unfoldment of God's plan for mankind.[39] Like the preceding ceremonies, the Declaration of the Báb is celebrated with great joy, and after the commemoration believers share food and fellowship.

May 29, and July 9, are the occasions for more solemn ceremonies. They signify respectively the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and the martyrdom of the Báb.[40] On these days followers assemble for the purpose of paying respect to the twin founders of their religion.   While they are not

[38] Before Bahá'u'lláh's ordered banisment and subsequent declaration, members of the community were still living in the Bábí era. Thus, although May 23, 1844, is often cited as the movement's point of origin, April 21, 1863, is the day '...whereon"all created things were immersed in the sea of purification,.."' (Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p.154)

[39] Although the Báb is held to be an independent manifestation of God, he is primarily viewed as being the herald of Bahá'u'lláh. For example, Shoghi Effendi states the following: 'The "Man-Child," mentioned in the Book of Revelation, destined to "rule all nations with a rod of iron," had released, through His coming, the creative energies which, reinforced by the effusions of a swiftly succeeding and infinitely mightier Revelation, were to instill into the entire human race the capacity to achieve its organic unification,...' (God Passes By, p. 58)

[40] The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh is to be commemorated at 3 am, and the Martyrdom of the Báb is to be observed at the noon hour. These times mark the actual hour that the occurrence took place and are therefore held to be significant - an example of the concept of sacred time.

mournful events like the Shí'ahcommemoration of the martyrdom of Husayn,[41] they are different in tone and character from Bahá'í festivals, the mood of the particpants being more reverent and subdued. During the observances believers listen to reconstructions of the events and offer verses of praise to the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

The final two holy days on the Bahá'í calendar are the Birthday of the Báb (October 20) and the Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh (November 12). Both ceremonies follow the pattern of other Bahá'í festivals, the believers coming together to voice the praises of the manifestations and to share in communal celebration.

As can be seen from the foregoing descriptions, one of the main functions of Bahá'í holy day observances is to promote group solidarity. During the ceremonies emphasis is not placed on communication with the Sacred or the performance of non-rational activity but on the common emotional response. By making followers aware of their religio-cultural heritage and allowing them to share in a communal situation the feelings of joy and sorrow, such occasions help instill in adherents' minds the attitudes of common purpose and identity. This function was understood by 'Abdu'l-Bahá when he wrote:

> ...it hath been decided by the desire of God that
> union and harmony may day by day increase among the
> friends of God...And the greatest means for the
> union and harmony of all is Spiritual Meetings.[42]

In attempting to introduce declarants in Malwa to the ritualistic and ceremonial aspects of Bahá'í community life the Bahá'í Administrative Order in India has adopted a policy of gradualism. While on the one hand new

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[41] The son of 'Alí and grandson of Muhammad martyred in 680 A.D. at Kerbela.

[42] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í World Faith, p. 413

believers are informed about the necessity of saying daily prayers,
fasting, holding feasts, and celebrating holy days, Bahá'í administrators
have not tried to overwhelm them by demanding sudden adherence to new
patterns of behavior which are in many ways alien to Hindu culture.
For example, the Bahá'í concept of prayer whereby the devotee's primary
activity is a verbalization of revealed verses is essentially different
from the popular form of pūjā found in Malwa which involves the use of
images and elaborate modes of symbolic drama.   Similarly, while Bahá'í
ritual and ceremony emphasizes the equality of all members of the community,
Hindu feasts and festivals are marked by caste exclusiveness.   As K. S.
Mathur reported:

> Similar restrictions are imposed on inter-caste
> participation in communal festivals and domestic
> ceremonies. In festivals in 'clean' caste houses
> all 'clean' castes participate on an equal basis.
> Members of 'unclean' castes may be allowed to
> participate but only in the capacity of servants,
> whereas 'untouchable' castes are invariably
> excluded from participation.[43]

Therefore, instead of requiring immediate and radical change in the behavior
patterns of new declarants, the Bahá'í Administrative Order is trying to
slowly modify ritualistic modes of activity by introducing certain aspects
of Bahá'í ritual and ceremony into a number of 'model village' communities.
In the process Bahá'í teachers do not malign traditional ritualistic
practices, neither do they demand, as do other religious groups,[44] that new
declarants completely abandon these observances.   Rather, an attempt is
being made to influence change through the positive process of religious
resocialization whereby old forms are tolerated at the same time as new ones
are being implemented.   Viewing the movement's consolidation program in
this light, we shall proceed to examine those aspects of Bahá'í ritual and

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[43] Mathur, p. 138

[44] For example the Neo-Buddhist Movement

ceremony which are presently being implemented in 'model village'

communities in rural Malwa.

The introduction of prayer presents a two-sided problem for Bahá'í

teachers in Malwa. First, unless a verse can be memorized, Bahá'í prayer

demands a literate devotee who can read from a prayerbook, and as we have

seen, the great majority of declarants in Malwa are illiterate. Second,

as mentioned earlier, prayer in the sense that it is understood in the

Bahá'í Faith is not part of the local ritual tradition, and therefore

its practice does not come easy to a Hindu declarant. In an attempt to

overcome these difficulties the Bahá'í Administrative Order has adopted

certain procedural methods of approach specifically designed for use in

a rural context.

The main method by which Bahá'í administrators are attempting to

introduce prayer into the lives of village believers is by making use of

those followers in various communities who are literate. The Ujjain

Regional Teaching Committee is continuously encouraging such individuals to

attend 'deepening' sessions in Indore and Ujjain, and in many instances

it pays for their transportation costs. At these sessions literate

believers are instructed to help illiterate declarants by reading them the

prayers and writings, thus allowing them to come into contact with the

holy word. In addition, these believers are encouraged to help organize

sessions of communal worship in their respective communities at which they

can teach fellow declarants short prayers and devotional phrases.[45]

The second means of introducing prayer into the village communities

is through the implementation of the region's corps of travelling teachers.

Of all the believers in rural Malwa this group are the most 'deepened' in

the teachings and practices of the Bahá'í Faith, and they form the

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[45] For example, the emphasis placed on prayer at the 'deepening' session
cited in Chapter 6 was for the purpose of encouraging participants
to organize similar activity in their communities.

best channel of communication between the Bahá'í administrative system
and the local village communities.

It has been the general feeling among members of the Ujjain Regional
Teaching Committee that rather than spending time teaching declarants
numerous devotional verses, the travelling teachers should concentrate on
encouraging new believers to recite one short prayer or devotional phrase.
Consequently, during their rounds travelling teachers speak to declarants
about the importance of saying the short obligatory prayer[46] or the
traditional Bahá'í devotional phrases 'Alláh'u'Abhá'[47] and'Yá Baha'u'l-Abhá'[48]
Furthermore, travelling teachers are instructed to meet with the more
literate members in the various communities and to encourage them to initiate
feasts and group devotions in their respective villages.   The philosophy
behind this approach is the same one used to justify the training of
individual believers at the Indore Teaching Institute; namely, that
although the majority of declarants are not able to read prayers, their
presence at occasions where the holy verses are being verbalized will
provide them with spiritual benefits.[49]   In this vein, one specific
project launched in 1971 required travelling teachers to encourage village
believers to assemble for dawn prayers.[50]

While the training of literate villagers to act as initiators of
Bahá'í devotional activity has to some degree alleviated the problem of

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[46] See page 213

[47] See page 171

[48] Known as the Greatest Name it can be translated either as 'O Glory of
      Glories', or 'O Glory of the All-Glorious'.

[49] 'No breeze can compare with the breezes of Divine Revelation, whilst
      the Word which is uttered by God shineth and flasheth as the sun
      amidst the books of men.' (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf,
      p. 42-43)

[50] Unpublished correspondence of the National Spiritual Assembly of the
      Bahá'ís of India, 'Letter to the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee,
      March 5, 1971'

literacy being a prerequisite for contact with the 'divine' word, the
question of cultural alienation still remains.   For this reason, a form
of devotional activity more easily integrated into the Indian cultural
context has been adopted.   This is the Bahá'í bhajan

A bhajan is a style of rythmic song which has long been popular among
bhakti sects in India.[51] Even today, many wandering bards and devotional
singers perform these songs in towns and villages, and their voices are
a familiar sound in the rural areas of Malwa.   When a bhajan is performed
in a group situation one of the devotees stands and sings the various
verses of the song while the entire assemblage joins in unison to sing
the words of the refrain.   Bhajans' contents are generally devotional in
nature, their verses extolling the deeds of gods, saints and heroes.

A large number of Bahá'í bhajans have arisen in India during the mass
teaching era, many of them being the creations of village believers.
Although technically not prayers, their verses of praise give them a
definite devotional character, and as a result bhajans have been approved
by the Indian National Spiritual Assembly as an acceptable form of Bahá'í
activity.   In order that the reader might obtain a better understanding
of the form and content of Bahá'í bhajans, verses from three such songs
have been translated below.

A. The Kalkin Avatāra[52]

Refrain –   Arise O children of India, the kalkin avatāra has come.
             Viṣṇu's avatāra has come with the name Bahá'u'lláh.

1.   Nowhere in the entire world can the influence of religion
             be seen,
             the wicked have obtained everything,
             the truthful have lost everything.

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[51] 'a musical verse recounting the attributes and deeds of the Lord.'
     (Mānak Hindī Koś, vol. IV, ed. by Rāmacandra Varmmā, (Prayag, 1965),
     p. 180)

[52] Bahāī Gīt, (New Delhi, n.d.), p. 14

According to the Gītā the time of Viṣṇu's avatāra

has come. ------ Awake! (refrain)

2.   The Gītā has said when circumstances are such,

religion is again established, just as it has happened today.

In order to save the righteous, kalkin avatāra

has come. ----- Awake! (refrain)

3.   Foolish people have not recognized that Viṣṇu's avatāra has

come again,

Rādhā [53] and Arjuna[54] knew that this (Bahá'u'lláh) was the

Lord's new abode.

The eternal has once again manifested himself, the avatāra

of God. ------ Awake! (refrain)

B. Bahā, Thy Love[55]

Refrain   Bahā, thy love and majesty are boundless

Whoever comes into thy shelter, his boat[56] crosses the shore.

1.   Thou have made the sun and the moon, and caused the stars

to shine.

Without the use of hands thou built the mountains and

caused the beautiful flowers to blossom. ----- Bahā! (refrain)

2.   Look at the rumbling clouds, the flashing lightning,

the falling rain.

See the koyal[57] singing with a sweet voice

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[53] Krsna's favourite maiden, her relationship with the god-hero has come
to symbolize divine love.

[54] One of the heroes of the Mahābhārata (see Chapter 7)

[55] Bahāī Gīt, p. 6

[56] In bhakti poetry a boat often denotes the vehicle of salvation. For
example, the sixteenth century poet Sūrdās wrote:
      I have heard people say that you have brought many across,
      I want to board the boat, but I can't pay the boatman.
      Take me across, O great king, Lord of Braj.
(S. M. Pandey and N. H. Zide, The Poems of Surdas, poem #7, University
of Chicago, unpublished)

[57] The koyal (English spelling - koel) is a black cukoo often alluded to
in bhakti poetry. For example, the fifteenth century poetess Mīrabāī
made use of the koyal in the following passage:
      O Dark One (Kṛṣṇa) today is a colorful festival
      In the rumbling masses of black rain clouds lightning flashes
      Frog, peacock, papila bird speak, the koyal is calling
      Mīrā's lord is clever (Kṛṣṇa), her strength is in his feet
(Mīrabāī kī Padāvalī, ed. by Ācārya Paraśurāma Caturvedī, (Prayag,
1970), p. 142)

a <u>raga</u>[58] of love. ----- Bahā! (refrain)

3.   Saints and prophets all sing of thy attributes

        Having sung all the religious scriptures, they fall exhausted.

        Thy shore cannot be obtained ----- Bahā! (refrain)

C. Lord Bahā's Story[59]

Refrain Come O children let us show you a glimpse of India

        Come O devotees we will tell you the story of Lord Bahā.

        Having recounted his tales let us make life fruitful.

1.   He was well-born, but his life was not one of pleasure

        He deprived himself to serve the poor

        Passing his entire life in prison, he revealed the book

        of knowledge. ----- Come! (refrain)

2.   He lit his life's lamp with divine knowledge

        Therefore he received from the Lord the name Bahā.

        His glorifications of God resound with love

        and truth. ----- Come! (refrain)

As the form and content of the above songs reveal, Bahá'í <u>bhajans</u> are reminiscent of traditional Hindu <u>bhakti</u> poetry. Their repetition of verses of praise filled with the glorifications of God and His <u>avatāra</u> mirrors the form used by medieval <u>bhakti</u> poets. Furthermore, the numerous references to Hindu cultural images (Viṣṇu, Rādhā, Arjuna, <u>koyal</u> etc.) reveal an attempt to correlate Bahá'u'lláh with traditional devotional symbols. Because of this identification with traditional cultural forms and symbols, Bahá'í <u>bhajans</u> are more meaningful to Hindu declarants than the standard style of Bahá'í devotion (prayer), and consequently they have become the most popular form of devotional activity in rural Malwa, and travelling teachers often use them as a means of involving illiterate declarants in Bahá'í communal gatherings, both feasts and holy day observances.

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[58] '...the name given to a class of modal melodies which constitute the highest expression of Indian classical music.' (Benjamin Walker, <u>Hindu World</u>, vol. II, (London, 1968), p. 266)

[59] <u>Bahāī Gīt</u>, p. 13

While a definite effort is being made to introduce some type of
devotional activity into the 'model village' communities, the emphasis
placed on fasting and the observance of 'passage' rites has not been as
acute. Although articles concerning these injunctions appear in the
written material sent to the villages, and their significance is stressed
in 'deepening' courses, there has not been an active campaign to implement
them in village life. It is commonly felt by Bahá'í administrators in
India that at this stage in the development of Bahá'í communities in rural
Malwa the most meaningful aspects of Bahá'í life to be emphasized by
village teachers are the fundamental doctrines of the oneness of God, His
manifestations, and His creatures, and the communal gatherings, whether
devotional, ceremonious, or administrative in nature, and not the finer
laws of fasting, marriage, etc. Consequently, great import has not been
attatched to the latter, for they would require declarants to make radical
changes in conventional behavior patterns, a process which if forced upon
new believers might well act as a deterrent to the development of the
more important elements of the Bahá'í educational program, if not to the
entire movement. This is not to imply that within 'model village'
communities there are no individuals who fast or obey the finer laws of
the Faith, as in many of these communities there are persons who do so,
especially among the travelling teachers and village primary school teachers
(see Chapter 11). Rather, it is to point out that in terms of mass
consolidation these elements are not considered to be the most important of
the movement's objectives. It is interesting to note, however, that while
there have been no Bahá'í burials in rural Malwa,[60] several Bahá'í weddings
have taken place. In each case the ceremony was performed after the
Hindu wedding, a procedure which if certain conditions are observed is
permissible.[61]

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[60] There have been Bahá'í burials in the cities of Gwalior and Ujjain.

[61] Bahá'í News (United States), # 283, September, 1954, (Wilmette, Illinois),
    p. 2

The Administrative Order is, however, trying to introduce the
Nineteen-Day Feast and holy day observances into the 'model village'
communities.[62] Behind this policy lies the assumption that if declarants
can begin to identify with Bahá'í group activities, not only will their
new beliefs be strengthened, but they will begin to develop a sense of
Bahá'í communal identity which will in time pave the way for meaningful
changes in their patterns of behavior.   Consequently, all regular channels
of communication linking village communities with the greater administrative
institutions of the Faith are employed to help in this process. Newsletters
and circulars sent to village communities list the dates of feasts and
holy days and remind the declarants of the import of observing such
occasions. Moreover, Bahái Darśan, the newspaper published by the Ujjain
Regional Teaching Committee and distributed in many of the local villages,
often prints special commemorative articles to mark the holy days.   For
example, in October of 1973 a special issue was published in observance
of the Birth of the Báb in which the major events of the young Siyyid's
life were recounted.[63] In the same manner, the Indore Teaching Institute
includes in its training classes instructions concerning the celebration
of feasts and holy days[64], and travelling teachers are specifically
instructed how and when feasts and holy day celebrations should be
observed.   In this regard, on one of the examinations periodically
administered by the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee for the purpose of
ensuring that travelling teachers are maintaining efficiency in their work,
the latter were asked to list the date and purpose of each holy day.[65]

[62] Unpublished correspondence of the National Spiritual Assembly of the
Bahá'ís of India, 'Letter to all regional teaching committees,
December, 30, 1972'

[63] Bahái Darśan, October, 1973, (Ujjain), p. 2 and 4

[64] For example, whenever an instruction session coincides with a feast day
a special Unity Feast is held during which participants share prayers,
bhajans, and food. See Chapter 9.

[65] The author personally perused examination questions.

In the five 'model village' communities examined in this study, the
implementation of Bahá'í ritual and ceremonial activity has only been
partial. According to village teachers, while devotional meetings and
holy day celebrations are held with some degree of regularity, on an
individual level compliance is noticeably lacking. For example, in each
community individual prayer and fasting are practiced by only a handful of
believers, and in most cases these persons have had extensive contact with
Bahá'í institutions outside of their village; that is, they have attended
teaching institutes and regional conferences or acted as either travelling
teachers or village primary school teachers.[66] Such 'deepened' believers
appear, however, to be ardent in their endeavors; most of them know several
prayers from memory and recite them daily. One villager in Rīchā had even
memorized the entire Tablet of Ahmad, a prayer of over eighty lines in
length held to be invested with special spiritual potency. Moreover,
while the majority of declarants in these communities do not pray daily,
they do know the Bahá'í devotional phrases 'Alláh'u'Abhá' and 'Yá Bahá'u'l-
Abhá,' and as a result both can be heard within the villages at regular
intervals.

While individual prayer and fasting are not a common phenomenon in
these communities, the Nineteen-Day Feast is periodically celebrated,
although according to village teachers attendance at the meetings often
varies. The fluctuation in attendance would fit into the Hindu ritual
idiom where, except for certain 'high' castes, there is no specific time
for worship, and consequently people attend to these matters only when they
feel they have a need to do so. K. S. Mathur found in his village that
'Such a view about the use of religious worship is shared by most of the
young and able-bodied men of all castes.'[67]

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[66] In the five villages such 'deepened' Bahá'ís would total no more than
fifteen in number, or approximately three declarants per community,
and among these very few would keep the fast.

[67] Mathur, p. 166

An example of the celebration of the Nineteen-Day Feast in rural Malwa was the Feast of Sovereignty (Sultán) held in village Rīchā on the evening of January 18, 1974. Preparation for the meeting began during the afternoon when the resident Bahá'í travelling teacher visited the community's various declarants to remind them that the meeting would take place in the evening under one of the large trees situated on the edge of the village. At about half past seven believers began to assemble, and by eight o'clock there were fourteen men present including Brāhmaṇs, Rājputs Chamārs, and Balāis, all of whom sat themselves in a circle around a small fire.[68] The devotional part of the meeting lasted approximately fifteen minutes. It began with a prayer read by the Bahá'í teacher who then proceeded to elaborate on the import of the Nineteen-Day Feast in the life of a Bahá'í community. Upon the conclusion of his talk a second member of the community (a Brāhmaṇ) read one of The Hidden Words. This was followed by the reading of several more verses from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá (by a Brāhmaṇ and a Rājput) and another short invocation by the village teacher. Before closing the devotional period the teacher reminded the participants of the importance of repeating the devotional phrase 'Alláh'u'Abhá' during the course of their daily work. He then ended the devotions with a prayer.

While short in duration the atmosphere surrounding the session was one of gaiety and friendship. Between prayers participants conversed with one another and there was no sign of caste exclusiveness - 'low' caste members were not isolated or segregated in any way. Moreover, following the termination of the session all of the members shared roasted nuts and engaged in spirited social intercourse.

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[68] At the time of the feast this number accounted for approximately half of Rīchā's male declarants over the age of fifteen years, and according to the village teacher they formed the core of the village's Bahá'í community, being the most active declarants in Rīchā. The following month another twenty villagers enrolled in the Faith.

As can be gleaned from the description of the Rīchā meeting,
devotional sessions in the village are not elaborate; they are usually
short in duration and center around specific literate believers.
According to the resident teachers in the other four villages the same
pattern holds in their communities, a situation which is no doubt partially
a consequence of illiteracy. It is also an indication, however, of the
difficulty involved in trying to introduce a culturally alien institution
into village life, and consequently it would appear that the future of
communal worship in rural Malwa depends on the development of bhajan
sessions which provide both a wider base for believer participation and a
more intimate link with Hindu cultural forms and symbols. However, at
this point in time the Bahá'í Administrative Order is primarily concerned
that declarants assemble, even for short periods, and that the meetings
reflect an atmosphere of unity and brotherhood. Thus, the fact that in
both Kāsod and Garabelī members of the Balāī caste read from Bahá'í
scriptures is considered more important than the length of meetings or
the number of active participants, for in traditional Hindu practice an
'unclean' casteman is not allowed to learn or have access to the Vedas.[69]
Consequently, for the moment one of the main functions of the Nineteen-
Day Feast is to demonstrate to declarants that in Bahá'í communal worship
there is no variation of roles based on caste lines and thereby contrast
it with the assumptions of orthodox Hinduism.[70]

During the author's stay in Malwa only one Bahá'í holy day arose (Naw-
Rúz). However, in addition to supplementary information supplied by
village teachers, a written report describing another holy day observance
held earlier in the year (the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh) was obtained, and

[69] Basham, p. 145

[70] 'In the fasts and festivals they celebrate, the rites of passage they
solemnise and the deities they worship variations on caste basis
are visible.' (Mathur, p. 164)

consequently a few words concerning these two occasions will be mentioned here.

On the evening of March 20, 1974, the Naw-Rúz festival was celebrated by the Bahá'í community in Manāsā. The ceremony took place in the village's Bahá'í bhavan , a building which acts both as a school for children during the day and a center for community meetings and celebrations. The resident school teacher directed the observance at which 31 male believers were in attendance (29 Rājputs, 1 Chamār, and 1 Balāi). After reading a prayer and a selection from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh the teacher spoke to the assembled group about the meaning of Naw-Rúz, comparing it to Hindu festivals and pointing out that just as Divālī,[71] Holī,[72] and Daśahra[73] were times for rejoicing, the Bahá'í New Year observance was an occasion for community celebration. Following his speech bhajans were sung and participants conversed freely in an atmosphere of gaiety and friendship.

A letter written to the National Spiritual Assembly by a member of another 'model village' community recounting the events that took place at the observance of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh reveals a similar scene to the one in Manāsā:

> I am very happy to inform you that in our village
> the birthday of Bahá'u'lláh was celebrated with
> great joy and spirit. On this auspicious occasion
> a prayer was first read by the Secretary of the
> Local Spiritual Assembly. After this, other members
> of the community read from The Hidden Words, Selected
> Writing's of Bahá'u'lláh, and other Bahá'í books.
> While portraying the life of Bahá'u'lláh, Govind
> Prasād brought to light the important aspects of the
> Bahá'í Faith...After this, Bahá'í songs were sung,
> which made for an enthusiastic atmosphere among the
> believers.[74]

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[71] A Hindu festival celebrated on the day of the new moon of Kārtik (the eighth month of the Hindu year, October – November) when lamps are lit in houses to symbolize the victory of good over evil.

[72] A Hindu festival celebrated on the last day of the month of Phāgun (February – March) when participants throw colored water on one another.

[73] A Hindu festival celebrated on the tenth day of Kvār (September – October) to commemorate the victory of Rāma over Ravaṇa.

[74] Unpublished correspondence of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India.

A village bhavan

According to village teachers the formats of the celebrations cited
above are typical of holy day observances in the five 'model village'
communities.   Thus, like devotional sessions, Bahá'í ceremonies are not
elaborate affairs.   Rather, when observed they appear to be simple
gatherings organized by village teachers at which the assembled declarants
listen to Bahá'í writings and songs and are reminded by means of
instructional talks of the significance of particular events deemed
sacred in the Bahá'í world, a process which Bahá'í administrators and
teachers hope will provide new believers with the foundations for a new
religious mythology (a mythology expressed through the revealed word
rather than symbolic drama) which will act as a socio-psychological
reinforcement to group identity.

Before closing it should be pointed out that with a few exceptions
declarants in the five communities have not given up their traditional
patterns of ritual behavior, nor has it been part of the Bahá'í
Administrative Order's teaching and consolidation policy to demand
this of them.   Hence, while members attend Bahá'í meetings they also offer
pūjā in village shrines and temples and abide by caste regulations
concerning marriage and dining.   For example, in Ríchā a declarant who
told me he was travelling to nearby villages spreading the message of
Bahá'u'lláh also displayed his sacred thread[75] and said he performed daily
pūjā in the main village temple.   Similarly, in Karaṅkaní a villager
could speak of Bhagavān Bahā and offer coconut to Nārāyaṇa![76]   Moreover,
in Manāsā village icons representing Rāma, Hanumant, and Ganeśa are housed
in one corner of the Bahá'í bhavan.   In all five communities teachers

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[75] A cord of three threads, each of nine twisted strands, hung over the
   left shoulder and under the right arm, traditionally donned by
   'clean' caste Hindus but today primarily worn by Brahmans.
   It symbolizes one's initiation into Hindu society and has special
   religious significance for the orthodox.

[76] A god associated with Visnu.

established the significance of these observations by confirming that
declarants still functioned within the Hindu ritual idiom, the main
difference between them and other villagers being their acceptance of
Bahá'u'lláh and their participation in Bahá'í meetings.   Consequently,
it appears that in these communities feasts and holy day observances
are providing believers with new socio-religious frames of reference, but
they have not as yet replaced traditional forms of ritual behavior.

Chapter 9   Social Principles

One of the striking differences between the 'world view' of the Bahá'í

Faith and that of traditional Hinduism is their respective attitudes

towards social stratification.   In Bahá'í teachings all men are considered

equal in the eyes of God, and consequently within the Bahá'í community there

is ideally no hierarchy of status groups.[1]   On the other hand, in

traditional village Hinduism a man is ranked according to his caste, an

institution which not only determines the nature of his social relationships

but reflects his state of purity and therefore his proximity to God.

Mention has already been made of this hierarchical structure in Chapter

4, but since its assumptions are at such great odds with the social norms

of the Bahá'í Faith and are ones with which the movement must come to

terms in both its teaching and consolidation programs, this chapter will

commence by citing a few examples of how the ideals of social inequality

are manifested in the traditional village, specifically, as regards the

behavior patterns of 'unclean' and 'untouchable' caste members. Concerning

this subject, the author is well aware, as was stated in Chapter 4, that

the influences of modernization are having a disruptive effect on the

traditional system.   However, the ideal of social inequality still remains

part and parcel of the contemporary villager's 'world view', and therefore

while these examples are not meant to be a definitive statement regarding

the present condition of the lower castes in rural Malwa, it is the author's

conviction that they reflect the essential social norms of popular Hinduism.

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[1] In a normative sense the Bahá'í Faith is an egalitarian religion.
    Structurally, however, there exists a hierarchy of status groups, the
    top positions being held by the manifestation, his successors, and
    members of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Regarding the latter,
    however, it should be pointed out that according to Bahá'í ideals
    it is the institution and not the individual members that is raised
    to a position of authority.

Two status groups which have traditionally been ranked very low in the village social system, and ones whose numbers in terms of Bahá'í enrollment are quite high,[2] are Balāis and Chamārs. Balāis are considered Śudras and are classified as 'unclean', while Chamārs are designated 'untouchables'.[3] Both castes receive their low status as a result of their traditional occupations.[4] Balāis were a weaver caste, and their work brought them into contact with a bow whose string (being made of animal tissue) defiled them.[5] Likewise, Chamārs traditionally worked with leather,[6] and therefore they were looked upon as being impure. As a consequence of their condition the living quarters of both Balāis and Chamārs are separated from 'clean' caste dwellings, and their members are often denied the use of specific village social services. Moreover, in terms of general social intercourse certain spacial taboos are applied to them.

The ground plan of most villages in Malwa, and indeed in all of India, is characterized by its separation of 'clean' caste dwellings from 'unclean' and 'untouchable' homes. Both K. S. Mathur and Adrian Mayer found this type of housing pattern in their respective Malwa villages,[7] and all of the 'model village' communities investigated in this study were

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[2] Although there are no official records of the caste backgrounds of declarants in Malwa, I was informed by village teachers that members of the two castes make up a considerable number of lower caste declarants in the region.

[3] The main difference between the two being that theoretically the former do not spread pollution by physical contact. See Mathur, p. 69

[4] What is considered important is not the actual occupation of the individual involved, but the traditional occupation of his caste. For example, most Balāis and Chamārs are cultivators or field laborers, but their traditional occupations still defile them.

[5] According to the traditional scheme of values contact with parts of remains of animals is considered defiling

[6] Often as skinners or tanners

[7] Potlod in Indore district and Ramkheri in Dewas district – see Introduction, p. 7.

layed out along similar lines.   Consequently, Balāis and Chamārs cannot

live among the higher castes but must reside in separate wards outside

the main area of village habitation.   This generally means that they live

on the periphery of the village, and in some cases their dwellings can be

separated from the main settlement by a considerable distance.   Moreover,

'clean' caste members will rarely enter such wards.

Just as they are isolated from other members of the village in terms

of living space, Balāis and Chamārs have traditionally been descriminated

against regarding the use of many village social services.   For example,

Brāhmans and Nāīs will not usually serve them,[8] and they are not allowed

to use 'clean' caste wells but must draw water from their specially

designated springs.   As was pointed out in Chapter 4, the main reason for

such segregation is the belief that direct physical contact with impure

castes will taint the 'clean' casteman.   The social inequality these

castes face is also noticeable during times of general social intercourse.

Thus, they must address higher castemen with titles of respect, and they

are expected to sit in separate groups away from the main body of villagers

during communal gatherings.   In this respect Mathur noted the following:

> My observations in Potlod show that on occasions
> of communal gatherings, care is taken by
> everybody to accord due prestige to others
> Brahmin and Rajput are almost always given a
> patient hearing when they speak. Members of
> other 'clean' castes sit in a body whereas members
> of 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes sit a little
> away from the main body and are expected to be
> patient listeners only.[9]

And,

> When an 'unclean' or 'untouchable' caste man visits
> a 'clean' caste house, he is treated with a certain
> contempt, which, however, is seldom taken to be so
> by the latter, since he has become accustomed to
> such behaviour. He is not allowed to enter the house,
> no seat is offered to him; he usually sits on the
> naked ground just outside the threshold.[10]

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[8] Each caste usually has its own designated members who perform these tasks.

[9] Mathur, p. 122

[10] Mathur, p. 137

'Unclean' and 'untouchable' castes also have distinct deities, rituals, and festivals which distinguish them from higher castes. In addition, in those festivals which are communal in nature they have traditionally had to participate on an unequal basis, often acting as servants to the 'clean' castes, and in many instances 'untouchable' members have not been allowed to participate. Moreover, although they are legally permitted to enter village temples, most 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castemen will not frequent these places because they are not allowed to worship in the same way that 'clean' Hindus do.[11] Therefore, in general the role of 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes in village social life has been one of isolated servitude.

While in popular Hinduism patterns of status group interaction are based on concepts of purity and pollution and their implications of human inequality, the principles guiding social interaction in the Bahá'í community are more egalitarian in nature. The core of these principles is the concept of the oneness of mankind, a belief which 'Abdu'l-Bahá designated as the foundation of the Faith of God [12] and Shoghi Effendi referred to as the most vital of all the principles found in Bahá'u'lláh's tablets.[13]

According to the concept of the oneness of mankind all men are believed to be equal in the eyes of God. While they may differ in their potential capacities - and will of necessity attain to different intellectual

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[11] Mathur, p. 166

[12] 'In this wondrous Revelation, this glorious century, the foundation of the Faith of God and the distinguishing feature of His Law is the consciousness of the Oneness of Mankind.' (Quoted in Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 36)

[13] Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 216-217

and socio-economic stations in life – they are all His children, and
their existence is sustained by His power.[14]   Consequently, the social
principles of the Bahá'í Faith are an extension of its metaphysical
beliefs.   As in Islám the emphasis placed on the Oneness and Unity of the
God-head results in a corresponding drive towards unity in the human
sphere; God is the father of all men, and hence all of his children are
members of one family.   In the words of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Ye are the fruits
of one tree,and the leaves of one branch.'[15]

Unlike popular Hindu doctrine, the Bahá'í teachings do not posit a
belief in intrinsic impurity.   As was noted in Chapter 4, according to
Hindu belief man is born in a state of neutrality and is extremely
susceptible to impurities.   This doctrine naturally leads to a
hierarchical stratification of things 'pure' and 'impure', and in the human
sphere results in concepts of ritual inequality and their social
manifestations of 'untouchability' and commensal excluseivness.   Bahá'í
doctrine, on the other hand, accepts that man is born good, and moreover that
there is nothing in existence that is intrinsically impure or evil.[16]
Not being divided into a range of pure and impure categories, all creation
is viewed as a unity held together by the laws of love and attraction:

> Unity is necessary to existence. Love is the very
> cause of life; on the other hand, separation brings
> death. In the material world of creation, for instance,
> all things owe their actual life to unity. The elements
> which compose wood, mineral, or stone, are held
> together by the law of attraction.[17]

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[14] 'In the eyes of the Creator all His children are equal; His goodness is
poured forth on all.' (Paris Talks, p. 138)

[15] Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 218

[16] 'In creation there is no evil; all is good.' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered
Questions, p. 250)

[17] Paris Talks, p. 139–'So powerful is the light of unity that it can
illuminate the whole earth.' (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the
Wolf, p. 14)

From this belief follows the social ideal that all men are bound together by God's creative act: 'So it is with the great body of humanity. The wonderful Law of Attraction, Harmony and Unity, holds together this marvellous Creation.'[18]

The primary adjunct to the concept of the oneness of mankind is the ideal of the elimination of all prejudice - racial, sexual, national, religious, or socio-economic. God loves all of His creatures equally: 'Therefore no one should glorify himself over another; no one should manifest pride or superiority toward another; no one should look upon another with scorn and contempt and no one should deprive or oppress a fellow creature.'[19] In terms of the Indian social environment this means that new declarants should strive to eliminate ideas of caste exclusiveness from their 'world views', a goal towards which the Bahá'í Administrative Order in India is working but, as we shall shortly see, finding somewhat difficult to implement.

Perhaps the most striking structural manifestation of the ideal of equality among the faithful in the Bahá'í community is the lack of any type of priesthood or body of scholars who are considered bearers of special knowledge or guides to spiritual enlightenment.[20] According to Bahá'u'lláh in this day men are meant to investigate truth for themsleves;[21] no body of clerics can guide them, and they should not blindly follow the pathway of tradition. Consequently, while all of the faithful have the right to use the Faith's revealed scriptures, no one can claim a monopoly over their

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[18] Paris Talks, p. 139

[19] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in The Divine Art of Living. Selections from the Bahá'í Writings, rev. ed., (Wilmette, Illinois, 1965), p. 110

[20] A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (p. 47) cites priesthood as one of the prohibitions listed in Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book.

[21] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í World Faith, p. 238

interpretation,[22] a principle which allows each believer to have direct

access to his God and, unlike traditional village belief, denies the

necessity of a religious functionary in order that communion between the

Sacred and the profane can take place.[23]

As was noted in Chapter 8, the lack of a clergy or priesthood means

that Bahá'í feasts and other periods of communal devotion are noticeably

devoid of role differentiation. During these occasions all members of the

community are free to offer prayers, and there are no 'secret' or

sequestered verses set aside for use by specific individuals. In fact,

according to Bahá'í ideals one of the main functions of such meetings is

to transcend the limitations of race, class, nationality, sect, and

personality.[24] Similarly, the spirit surrounding Bahá'í ceremonies is one

of unity and equality. All holy day observances are occasions for the

gathering of the entire body of believers,[25] and their formats do not

provide for functional variations based on status group identification.

Instead, all members of the community sit and participate together, there

being no standardized apparel or activity distinguishing one believer

from another.[26] Furthermore, the programs for each occasion are not

determined by a sacrosanct body of traditional law administered by a chosen

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[22] Only Bahá'u'lláh's appointed successors ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi,
and the Universal House of Justice) have the right to officially
interpret the sacred writings. Otherwise, each individual must
work out his own salvation.

[23] For example, it is necessary that a Brāhman officiate at all 'high'
caste rituals.

[24] The Bahá'í Community, p. 19

[25] In contrast to village observances where according to popular practice
not all castes are permitted to observe the same festivals, some
being celebrated only by 'clean' castes and others only by individual
castes.

[26] While specific individuals read passages or present talks, they are
meant to be selected on an arbitrary basis, and they differ from
one observance to another.

few but are arranged and directed by the community's democratically
elected administrative body.

The structure of Bahá'í local administrative institutions is also
influenced by the Faith's social principles, but as we will be examining
them in greater detail in Chapter 10 it is not necessary at this time to
give specific examples of this relationship. It should be noted, however,
that the foundations of the entire administrative system are intimately
bound by the concept of the oneness of mankind, and as a result community
leaders are to consider themselves guardians of the faithful, their
offices being ones of service to the community and not positions of personal
status. In this vein Shoghi Effendi wrote:

> Their function is not to dictate, but to consult,
> and consult not only among themselves, but as much
> as possible with the Friends whom they represent...
> They should never be led to suppose that they are
> the central ornaments of the body of the Cause,
> intrinsically superior to others in capacity or
> merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and
> principles.[27]

Furthermore, as they are elected for specific periods of time, administrators
can be removed from office, and consequently there are no hereditary
positions of leadership which can undermine the concept of equality among
the faithful.[28]

The ideal of equality of believers can also be seen in the formulation
of Bahá'í laws and ordinances, as submission to the commandments of God is
part of the twofold obligation of every Bahá'í:

> The first is steadfastness in His love, such
> steadfastness that neither the clamor of the enemy
> nor the claims of the idle pretender can deter him
> from cleaving unto Him Who is the Eternal Truth, a
> steadfastness that taketh no account of them
> whatever. The second is strict observance of the
> laws He hath prescribed...[29]

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[27] Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 44

[28] Although the institution of the Guardianship was meant to be hereditary,
Shoghi Effendi had no offspring, and as a result the office terminated
with his death.

[29] Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 289-290

Thus, all Bahá'í laws are binding on every believer, there being no special commands set aside for a specific segment of the community.[30] For example, there are no provisions for monasticism, as Bahá'u'lláh admonished priests and monks to leave their cloisters and enter the world.[31] Therefore, the laws and ordinances of the Bahá'í Faith help reinforce in the world of action those lofty ideals set forth in the movement's literature - ideals whose emphasis on unity and equality among the faithful put them in marked contrast to the ideals and laws of popular Hinduism which provide for differentiation in behavior along caste lines[32] and thereby act as buttresses to the concept of human inequality.

As one can readily see from the above discussion of Bahá'í social principles, the movement's approach to the question of human relations is in fundamental conflict with the social norms of traditional village Hinduism. This being the case, two important queries arise: first, why are villagers declaring their belief in such doctrines; and second, how are Bahá'í administrators and teachers approaching the problem of introducing these values to new declarants? The first question will be

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[30] The exceptions being the aforementioned provisions for women and the elderly regarding the fast and obligatory prayers.

[31] Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 49

[32] Certain acts which are disdained by some castes are permissible to others. For example, K. S. Mathur relates that one of the most popular stories in Potlod was the tale of the hunter and the Brāhman in which the former teaches the latter the secret of dharma. 'The hunter told the Brahmin that though he was a hunter-butcher by caste and trade, a man of a low and 'unclean' caste, he scrupulously observed his duties: he followed the trade of his caste, even though that involved butchering innocent animals for food...having been born into a particular caste and station of life, it is incumbent upon a person to live righteously in accordance with the traditions of his caste, for that, and that alone is his dharma.' (Mathur, p. 87)

considered at greater length in Chapter 12 (Conclusion) where it can be discussed in light of the accumulated data of the entire study. As for the second, its issues will be dealt with in the following pages.

While stringent laws whose dictates restrict the degree of status group interaction permitted in conventional social situations have long been important factors in the determination of patterns of social intercourse in the Indian village, there are two areas of life where these injunctions have tended to break down. The first is related to a villager's conduct outside of his village, and the second is associated with purely 'religious' activities.

In Hinduism the primary function of dharma (proper action) is to maintain a given social order. The basic unit of this social order has traditionally been the village and to some extent its surrounding region.[33] Rules of conduct, therefore, are primarily directed towards the perpetuation of a given set of values within one's conventional social milieu; outside of this context such rules are not as binding. For example, Mathur found that:

> The general and popular view is that the actions of
> a person in a socio-cultural context which is not
> his own are not to be considered his normal social
> actions, and that, therefore, he is not judged on the
> basis of the former. What he does in the city is no
> business of his caste community in the village, so
> long as his actions do not infringe the solidarity
> of the social groups to which he belongs.[34]

Consequently, there is a distinct difference made between one's dharma in conventional life and one's activities outside of that milieu. A similar distinction applies to what might be termed purely 'religious' activity. For example, rules of dharma are not binding on religious ascetics who have renounced the world, as they are not seen to be members of conventional

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[33] For a discussion of the relationship of a village and its region see Adrian Mayer, especially the Conclusion.

[34] Mathur, p. 94

society.   This same type of attitude has also been applied to devotional
(bhakti) sects.[35] Within the framework of a sect's devotional activities
traditional rules of dharma are often suspended.   For example, as many
sects have been anti-caste in outlook their devotees (from different caste
backgrounds) have joined together in various forms of devotional activity
such as sharing ritually consecrated food.[36] However, outside of such
activities, that is, within the context of conventional society, traditional
rules of dharma prevail.[37]

The path that the Bahá'í Administrative Order has travelled in terms
of introducing the social teachings of the Faith to new declarants in
Malwa has been one that has taken advantage of the above mentioned
categories of behavior.   To this date Bahá'í teachers have not made an
attempt to change the conventional life patterns of new believers but have
directed their efforts towards inducing village declarants to adopt Bahá'í
modes of behavior within the context of Bahá'í activities.   These
activities are essentially two in kind: those which take place outside
the local community;   and those which function within the village.

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[35] As mentioned in Chapter 7, bhakti means devotion to a personal god.
This form of religious activity, which is characterized by the
chanting of devotional mantras or the repetition of divine names,
developed first in the Tamil country (South India) in the seventh
century and in the following centuries spread over all of India.
Many bhakti sects center their devotion on the figures of Kṛṣṇa or
Rāma, but the number of objects of adoration is almost immeasurable.

[36] An example of such a sect would be the Vallabhāchāryas. Members of
this group worship Kṛṣṇa as outlined by their founder Vallabhāchārya
(sixteenth century). During congregational worship devotees of any
age, sex, or caste can participate in the devotional activities,
which include the consumption of prasād (offerings of food made to
a deity and later distributed amongst the devotees). For a more
detailed examination of this sect see Richard Barz, EarlyDevelopments
within the Bhakti Sect of Vallabhāchārya According to Sectarian
Traditions, Ph.D. Dissertation, unpublished, University of Chicago,
1971.

[37] In this sense bhakti sects provide what Robert Merton has called 'latent
functions'. Beyond their manifest function of provoking the ecstatic
experience, they allow for the expression of 'deviant' social behavior.
See Merton's Social Theory and Social Structure, (New York, 1968),
p. 115-121.

In Chapter 6 mention was made of the Indore Teaching Institute and the role it plays as a channel of communication between local village communities in Malwa and the institutions of the Bahá'í Faith's administrative order. Here it was noted that one of the primary functions of the Institute is to educate new believers by exposing them to Bahá'í social principles in action. This is also true of Bahá'í seasonal schools and regional conferences (see Chapter 11), and consequently in the operating procedures of all three of these institutions there are no distinctions made on the basis of caste lines; all participants are considered equal and are treated accordingly. For example, there are no facilities for separate dining;[38] Harijans eat at the same table with Brāhmaṇs, and the food is prepared by several hands. Similarly, attending members share rooms on a mixed caste basis.[39]

In addition to eating, sleeping, and working together, participants are shown at these sessions how Bahá'í social principles should be applied within the framework of the movement's socio-religious institutions. For example, during the nine-day 'deepening' session held in December of 1973[40] a special Unity Feast[41] was celebrated at which institute teachers spoke of the brotherhood of all Bahá'ís and stressed the necessity of all Bahá'í

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[38] At the sessions observed by the author the eating arrangements were as follows. Both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food was prepared by four women, three from Parsi background and one from Hindu ancestry (the wife of the caretaker - a 'clean' caste Mālī). At meal times the food was placed in bowls and distributed along one large table located on the veranda. All participants ate at this table regardless of their caste backgrounds.

[39] Often village participants share one large room, and thus Brāhmaṇs and Rājputs are housed in the same area as Balāis and Chamārs.

[40] See Chapter 6

[41] The Nineteen-Day Feast is a local institution and as such it can only be celebrated at the community level. However, on those occasions when a feast day takes place during a conference or teaching institute session a special Unity Feast is held, the main difference between the two being that the latter contains no business or administrative period (see Chapter 10), as only a local community can consult on such issues.

feasts and ceremonies reflecting the ideal of the oneness of mankind. During the feast villagers from both 'clean' and 'unclean' caste backgrounds prayed, sang, and ate together.[42] At the same session mock local spiritual assemblies were elected, and the Bahá'í method of consultation was explained and exemplified.[43]

By providing such activities outside of the conventional village setting the Bahá'í Administrative Order has enabled many declarants to experience new modes of social behavior without endangering their positions in traditional society. Thus, one of the main means of introducing Bahá'í social ideals into the rural communities has been to educate a number of key believers in a non-conventional milieu and then instruct them to help their fellow declarants in the application of these ideals within the context of Bahá'í socio-religious institutions, such as feasts, holy day observances, and assembly meetings. In this way, the Bahá'í Faith is not put in the position of having to directly confront the rigidity of the traditional system.

In the villages themselves, moreover, Bahá'í social principles are exemplified only within a Bahá'í frame of reference. Bahá'í administrators and teachers have not interfered with the standardized patterns of status group interaction, but have tried to concentrate on establishing the movement as a distinct religous phenomenon.[44] In this sense, the Faith

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[42] As mentioned earlier (Chapter 8), a Bahá'í feast is divided into three parts. During the third portion believers are meant to mingle with one another and share experiences. It has been traditional at this time for the host to serve food to the guests.

[43] The emphasis being placed on the right of every believer to air his thoughts. For an elaboration on this concept see Chapter 10.

[44] This does not mean to say that the Bahá'í Administrative Order has consciously adopted a double standard. Rather, it is a reflection of the movement's attitude of not involving itself in tearing down antiquated institutions but in constructing new ones. See p. 257-258.

might be grouped in the same category as the aforementioned bhakti[45] sects

whose activities have often transcended conventional norms. Consequently,

while village teachers espouse Bahá'í social principles they seldom break

the traditional rules of dharma in a conventional setting. For example,

the travelling teacher in Rīchā told me that he often shares food with

a fellow Bahá'í of Muslim background, but he only does so in situations

which are beyond the pale of conventional social interaction.[46]

    In looking at the 'model village' communities then, it can be assumed

that the only situations in which one can expect to find any type of change

in the traditional patterns of status group interaction will be within the

framework of Bahá'í institutions, and even then, change will only be

partial, as the approach of the Bahá'í Administrative Order has not been

to force immediate change but rather to create frames of reference

within which alternative modes of behavior can be introduced and nurtured

to fruition.

    The application of Bahá'í social principles in the context of the

'model village' communities can be divided into two basic categories: the

breakdown of interdictions regarding spacial isolation; and the

inhancement of equal participation in group activities. Within the

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[45] The term bhakti is being used here in a broad sense, referring to a
category of religious behavior which is strongly devotional in nature
and is often characterized by egalitarian ideals, and not to specific
metaphysical doctrines or beliefs.

[46] In this regard he implied that were he to enter the latter's home and
openly partake of food the village elders would be likely to become
upset. Several other travelling teachers also indicated that similar
situations existed in their villages, the main drawback to inter-
caste dining being the reaction of conservative elements within the
Hindu community.

framework of the movement's devotional, ceremonial, administrative, and educational institutions attempts are being made to reduce the traditional taboos surrounding these categories of behavior, and in the following paragraphs a few instances of their results will be cited.[47]

As was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, traditional patterns of status group interaction have been characterized by the lack of 'clean', 'unclean', and 'untouchable', caste intercourse, and consequently at village communal gatherings the latter have had to abide by designated laws of spacial isolation. Using this spacial taboo as an index of caste exclusiveness, it would appear that in the 'model village' communities under examination restrictions regarding inter-caste contact are not as stringent as they are in more conventional spheres of village life. For example, in village Richā Balāi and Chamār declarants are not isolated from the remainder of the group during feasts. While they generally sit next to each other they are in no way marked off as being separate. In fact, they often sit in close proximity to 'high' caste Brāhmans and Rājputs.[48] But perhaps an even more significant event in this regard was a Chamār's entering a Rājput household to participate in a meeting of the communities Local Spiritual Assembly, for, as we have already seen, Mathur found in his village that 'untouchables' were not allowed to enter the houses of 'clean' castemen. On this occasion (see Chapter 10) the Chamār not only entered the house but took his place among other 'clean' caste members and participated without any sign of

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[47] The author is not in a position to say whether this 'deviant' behavior is only a result of Bahá'í values being introduced into the village or a manifestation of numerous contributing variables. The important point, however, is that Bahá'í institutions provide a framework for such expressions.

[48] It is interesting to note, however, that the two Bhangī members of the community rarely attend communal activities, an indication that the stigma surrounding this caste (sweepers and scavengers) is still present in Richā.

descrimination.[49]

There are also signs in village Kāsod that spatial isolation in Bahá'í activities is less apparent than in conventional situations.   Both Balāi and Chamār castemen attend community meetings and are permitted to sit on the headman's veranda (where such occasions usually take place), a situation which is in marked contrast to traditional devotional and ceremonial activity in Kāsod where each caste has its own shrines whose locations are far removed from 'clean' caste temples.   Moreover, the resident Bahá'í teacher is a member of an 'unclean' caste (Balāi), and he actively participates with 'clean' caste Rājputs in both devotional and administrative functions.[50]

Additional examples of the breakdown of traditional concepts of spatial isolation in the 'model village' communities include the following: in Manāsā a Chamār has been elected to the community's Local Spiritual Assembly (although the community is dominated by Rājputs) and sits with eight Rājputs during assembly meetings;   in Garabelī, where the Bahá'í community is dominated by 'unclean' Balāis, there are several 'clean' castemen who also take active part in community activities; and in all three communities in which Bahá'í primary schools have been established (Karaṅkanī, Manāsā, and Kāsod) children from 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes sit in the same line as 'clean' caste children and take their respective turns reciting prayers and reading lessons.   Moreover, in both Rīchā and Kāsod teachers reported that during feasts, food was often shared by all participants including both 'unclean' and 'untouchable' caste

[49] This attitude can be contrasted with Adrian Mayer's finding in Ramkheri that during village administrative meetings (Village Committee) Tanners (Chamārs) could not sit with 'clean' castemen but had to stand near the veranda. (p. 57)

[50] This individual presents a good example of the categorization of behavior taking place in these communities. While he teaches 'clean' caste children and interacts with Rājputs at feasts and assembly meetings, he lives in a small hut on the edge of the village, uses Balāi wells, and does not dine with higher castemen.

members.[51]

Regarding equal participation between 'clean', 'unclean', and 'untouchable' declarants in community activities, advances are not as noticeable. By and large, those who are most active or most vocal in the five 'model villages' are members of 'clean' castes. There are, however, exceptions to this rule, the most obvious one being Garabelī, where all of the members of the local administrative body are members of the Balāi caste.[52] However, in the other villages where 'unclean' and 'untouchable' declarants are in a minority, active participation by members of these status groups is limited to specific individuals, as on the whole, 'low' castemen are still hesitant to participate on an equal basis. Consequently, although in Kāsod there are eight male Chamār declarants and five male Balāi believers, only one of these individuals (the Bahá'í teacher) is outspoken enough to participate in community discussion without any degree of reservation. For example, during a community meeting at which the question arose of building a Bahá'í bhavan, he was the only 'unclean' casteman to enter the discussion. Otherwise, the main flow of conversation was dominated by Rājput and Brāhman declarants. The same situation exists in Rīchā where the one Chamār who has been elected to the village's Local Spiritual Assembly is the only 'low' casteman in the community who can be said to play anything but a passive role in Bahá'í activities. Moreover, Bahá'í activities in Karankani are almost exclusively the domain of 'clean' caste declarants, all administrative positions being held by members from this stratum of society.

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[51] The author only witnessed one such sharing of food in the 'model village' communities and that was during the social portion of the Richa feast. On that occasion 'clean', 'unclean', and 'untouchable' declarants jointly partook of roasted nuts and grams provided by the Bahá'í teacher (Rājput). Most village teachers, however, claimed that such sharing of food during Bahá'í feasts was not uncommon in their communities.

[52] There are many such 'low' caste Bahá'í communities in Malwa, several of which are 'model villages'.

In summary, it appears that in the five communities some change is beginning to occur in the patterns of status group interaction, but that it is limited to particular frames of reference and is primarily concerned with the breakdown of traditional concepts of spacial isolation. Consequently, while all of the declarants in the five communities have proclaimed their belief in the oneness of mankind, they do not marry outside of their own castes, nor do they break traditional rules of commensality in conventional social situations. Furthermore, although 'low' caste believers are allowed to participate in Bahá'í activities without the stigma of spacial isolation being applied to them, in most cases members of these status groups assume their traditional roles of being good listeners. Yet, the fact that Bahá'í functions in the 'model village' communities are free from the blatant acts of social descrimination that often characterize relationships between 'high' and 'low' caste members is seen by the Bahá'í Administrative Order to be a positive step forward, and if nurtured it may lead to more constant and significant changes in the field of human relations. However, in this regard Bahá'í administrators hold no grandiose ideals of revitalizing the conventional social system. The central aim of the Bahá'í Faith in introducing its values and institutions into Indian villages is not to reform society but to build from the base level a new world social order whose institutions will reflect the ideals and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. They see the old world order as moribund and being on the verge of collapse; the salvation of mankind depends on a new civilization. Shoghi Effendi summarized this view in the following words:

> We are indeed living in an age which, if we would
> correctly appraise it, should be regarded as one
> which is witnessing a dual phenomenon. The first
> signalizes the death-pangs of an order, effete and
> godless, that has stubbornly refused, despite the
> signs and portents of a century-old Revelation, to
> attune its processes to the precepts and ideals
> which that Heaven-sent Faith proffered it. The
> second proclaims the birth-pangs of an Order, divine

> and redemptive, that will inevitably supplant the
> former, and within Whose administrative structure
> an embryonic civilization, incomparable and world-
> embracing, is imperceptibly maturing. The one is
> being rolled up, and is crashing in oppression,
> blood-shed, and ruin. The other opens up vistas of
> a justice, a unity, a peace, a culture, such as no
> age has ever seen. The former has spent its force,
> demonstrated its falsity and barrenness, lost
> irretrievably its opportunity, and is hurrying to its
> doom. The latter, virile and unconquerable, is
> plucking asunder its chains, and is vindicating its
> title to be the one refuge within which a sore-tried   53
> humanity, purged from its dross, can attain its destiny.

Consequently, the Bahá'í Administrative Order in India is not concerned

with altering life patterns in the context of the conventional social

order but in establishing frames of reference in which new social ideals

can grow and develop. At the present time it is still in the process of

building these institutions in Malwa, but in many of the 'model villages'

they have already come to represent, at least in word if not always in

deed, the ideal of human equality.

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[53] Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, (Wilmette, Illinois, 1967),
    p. 16

Chapter 10   Local Administration

Several times during the course of this study it has been mentioned

that as an international movement the Bahá'í Faith is not only involved

in converting people to its teachings; it is also attempting to introduce

in various countries throughout the world socio-religious institutions

whose modes of operation have been formulated and developed by its founders

and their duly appointed successors.   These institutions are part of an

internationally linked superstructure whose present form is seen to be the

embryonic state of a future world social order, referred to in Bahá'í

literature as the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.   The prime goal of the

movement is to construct this new order, and its teaching and consolidation

activities both in rural Malwa and in numerous countries throughout the

world are part of the building process.   Shoghi Effendi referred to

the goal when he wrote:

> Conscious of their high calling, confident
> in the society-building power which their
> Faith possesses, they press forward,
> undeterred and undismayed, in their efforts
> to fashion and perfect the necessary
> instruments wherein the embryonic World Order
> of Bahá'u'lláh can mature and develop. It
> is this building process, slow and
> unobtrusive, to which the life of the world-
> wide Bahá'í Community is wholly consecrated,
> that constitutes the one hope of a stricken
> society.[1]

In the process of establishing the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, the

Bahá'í Faith has developed a system of administrative institutions whose

primary functions are to both guide and direct the movement's teaching and

consolidation programs and administer to the general needs of believers.

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[1]Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 195

As was shown in Chapter 5, the administrative institutions are
organized on three levels: international, national, and local.   As
the first two have been discussed in Part II of the study, the present
chapter will be primarily concerned with local administrative procedures.

The fundamental local administrative institution in the Bahá'í
Faith is the Local Spiritual Assembly.   Like other administrative
institutions within the Faith, its establishment was ordained by
Bahá'u'lláh:

> The Lord hath ordained that in every
> city a House of Justice be established
> wherein shall gather the counsellors to
> the number of Bahá (9)...It is incumbent
> upon them to take counsel together and to
> have regard for the interests of the servants
> of God, for His sake, even as they regard
> their own interests, and to choose that
> which is meet and seemly.   Thus hath the
> Lord your God commanded you.[2]

Bahá'ís hold this formulation to be particularly significant.   In fact,
Shoghi Effendi emphasized that the power not only of the Local Spiritual
Assembly, but of the entire administrative order was due to its divine
formulation:

> It should be noted in this connection that
> this Administrative Order is fundamentally
> different from anything that any Prophet
> has previously established, inasmuch as
> Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its
> principles, established its institutions,
> appointed the person to interpret His Word
> and conferred the necessary authority on the
> body designed to supplement and apply His
> legislative ordinances.[3]

The duties of the Local Spiritual Assembly can be divided into two
main categories.   First, it is meant to act as a stimulating agent for
the promotion and organization of teaching and consolidation activities

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[2] Quoted in Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, (Wilmette, Illinois, 1968), p. 21

[3] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 145

on the local level.[4]   Accordingly, the Local Spiritual Assembly should

> ...consecrate a certain part of its
> time, at each of its sessions, to the
> earnest and prayerful consideration of
> such ways and means to foster the campaign
> of teaching, or may furnish whatever
> resources are available for its progress,
> extension, and consolidation.[5]

Consequently, at this stage in the development of the Bahá'í Faith one

of the primary responsibilities of the Local Spiritual Assembly is to

see that within the city or hamlet in which it is operating, the doctrines

of the movement are both spread to those who have not heard them,and

strengthened in the minds of those who have accepted.   Second, the

body is meant to consult on affairs pertaining to the life of the local

community.[6]   For example, if there is a dispute between two members

of the community, the Local Spiritual Assembly acts as a court of

arbitration, helping the parties to reconcile their differences.

As Shoghi Effendi pointed out, 'They must endeavour to promote amity

and concord amongst the Friends, efface every lingering trace of distrust,

coolness, and estrangement from every heart, and secure in its stead an

active and wholehearted co-operation for the service of the Cause.'[7]

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[4] 'Each local Assembly has a definite area of jurisdiction. In most
    cases the area is that of the civil boundaries of an incorporated
    village, town or city. An Assembly may also be formed by nine or
    more Bahá'ís who reside in the same township or county or
    unincorporated village.' (The Bahá'í Community. A Summary of Its
    Organization and Laws, rev. ed., (Wilmette, Illinois, 1963), p. 5)

[5] Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, rev. ed., (Wilmette,
    Illinois, 1963), p. 44-45

[6] 'Not only with regard to publication, but all matters without any
    exception whatsoever, regarding the interests of the Cause in that
    locality, individually or collectively, should be referred exclusively
    to the Spiritual Assembly in that locality, which shall decide upon
    it, unless it be a matter of national interest, in which case it
    shall be referred to the national body.' (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í
    Administration, p. 23)

[7] Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 39

Similarly, any decisions concerning financial matters, such as appropriation of funds within the community, are the responsibility of the Local Spiritual Assembly.

As representatives of the Bahá'í community, the members of the Local Spiritual Assembly are relegated such additional responsibilities as protecting the Faith from external attack and internal division, arranging community functions, and maintaining communication with the movement's higher administrative institutions.[8]

In keeping with the Bahá'í ideal of equality among the faithful, members of the Local Spiritual Assembly are elevated to their positions by means of a democratic election. Each year on the first day of Ridván (April 21) members of Bahá'í communities throughout the world assemble for the purpose of selecting their local leaders. Every Bahá'í over twenty-one years of age is eligible to vote, and as Shoghi Effendi emphasized, taking part in this event is a sacred obligation:

> ...and every declared believer of 21 years
> and above, far from standing aloof and
> assuming an indifferent or independent
> attitude, should regard it his sacred duty
> to take part conscientiously and diligently,
> in the election, the consolidation and the
> efficient working of his own local Assembly.[9]

On this occasion each member of the assembled group writes down the names of nine believers whom he feels would best serve the local community. The mood of the election meeting should be one of prayer and meditation; there should be no electioneering or nominating of candidates, and prayers should be read before the ballots are cast.[10] After the ballots are counted,[11] the nine individuals who receive the highest number of votes

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[8] Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 39-40

[9] Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, p. 39

[10] The Bahá'í Community, p. 7

[11] Those members not attending the meeting have the right to send their sealed ballots by mail or messenger.

become the members of the Local Spiritual Assembly.[12] The believer who

receives the most votes then calls the new members together, and assembly

officers are selected. Each assembly should elect a chairman, a vice-

chairman, a secretary, and a treasurer.[13] When the body has selected

its officers it should report the results to the National Spiritual

Assembly.

In performing their duties members of the Local Spiritual Assembly

have certain responsibilities to the body of believers. While they are

not 'responsible' for their acts in the way this term is understood in

contemporary parliamentary systems, they are pledged at all times to

promote the best interest of the community. Thus, although assembly

members are directed to base their decisions on nothing but the admonitions

of their own conscience,[14] they are nevertheless '...solemnly pledged

to follow, under all conditions, the dictates of the "Most Great Justice"

that can alone usher in the reign of the "Most Great Peace"...'[15]

Consequently, as was pointed out in Chapter 9, the function of local

administrators is not to dictate, but consult both among themselves and

with members of the community at large.[16]

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[12] In case of a tie for ninth position, a second ballot is cast to decide
the issue. Only members present at the election meeting can
participate in the second ballot.

[13] Unlike the general election, officers of the Local Spiritual Assembly
are selected by majority vote. Thus an individual would have to
receive at least five votes before being elected chairman.

[14] In this vein Shoghi Effendi wrote that members of the Local Spiritual
Assembly are'... invested with an authority rendering them
unanswerable for their acts and decisions to those who elect them...'
(God Passes By, p. 331)

[15] Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 331

[16] 'Let us bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not
dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power,
but the spirit of frank and loving consultation...' (Shoghi Effendi,
Bahá'í Administration, p. 63-64)

There are no prescribed times when assembly meetings should be held,
although in large communities they are generally called at least once a
week.   A meeting can only take place when all members have been notified
of its time and location, but five persons at any given session constitute
a quorum, and a majority vote of those present is sufficient for conducting
business.[17]   All meetings should be opened with a prayer, which is
generally followed by the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting
and by discussion of reports submitted by any of the body's duly appointed
committees.[18]   After committee reports have been presented old and new
business is discussed, and upon conclusion of consultation the meeting is
closed with a prayer.   All sessions should be conducted in an atmosphere
of prayer, love, and harmony:

> They must when coming together turn
> their faces to the Kingdom on High and
> ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They
> must then proceed with the utmost devotion,
> courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to
> express their views.[19]

The various aspects of assembly interaction are guided by the
principle of Bahá'í consultation, according to which, every member of
the group has the right to express his or her views with absolute freedom.[20]

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[17] By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article VIII, section 1

[18] The Local Spiritual Assembly has the authority to appoint committees,
composed of members of the community and chaired by one of its own
members, whose functions are to organize and co-ordinate specific
activities within the community. For example, in a local community
there might be committees responsible for propagation activities,
'deepening' programs, and child education.

[19] The Bahá'í Community, p. 10-11

[20] 'Let us also remember that at the very root of the Cause lies the
principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression,
his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views.' (Shoghi
Effendi, in Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 44)

When expressing their ideas, however, members are supposed to remember

that their purpose is community service. In the words of Shoghi Effendi:

> They should approach their task with
> extreme humility, and endeavour, by
> their openmindedness, their high sense
> of justice and duty, their candour, their
> modesty, their entire devotion to the
> welfare and interests of the Friends, the
> Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the
> confidence and the genuine support and
> respect of those whom they serve, but also
> their esteem and real affection.[21]

After all opinions have been voiced and thoroughly and impassionately

discussed, a vote is called. A majority vote constitutes a verdict,

and once arrived at becomes the decision of the entire body. 'There is

no minority opinion in Bahá'í Administration; the decision of the majority

is the decision of all.'[22] Moreover, the judgement must be accepted by

every believer in the community; no one should criticize or act contrary

to the decision, as this would cause disruption and antagonism within the

community.[23]

Part of the Local Spiritual Assembly's consultative responsibility

is to consider recommendations presented to it by the community. The

occasion for the formulation of community suggestions is the business

portion of the Nineteen-Day Feast. During this time individual believers

can make recommendations concerning any matter related to the Faith.

However, 'Such recommendations must be adopted by majority vote of the

community members present before constituting a resolution to be

considered by the local Spiritual Assembly.'[24] This means that all

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[21] Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 44-45

[22] The Bahá'í Community, p. 12

[23] 'Let us recall His explicit and often-repeated assurance that every
Assembly elected in that rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and
detatchment is, in truth, appointed of God, that its verdict is
truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision
unreservedly and with cheerfulness.' (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í
Administration, p. 65)

[24] The Bahá'í Community, p. 19

recommendations must be openly aired, there being no room within the
administrative process for lobbying.[25]

Like assembly meetings, community discussion is governed by the rules
of Bahá'í consultation. Under the guidance of the Chairman of the Local
Spiritual Assembly every member of the community is allowed, if so desired,
to express an opinion. After consultation the members are polled. If
a suggestion is adopted, the Local Spiritual Assembly must consider it at
their next meeting and report their decision to the community at a future
feast.[26]

It is also at the Nineteen-Day Feast that the Local Spiritual Assembly
performs its communicative functions. On the one hand, it serves as a
channel through which individual believers can make suggestions to the
National Spiritual Assembly; if a recommendation is passed by the
community, the Local Spiritual Assembly may in its discretion forward it to
the national body.[27] Conversely, the Local Spiritual Assembly provides a
means by which the higher administrative institutions can communicate with
individual believers. At each feast the group's secretary relays to the
community any communications or directives[*] sent by the National Spiritual

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[25] Problems of an individual nature should be taken directly to the Local
Spiritual Assembly, but any recommendations regarding the Faith in
general must be discussed at the Nineteen-Day Feast.

[26] 'The secretary of the Assembly records each resolution adopted by the
community, as well as the various suggestions advanced during the
meeting, in order to report these to the Spiritual Assembly for its
consideration. Whatever action the Assembly takes is to be reported
at a later Nineteen-Day Feast.' (The Bahá'í Community, p. 19)

[27] The Bahá'í Community, p. 19

[*] The National Spiritual Assembly sends monthly circulars to the local
communities under its jurisdiction. In these bulletins messages
received from the Universal House of Justice are recounted as well
as news relating specifically to the activities of the national Bahá'í
community. Such communication is generally read at the beginning of
the business portion of the feast which follows the conclusion of the
devotional period.

Assembly and its appointed committees.   This contact is a vital link

in the chain of communication that binds Bahá'í communities throughout

the world.   As a Bahá'í administrative manual states:

> A matter of vital importance at this
> meeting is consideration of national
> and international Bahá'í affairs, to
> strengthen the capacity of the community
> to cooperate in promotion of the larger
> Bahá'í interests and to deepen the
> understanding of all believers concerning
> the relation of the local community to the
> Bahá'í World Community.[28]

Another administrative process involving the participation of members

of local communities is the selection of delegates to act as electors

of the National Spiritual Assembly.[29] In every country where there exists

a national administrative body, delegates, whose number and apportionment

are determined by Bahá'í population patterns, are annually selected by

means of democratic election to attend the National Convention.   The

method of electing delegates varies according to country.   In countries

where the Bahá'í population is small, delegates are often selected in

local communities, each community being assigned a specific number of

delegate seats according to its relative size.   In countries like India

where the Bahá'í population is comparatively large, delegate positions

are allocated on the basis of population density, a specific geographical

area receiving a fixed number of seats.   Consequently, in such countries

delegates are selected at annual district conventions, an institution

which will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

Once delegates are chosen they have the right to attend the National

Convention in the capacity of electors of the National Spiritual Assembly.[30]

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[28] The Bahá'í Community, p. 18

[29] 'It is expressly recorded in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings that these
National Assemblies must be indirectly elected by the Friends;   that
is, the Friends in every country must elect a certain number of
delegates, who in turn will elect from among all the Friends in
that country the members of the National Spiritual Assembly.'
(Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 61)

[30] In India this convention is held in New Delhi during the last week of April.

If a duly elected delegate cannot attend the gathering in person, he is able to send his ballot by post or messenger, and it will be counted with the votes cast by attending delegates on election day. A delegate, however, is encouraged to attend the session. According to the Faith's Guardian:

> It should, however, be made clear to every
> elected delegate - who should be continually
> reminded - that it is a sacred responsibility
> and admittedly preferable to attend if
> possible in person the sessions of the
> Convention, to take an active part in all its
> proceedings, and to acquaint his fellow-
> workers on his return with the accomplishments,
> the decisions, and the aspirations of the
> assembled representatives of the believers.[31]

The purpose of the National Convention is twofold. First, as already mentioned, it provides the opportunity for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly. As with other Bahá'í elections there is no electioneering or nominating of candidates. Rather, after the reading of prayers,[32] each elector writes down the names of nine persons. In so doing he is free to choose from among all the officially delared Bahá'ís within the national community. After tabulation the nine believers who receive the highest number of votes become the members of the National Spiritual Assembly for the year. In case of a tie for ninth position, a second ballot is cast by those delegates in attendance. The meeting's second function is to provide a forum where (as representatives of local believers) the delegates can consult with the new National Spiritual Assembly.[33] At this time the opinions and sentiments of the delegates can be expressed

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[31] _Principles of Bahá'í Administration_, p. 65

[32] '...the elector...is called to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold.' (Shoghi Effendi, _Bahá'í Administration_, p. 65)

[33] 'I feel, however, that in view of the expansion and the growing importance of the administrative sphere of the Cause, the general sentiments and tendencies prevailing among the Friends, and the signs of increasing interdependence among the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world, the assembled accredited representatives of the believers should exercise not only the vital and responsible right of electing the National Assembly, but should also fulfil the functions of an enlightened consultative and co-operative body...' (Shoghi Effendi, in _Principles of Bahá'í Administration_, p. 61-62)

openly and straightforwardly to the national office-bearers who in turn

'...should familiarize the delegates with the various matters that will

have to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously

study and weigh the opinions and judgements of the delegates.'[34]   Hence,

the National Convention allows for direct consultation between the local

and national levels of Bahá'í administration and is therefore an

important appendage to the administrative activities of a local community.

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In order that the reader might better understand the factors influencing

the implementation of Bahá'í administrative institutions in rural Malwa

it would be helpful before citing specific examples to say a few words

concerning the structure of contemporary village administrative institutions.

For our purpose it will not be necessary to examine these institutions in

detail.   Rather, it will be sufficient to make note of their essential

characteristics.

Within the contemporary village there are two types of leadership

positions: the traditional institutions of the village headman and caste

councils, and the relatively modern Village Committee (pañcāyat).

The office of the village headman is a hereditary position.   In the

past it was the primary position of authority in the village.[35] Most large

villages in Malwa have two headmen, while smaller communities are under

the guidance of a single individual, generally a member of a 'clean' caste,

and very often a Rājput.   Before the introduction of the Village Committee

headmen were solely responsible for dispensing civil justice.   Since they

were the government's official representatives, they were relegated the

responsibilities of maintaining law and order and collecting tax revenue.

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[34] Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 62

[35] For a more detailed account of the role of a village headman in Malwa
see Adrian Mayer, p. 93-113.

In addition, they also acted as spokesmen for their villages in legal disputes. For example, Adrian Mayer found that in the past Ramkheri headmen had defended the interests of the village in land disputes by enlisting the help of government officials.[36] Outside of their official duties, headmen also play leading roles in both secular and religious spheres of village life, often arbitrating inter-caste disputes or performing specific services at village festivals.

The other traditional position of authority in the contemporary village is the caste council. Each caste has its own leaders whose primary functions are to settle disputes within their respective status groups and dispense punishment to those members who violate rules and mores. The members of these councils are generally elders who have had their positions of authority bestowed upon them as a result of their age or the prestige they hold within their respective communities. Moreover, like the village headman, their authority within a given area of jurisdiction has in the past been unquestionable. Consequently, traditional positions of leadership have tended to be controlled by dominant individuals who have claimed authority on the basis of either heredity or personal prestige.

With the introduction in the 1940's of democratic ideals on the local level, a new institution of leadership arose within Malwa villages. This was the Village Committee, or _gram pañcayat_. In reality the institution is more often an area committee than a village committee, for several villages may come under the jurisdiction of one _pañcayat_. Unlike traditional positions of authority, membership on a _pañcayat_ is determined by democratic election, and therefore theoretically all members of the village have an equal say in selecting their representatives.[37] Furthermore

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[36] Mayer, p. 95

[37] The election of _pañcayat_ members generally takes place at a village - inter-village - meeting where individuals express their preferences by a show of hands.

*In reality these are sub-caste councils.

a committee's decision is not absolute; appeals to higher administrative institutions can be made (district committees).

As one might imagine, the powers of the pañcayat and those of the village patel have often come into conflict. Originally a committee lacked the the power to collect taxes, but by the 1950's in many instances it had assumed this right. In 1955 Adrian Mayer found that 'The present policy seems to be to give it [Village Committee] all the powers formerly held by the headman.'[38] However, while the powers of pañcayats have increased, in many of the smaller villages of the region, such as Richā, Manāsā, Karankanī, and Kāsod, the headman still plays an important role in village leadership. In all four villages he was involved in the collection of taxes and the settling of disputes, and was generally regarded as the most influential individual in the community.

From our point of view, however, the relative powers of village administrative institutions are per se not important. Interest in them arises only in terms of the influence they have on both the introduction and subsequent functioning of Bahá'í administrative institutions. For example, the importance of the Village Committee with its democratic features of popular election and right of appeal lies in the similarities it shares with certain Bahá'í procedures. As a result of its existence, the introduction of Bahá'í administrative institutions has not been handicapped to any great degree by villagers' lack of understanding of democratic procedures; when Bahá'í teachers speak of elected assembly members, new declarants have a basis in reality with which they can identify, for although many of the principles in Bahá'í adminstration are different from those that characterize political processes in Malwa villages, the fundamental ideal of one man one vote is akin. Similarly, traditional institutions cast their influence on Bahá'í procedures. As will be shown in following pages, customary patterns

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[38] Mayer, p. 115

of village leadership are still manifestly expressing themselves within the framework of Bahá'í administrative institutions.

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Bahá'í leadership in India has placed much importance on the establishment and development of the Faith's administrative institutions in the village communities in Malwa, as they are the foundation on which the Bahá'í Administrative Order is trying to build the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. In this regard it is believed that local spiritual assemblies will eventually evolve into local houses of justice, the cornerstones of local administration in the new world social order. As Shoghi Effendi stated: 'That the Spiritual Assemblies of today will be replaced in time by the Houses of Justice, and are to all intents and purposes identical and not separate bodies, is abundantly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself!'[39] Consequently, much of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee's limited manpower and resources is directed towards the establishment and maintenance of local administrative institutions. In carrying out this work they are following the advice of the Universal House of Justice which in a letter dated February 15, 1968, stated:

> In all your training programmes, the Baha'i
> Administration should have special attention.
> The believers should know that our administration
> is part of our religion. For this reason, not
> only should you   patiently and lovingly train
> the believers, but should also strive to attract
> to the Faith individuals who possess qualities
> and capacities that will add to the administrative
> strength of the Community as a whole.[40]

Every year on April 21, the 2,356 communities in Malwa in which nine or more Bahá'ís reside must elect their local spiritual assemblies for the year, and it is the responsibility of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee

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[39] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 6

[40] 'Letter written to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, February 15, 1968', Arise to Serve, p. 122

to help direct the procedure.   Consequently, during the entire month of
April, all of the Committee's travelling teachers take to the field for
the purpose of contacting as many communities as possible and reminding
them of their responsibility to hold elections on the prescribed day.
Moreover, instructions regarding the election are sent to the villages.
For example, in the Bahāī Darśan of March, 1974, directions concerning
the proper method of forming a local spiritual assembly were outlined.   The
following paragraph was taken from that issue:

> The members of the Local Spiritual Assembly
> are the nine Bahá'ís who in each community
> on election day receive the most votes.
> After the election it is their duty to gather
> together and hold a meeting. From among the
> nine chosen, the one who receives the most
> votes becomes the temporary chairman, and as
> soon as possible he must call the first assembly
> meeting. It is necessary to begin this meeting
> with a prayer and to ask God's help in promoting
> the progress of the Cause. After the prayer
> it is necessary for them to select the assembly
> officers for the year. Each assembly must have
> a chairman, secretary, vice-chairman, and
> treasurer. The work of the chairman is to direct
> the meetings and to help the assembly in arriving
> at their decisions. If the members only come
> together to talk and then disperse, their meeting
> will have no benefit.[41]

When travelling teachers contact the village declarants they once again
explain the proper election procedures and emphasize the importance of
approaching the event in a prayerful attitude.   In addition, they request
assembly members to inform the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee of the
outcome of the election.   In the 'model villages' elections are often
supervised by travelling teachers or 'deepened' Bahá'ís. Following prayers,
pieces of paper are distributed among the believers who are then asked to
write the names of none fellow village Bahá'ís whom they feel would best
serve the community.   Those who cannot write are asked to relate their

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[41] Bahāī Darśan, March 29, 1974, p. 2

choices to the election supervisors who in turn enter the verbal vote on a piece of paper and place it among the other ballots. At the conclusion of the election, votes are tabulated and results announced. Officers are then elected and their names sent to the Regional Teaching Committee which in turn sends them to the national office in New Delhi.

The Regional Teaching Committee also directs and supervises the election of convention delegates. As mentioned earlier, delegate positions are apportioned on the basis of Bahá'í population. In India there are a total of 171 delegate positions, each delegate representing 2,350 believers. Every state within the Indian Union receives at least one delegate position regardless of the number of Bahá'ís residing in its territory, while the remaining positions are distributed according to Bahá'í population density. Malwa has been assigned fifty-three seats, an indication that close to one-third of the declared Bahá'ís in India reside in this region. The number of delegate positions in Malwa are listed below according to district.

Table 11[42]

District	Delegate Positions
Ujjain	15
Shajapur	12
Mandsaur	6
Dewas	5
Ratlam	4
Bastar	3
Dhar	2
Sehore	2
Rajgarh	1
Indore	1
Jabalpur	1
Jhabua	1
	53

In Malwa the occasions for electing convention delegates are referred to as unit elections. To facilitate the selection process the National

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[42] The districts of Sehore, Bastar, Jabalpur, and Jhabua also come under jurisdiction of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee.

Spiritual Assembly has divided the region into eighteen sections, each of which has its own unit election.   In some cases a unit indicates a Bahá'í population of 2,500 declarants, while in other instances it represents a population of 7,500 believers.   In the former units one delegate is selected, and in the latter three are chosen.   In mid-February a special election is held in a key village within each unit, the various Bahá'í communities in each unit having been informed prior to the gathering of its time and location.   The entire process of electing convention delegates lasts eighteen days, one unit convention being held   each day between February 11, and February 28.

So as to provide complete fairness in the selection of delegates, the elections are supervised by Bahá'ís who do not live within the unit in question.   They are often members of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee or members of consolidation teams (see Chapter 6).   In addition, in last year's election (1974) election sites were visited by the region's Auxiliary Board member.

At each unit election supervisors open the meeting with prayers and instruct the assembled declarants in the manner and method by which Bahá'í elections are to be implemented.   These instructions include a review of the essential procedures found in all Bahá'í elections as well as specific directives concerning the election of unit delegates, which in the case of a unit representing 2,500 believers involves the writing down of a name of one person residing in the unit whom the voter feels would make a good delegate, and in the case of a unit representing 7,500 declarants means the selection of three such individuals.   Pieces of paper are then distributed, and the election takes place.   As in assembly elections, those who cannot write are directed to indicate their choices to an election supervisor. After all participants have cast their ballots the election supervisors tabulate the votes, and the individual(s) with the highest number of votes is (are) declared the unit delegate(s) for that year and is (are) elgible

to attend the National Convention as an elector(s) of the National Spiritual
Assembly.[43]   In those cases where a duly elected delegate cannot attend
the meeting,[44] he is asked to submit his ballot[45] to an election supervisor
(generally an auxiliary board member) who in turn forwards it to the national
office where it will be counted along with the ballots of attending delegates
on the day of the election meeting.

According to members of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee,
attendance at unit elections is generally low; one hundred and fifty
declarants would be considered a sizeable number for such a gathering.
For example, in the unit election held in village Mārod (Ratlam district)
the elected delegate received 84 out of 133 votes cast.   The lack of
attendance is no doubt partly due to the fact that villagers must travel
a fair distance to the election site, but it is also an indication that
active involvement in Bahá'í institutions is still limited to a minority
of declarants.

The Bahá'í Administrative Order in India is not only concerned that
assembly members and delegates be properly elected but that local
institutions begin to function as viable community entities.   In this vein
the Universal House of Justice told the Indian National Spiritual Assembly
that 'The Spiritual Assembly should be regarded as the pivot of the activities
for Bahá'ís in each village.'[46]   In expressing this view the body was

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[43] In the five 'model villages' three delegates were elected: one from
Manāsā, and two from Rīchā.

[44] Many delegates cannot afford the travelling expenses, and although in
many cases the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee has helped partially
finance their trips, the lack of funds makes it impossible for all
delegates to travel to New Delhi.

[45] He is asked to write the names of nine persons on a prepared election
slip which is then sealed and forwarded to New Delhi.

[46] 'Message of September 13, 1966', Extracts from Communication of the
Universal House of Justice, p. 8

Convention delegates

reiterating the feelings of Shoghi Effendi who had earlier remarked that
'Without the study and application of the administration the teaching of
the Cause becomes not only meaningless, but loses in effectiveness and
scope.'[47]

In attempting to nurture local administrative institutions the
Administrative Order relies heavily on its two channels of communication
that provide new declarants with direct human contact, namely, teaching
institutes and travelling teachers. As with other Bahá'í consolidation
activities, an attempt has been made to educate a few key believers. This
policy is reflected in the following message sent by the National Spiritual
Assembly to its teaching committees in April of 1971.

> Throughout the year your committee must
> concentrate on training at least the
> Secretary and Chairman or any two members
> of each Local Spiritual Assembly of your
> region, inviting them in teaching and
> deepening courses, asking the travelling
> teachers to conduct one or two day deepening
> lessons in the places where there are Local
> Spiritual Assemblies.[48]

Of the two sources of contact, travelling teachers are the more
effective. While teaching institutes present occasions when villagers
can receive personal instruction concerning the fundamentals of Bahá'í
administration, they are weakened by the fact that they do not operate in
an environment similar to the one in which administrative institutions
must function. Travelling teachers, on the other hand, can give instruction
in the villages, and hence their lessons are more meaningful. Even with
the use of such educational channels, however, the administrative
institutions in many villages often lie dormant. This is mainly due to the
previously mentioned lack of funds and trained manpower which prevents many
villages from receiving personal contact. Until the Administrative Order can

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[47] Quoted in Directives from the Guardian, p. 2

[48] Unpublished correspondence of the National Spiritual Assembly of the
Bahá'ís of India, 'Letter to teaching committees, April 23, 1971.'

increase its resources and manpower, in Malwa it is concentrating on trying

to develop local administrative institutions in the 'model villages'.

However, judging from observations and information supplied by village

teachers it would seem that even in the 'model village' communities Bahá'í

administrative institutions are still in the initial stages of development;

that is, while they are functioning they do not always follow the prescribed

procedures outlined earlier in this chapter.   The attitude of the

Administrative Order, however, is characterized by patience and forbearance.

From Hands of the Cause to teaching committee members, Bahá'í administrators

realize that change in the Indian village where the influence of tradition

is still strong will of necessity be a slow process, and consequently they

have refrained from demanding 'letter of the law' observance, preferring

to allow for gradual maturation.   In this regard they are following the

advice of the Guardian who concerning the approach to be taken towards new

believers said:

> Let him refrain, at the outset, from insisting
> on such laws and observances as might impose
> too severe a strain on the new seeker's newly-
> awakened faith, and endeavor to nurse him,
> patiently, tactfully, and yet determinedly,
> into full maturity, and aid him to proclaim
> his unqualified acceptance of whatever has
> been ordained by Baha'u'llah...Let him not be
> content until he has infused into his spiritual
> child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise
> independently, in his turn, and devote his
> energies to the quickening of other souls, and
> the upholding of the laws and principles laid
> down by his newly-adopted Faith.[49]

All five of the 'model villages' examined in this study have duly

elected local spiritual assemblies functioning within their confines.   For

the Bahá'í year 1973-1974[50] the membership of each assembly according

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[49] Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 43

[50] Assemblies serve from April 21, and thus their terms overlap the
Gregorian calendar.

to caste background was as follows:

Table 12

Village	Caste Background		Chairman
Kāsod	Rājput	(7)	Rājput
	Brāhman	(1)	
	Balāi	(1)	
Manāsā	Rājput	(8)	Rājput
	Chamār	(1)	
Richa	Brāhman	(4)	Rājput
	Rājput	(3)	
	Balāi	(1)	
	Chamār	(1)	
Karaṅkanī	Gūjar	(4)	Rājput
	Rājput	(3)	
	Brāhman	(2)	
Garabelī	Balāi	(9)	Balāi

As can be seen from the above figures, all of the local spiritual assemblies except for Garabelī,which is primarily a low caste community, are dominated by 'clean' caste members, and then mainly Rājputs. Moreover, in three of the communities the village headman is a member of the assembly (Kāsod, Manāsā, and Karaṅkanī), and in Garabelī several Balāi caste leaders have been elected. Consequently, the composition of the assemblies in these villages seems to reflect traditional leadership patterns.

According to village teachers, assembly meetings in the communities are not always held on a regular basis; they are called when there is a need to discuss a specific problem. Furthermore, the assemblies only consult on matters related to Bahā'í activities; they do not interfere with the jurisdiction of village administrative institutions. Here again one can see the effects of the Bahā'í policy of by-passing the 'old order'. Accordingly, Bahā'í administration is completely removed from political affairs. In fact, Shoghi Effendi forbid such incursion. He never ceased to remind the believers that the religion of Bahá'u'lláh demanded

allegiance to one's government:

> And this principle is no other than
> that which involves the non-participation
> by the adherents of the Faith of
> Bahá'u'lláh, whether in their individual
> capacities or collectively as local or
> national Assemblies, in any form of
> activity that might be interpreted,
> either directly or indirectly, as an
> interference in the political affairs of
> any particular government.[51]

Consequently, the main issues discussed at village assembly meetings are
those which are related to Bahá'í teaching and educational activities and
the collection and use of Bahá'í funds. There have been occasions in
the past (although not in these particular villages) when local assemblies
have had to discuss individual breaches of faith. For example, I was
told that in one village a specific declarant absconded with funds, and
that the matter having been discussed by the assembly was forwarded to
the National Spiritual Assembly for further consultation. Such instances,
however, are rare, and therefore the primary function of local spiritual
assemblies in the 'model villages' is to consult on matters concerning
community teaching and education.

On the evening of March 12, 1974, the Local Spiritual Assembly of
Karankani met to discuss problems relating to the condition of the village's
Bahá'í primary school. The meeting was held in the home of the resident
Bahá'í school teacher who although not a member of the body is generally
present at Bahá'í functions in the village as he is the main link between
the community and the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee. In addition,
being the headmaster of the school his presence at the meeting was
considered important. Eight other persons were in attendance, one
member being out of station. The meeting was opened with a prayer, after

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[51] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 64

Spiritual Assembly for building repairs, it would not ask for any further

assistance at this time, but the school teacher agreed to see if he could

obtain more books from the Regional Teaching Committee office in Ujjain.

The meeting was then closed with a prayer.

It seems apparent from the preceding account that the session was

not an example of an ideal assembly meeting. In the first place, a non-

assembly member (the school teacher) was one of the most active participants

in the consultation. Furthermore, no records were kept, nor was the

proper method of voting adhered to. Of greater significance is the

fact that the true spirit of Bahá'í consultation was not present; the

discussion was controlled by three persons. While other members were

present, they were not queried as to their own opinions, and although all

of them were members of 'clean' castes, they seemed to bow to the

authority of their superiors, a sign that traditional leadership roles

are still influential in Bahá'í administrative institutions in Karankani.

Administrative meetings in village Richa are held in the home of the

resident Bahá'í travelling teacher. On the evening of January 18, 1974,

seven members of the Local Spiritual Assembly met to discuss the contents

of a message sent to various village communities by the Ujjain Regional

Teaching Committee concerning the state of the Indian Bahá'í Fund.

In every country throughout the world where there exists a functioning

national spiritual assembly, there also exists a national fund. These

funds consist of money freely given to the Faith by local adherents (and

in some cases, as with India, allocated funds from the international

headquarters in Haifa)[*] which supports all teaching and consolidation work

within a specific country. Contributions to Bahá'í funds are meant to

be voluntary in nature, the only type of appeals for money permitted being

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[*] An international fund derived from contributions of national communities
throughout the world.

An assembly chairman

those directed to the community as a whole.[53]   The Universal House of

Justice, therefore, has supported the idea of general appeals to the

body of believers.   Accordingly, the Indian National Spiritual Assembly

occasionally makes such requests.   A letter addressed to its teaching

committees reveals the Assembly's position.

> We have to educate all the Bahá'ís
> old or new, who have accepted Bahá'u'lláh
> that they are full and equal members of
> the Bahá'í World Community and as such
> they are equally responsible to the
> progress of the Faith. The Universal
> House of Justice asks us that we should
> not hesitate, nor be diffident, in
> speaking of the Fund to the believers
> in mass teaching areas. They should
> know that giving to the Bahá'í Fund
> attracts blessings upon them. [54]

A similar appeal was made during January of 1974, and hence the topic

of the Indian Fund was discussed during the meeting of the Local Spiritual

Assembly in Rīchā.

Like the meeting in Karaṅkanī the Rīchā consultative session was

begun with a prayer read by the Chairman of the Assemby (Rājput) who is

also a Bahá'í travelling teacher.   He then proceeded to inform the

assembled members that the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee wanted to

remind believers in Malwa that the Indian Bahá'í Fund is the foundation

upon which all Bahá'í activities in India are based; travelling teachers

teaching institutes, conferences, and village schools are all supported

by its resources.   Therefore, each local spiritual assembly in the

region was being asked to consult on the question of how to encourage

greater participation among the believers in their respective communities.

In the consultation that followed it was finally decided that the question

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[53]
Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 9

[54]
Unpublished correspondence of the National Spiritual Assembly of the
    Bahá'ís of India, 'Letter to teaching committees, January 15, 1971'

should be presented to the believers during the next feast. However, to set an example for the rest of the community to follow, the Assembly would make a monthly contribution to the Indian Bahá'í Fund. Unlike the meeting in Karankani, consultation was not dominated by specific personalities. While the Bahá'í teacher guided the discussion, several members contributed ideas, including the Assembly's Chamār member. In fact, it was this 'untouchable' who suggested that the body make an initial contribution. Furthermore, there seemed to be a more democratic spirit surrounding the meeting; participants treated each other as equals, and there was no sign of individual superiority.

In seeking factors that might explain the differences between the Rīchā and Karankani meetings two conditions emerge as being particularly significant. First, the headman in Rīchā is not a Bahá'í, and therefore his influence is not felt as it is in Karankani where as pointed out earlier the Gujar headman is one of the most active declarants in the village. Second, the Bahá'í community in Rīchā is characterized by its large number of young declarants; 66 % of the community's believers are under the age of thirty (see Chapter 4). Consequently, there is no individual among them who represents a traditional figure of authority, whereas in Karankani the two elder members of the community both hold positions of authority in the traditional power structure. If there is anyone in Rīchā who might be considered the community leader it would be the Bahá'í travelling teacher, but his age (26) prevents him from assuming a traditional type of authorative role. Therefore, it would seem that in villages like Rīchā where the Bahá'í community does not include within its ranks persons who represent traditional authoritative positions there is greater potential for the democratic aspects of Bahá'í administrative processes to reveal themselves.

Among the five 'model villages' cited in this study, however, Rīchā

appears to be an exception. In Garabelī administrative activities tend
to be governed by Balāī caste leaders, one of whom was among the original
Bahá'í converts in Malwa. Having the dual prestige of being a spokesman
for the scheduled castes and a former Bahá'í travelling teacher, the
latter is looked to by other members of the community for guidance and
leadership. In Manāsā and Kāsod there exist similar situations to the
one in Karaṅkanī; in both communities the village headman and other
traditional village leaders are members of the Faith, and consequently
they often control Bahá'í administrative institutions. For example, in
Manāsā the headman has been a member of the village's Local Spiritual
Assembly since its establishment in the early 1960's, and has travelled
several times to New Delhi in the role of a convention delegate, while
in Kāsod the Local Spiritual Assembly is dominated by influential Rājputs.

Similar conditions seem to prevail at feasts. With the exception
of Richā, community consultation is governed by a few individuals, the
majority of attendants including both high and low caste members being
only passive participants. This situation was readily apparent during
community consultation in Kāsod where as mentioned in Chapter 9 the
question of building a Bahá'í bhavan was raised. In discussing the
subject with a visiting Bahá'í travelling teacher, four members of the
community predominated: two Rājputs, a Brāhman, and the Balāī school
teacher. While other members of the community listened to the discussion
they did not air their views.

While by no means comprehensive in scope, the above accounts
nevertheless give an indication of the state of Bahá'í administrative
institutions in the five 'model villages'. In general it would appear
that their modus operandi is not always consistent with Bahá'í
administrative norms: meetings are not held on a regular basis; records

of those meetings which are held are not usually kept; and proper
methods of voting are not generally adhered to. More importantly, in
most of the communities the spirit of Bahá'í consultation, namely, free
and equal participation by all members of the assembly or community is
lacking. The examples of the Karankani and Kasod meetings reflect this
phenomenon. However, it should once again be stressed that at this
stage in the development of Bahá'í administrative institutions in Malwa
the fact that elected members of a village assembly will come together
to make decisions concerning their communities is seen by the Bahá'í
Administrative Order in India to be in itself a type of breakthrough.
Given the traditional influences of hierarchical leadership and the Bahá'í
policy of training specific believers to act as community leaders and
educators, the problem of dominant individuals seems to be accepted as
an inevitable stage through which the communities will have to pass.
Yet, with the continual breakdown of traditional village leadership roles
(as a result of the introduction of modern secular ideals and institutions
such as the Village Committee and universal suffrage) the future holds
many possibilities for the development of Bahá'í administrative institutions
in Malwa, and therefore the Bahá'í Administrative Order is primarily
concerned that for the present their presence in the villages be known,
even in a limited form, because a time may come when they will be in a
position to develop into more significant sources of village leadership.

Chapter 11   Education and Propogation

In Bahá'í literature great emphasis is placed on the cultivation of

community education.   At the same time, much importance is attatched to the

sponsoring of local propagation campaigns.   In fact, education and

propagation are two of the pillars of Bahá'í community life: one is directed

towards strengthening the community internally, while the other aims at

adding members to its ranks.   This chapter will take a brief look at Bahá'í

teachings regarding education and propagation,both in their theoretical forms,

and as they are being implemented in rural Malwa.

In The Tablet of Ishráqát Bahá'u'lláh states:

> It is enjoined upon every father to provide for
> the instruction of his sons and daughters in the
> art of learning and writing and in that which
> hath been prescribed in My Epistles. He that
> neglecteth that whereunto he is bidden, if he
> be wealthy, the Trustees are to take from him
> that which is required for their education, and
> if he be poor, the matter shall devolve upon the
> House of Justice...[1]

As the preceding passage reveals, education in the Bahá'í Faith means

universal education;   all believers are given the responsibility of educating

their sons and daughters so that ignorance might be eliminated and knowledge

become the guiding light of civilization.   In this vein, 'Abdu'l-Bahá penned

the following:

> The primary, the bost [sic] urgent requirement
> is the promotion of education. It is
> inconceivable that any nation should acheive
> prosperity and success unless this paramount,
> this fundamental concern is carried forward.
> The principal reason for the decline and fall of
> peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the
> people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs,
> how much less do they grasp the core of the
> important problems and complex needs of the time.[2]

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[1] Bahá'u'lláh, The Tablet of Ishráqát, in The Bahá'í Revelation, p. 159

[2] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, trans. by Marzieh Gail,
    (Wilmette, Illinois, 1957), p. 109

In fact, so much importance is placed on the education of children in the Bahá'í Faith that it is considered an obligatory command which if not obeyed leaves the individual concerned answerable to God. For example, it is written that 'Should they neglect this matter, they shall, be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.'[3] Another passage repeats the warning: 'Beware! Beware! that ye fail not in this matter. Endeavor with heart, with life, to train your children, especially the daughters. No excuse is acceptable in this matter.'[4]

Education, however, does not only mean the training of children. It also implies the development of the mental powers of all members of the community. Moreover, it not only involves the learning of matters related to the temporal world, but also infers the understanding of 'divine' realities. Consequently, while knowledge of the sciences and arts is praised, it is not held to be the only domain of education. Rather, the teachings of science and religion are seen to be complementary spheres of knowledge, and a proper investigation of both is necessary for a complete understanding of reality. Hence, 'We may think of science as one wing and religion as the other; a bird needs two wings for flight, one alone would be useless.'[5] However, true arts and sciences are not those topics which begin and end in words; they are the spheres of knowledge which are conducive to the well-being and tranquility of mankind.[6] Thus, while Bahá'ís are encouraged to acquire knowledge of the arts and sciences, they are also commanded to seek out the 'divine' realities as expressed in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

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[3] Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. III, p. 579

[4] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í World Faith, p. 399

[5] Paris Talks, p. 130

[6] Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 19

> Is it not astonishing that although man has
> been created for the knowledge and love of
> God, for the virtues of the human world, for
> spirituality, heavenly illumination and life
> eternal, nevertheless he continues ignorant
> and negligent of all this? Consider how he
> seeks knowledge of everything except knowledge
> of God...How much he is attracted to the mysteries
> of matter and how completely unaware he is of
> the mysteries of divinity![7]

One of the vital responsibilities of the Local Spiritual Assembly,

therefore, is the promotion of community educational activities.   Regarding

this responsibility Shoghi Effendi wrote:

> They [local spiritual assemblies] must promote
> by every means in their power the material as
> well as the spiritual enlightment of youth, the
> means for the education of children, institute,
> whenever possible, Bahá'í educational institutions,
> organize and supervise their work and provide the
> best means for their progress and development.[8]

The primary purpose of Bahá'í educational activities, however, is

not just to provide believers with a theoretical knowledge of the Faith's

teachings but to teach them how to translate this knowledge into the realm

of action.   In essence Bahá'í education means learning the meaning of

Bahá'í writings in ways that will provide a basis for believers to act in

accordance to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.   Consequently, Bahá'í

education is largely moral education.   Its aim is to teach the believer

to know himself as part of the divine chain of creation and to show him

that the development of society is closely linked with his personal conduct.

As the Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas record:

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[7] Foundations of World Unity. Talks by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, (Wilmette, Illinois,
    1968), p. 64

[8] Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, p. 38

> For this day the most necessary duty is to
> purify your morals, to correct your manners,
> and to improve your deeds. The beloved of
> the Merciful must appear with such morals and
> habits among the creatures that the fragrant
> odor of the garden of sanctity may perfume all
> the horizons and may quicken all the dead souls,
> because the Manifestation of Divinity and the
> dawning of the infinite lights of the Invisible
> is intended for the education of souls and the
> refinement of the morals of all in existence,...[9]

In India, where most of the rural local spiritual assemblies are not well developed, the Bahá'í Administrative Order has promoted community education by establishing educational institutions on both the regional and local levels. Mention has already been made of the most prominent regional educational institution in Malwa, the Indore Teaching Institute. In addition to the Institute there are two other educational institutions functioning on the regional level: regional conferences, and seasonal schools. Moreover, on the local level ten village primary schools have been established.

Regional conferences are similar to teaching institutes in that they provide occasions when declarants from throughout the region (and country) can meet with each other for the purpose of learning about the various aspects of Bahá'í life. The main difference between the two is that teaching institutes are held in one location and run on a more regular basis, whereas conferences are held throughout the region and are generally called for a specific purpose or event. In addition, although they often contain 'educational' programs within their formats, conferences tend to be more oriented towards the creation of group unity and the development of enthusiasm as regards teaching campaigns than they are with direct study of the writings.

After the great explosion of declarations that followed the Saṅgīmandā experiment (see Chapter 3), the Bahá'í Administrative Order in India

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[9] Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. II, p. 373

sponsored a series of conferences in Malwa for the purpose of promoting
unity among the new declarants.   In August of 1961 a large conference was
held in Dhar.   This was followed by similar conferences in Ujjain and
Indore.   When Rúḥíyyih Khánum visited Malwa in 1964 special conferences
were held in Shajapur and Indore, and a rash of such conferences were
convened in 1968, one of which was a special 'deepening' conference held
in Ujjain for the education of tribal declarants.[10]   Furthermore, over
four hundred declarants from Malwa attended the International Bahá'í
Conference held in New Delhi in 1967.   Recent years have seen periodic
conferences both in Ujjain and Indore, and, furthermore, another large
conference is being planned for Malwa in 1975 to help promote the Universal
House of Justice's new Five-Year Plan.

The educational portions of these conferences usually involve talks
presented by special guest speakers (often prominent members of the Bahá'í
Administrative Order, such as Hands of the Cause or visiting international
personalities).   Thus the primary function of regional conferences is
not to provide intense study but to engender spirit and feelings of group
unity.

A more purely educational institution is the Bahá'í seasonal school.
Originally termed summer-schools - because they were developed by early
converts in America during periods of summer vacation - these educational
gatherings of believers have over the years expanded beyond the boundaries
of a particular season so that today most Bahá'í communities around the
world hold not only regional summer-schools but regional winter and spring-
schools.   Shoghi Effendi anticipated such a development when he relayed
that although summer-schools were originally convened in the summer months
'...there is no reason why they should be called "Summer Schools".'[11]

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[10] There have been a good number of declarations among tribal peoples in
Malwa, especially among the Bhils.

[11] 'Letter to an individual believer, December 26, 1941', Letters from the
Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, p. 42

Summer, winter, and spring schools are held throughout India for the purpose of 'deepening' declarants in the knowledge of the Bahá'í writings. Although there is no rigid format to which instructors must adhere, the following was advised by Shoghi Effendi:

> Shoghi Effendi feels that the real purpose of these Summer Schools is to deepen the knowledge of the friends. Lectures are very essential for they give a wonderful picture of the subject matter, but it is not sufficient to have a picture; the friends should deepen their knowledge and this can be achieved if, together with lectures, there are study classes and seminar work carried on by the same lecturer.[12]

Consequently, one of the central aims of seasonal schools is to provide an environment in which believers can both hear and learn the revealed verses of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.[13]

Since the advent of mass teaching in Malwa special seasonal schools have been periodically held in both Ujjain and Indore. The sessions last from several days to a week, during which time participants eat, sleep, and work within the confines of Bahá'í educational centers.[14] Their formats have usually followed the general pattern quoted above, with special emphasis being placed on administrative topics.[15] Furthermore, much of the work in these schools has been oriented towards oral education, as the problems of illiteracy often diminish the value of direct scriptural study.

The Bahá'í Administrative Order has not only developed educational

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[12] Bahá'í News (United States and Canada), # 63, June, 1932, (West Englewood, New Jersey), p. 3

[13] 'The friends should read the Writings and be able to quote from the Tablets when discussing subjects pertaining to the Faith.' (Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Bahá'í News (United States and Canada), #67, October, 1932, (West Englewood, New Jersey), p. 4)

[14] In Indore the Teaching Institute grounds are used, and in Ujjain the Bahá'í center located just outside of the city is utilized.

[15] 'The teaching of the Administration is therefore, an indispensable feature of every Bahá'í Summer School...' (Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Directives from the Guardian, p. 66)

institutions on the regional level in Malwa, it has also sponsored the

establishment of village primary schools.   In Malwa ten such schools are

currently functioning,[16] and several have been officially recognized by the

Madhya Pradesh District Education Officer as meeting the government's

requirements for primary schools.[17] Five of the schools are located in

Shajapur district;   two are situated in both Mandsaur and Ratlam districts;

and one is located in Ujjain district.   Each school has a resident Bahá'í

teacher who is supported by the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee.

The curriculum in the village schools consists of Hindi, mathematics,

and geography-history.   In addition, one period each day is devoted to

Bahá'í education,which generally involves memorizing prayers and learning

about the lives of the central figures of the Faith.

Three of the five 'model village' communities examined in this study

have functioning Bahá'í primary schools within their boundaries.   The

Manāsā school was built in 1968, the same year that villagers in Karaṅkanī

constructed their school.   In Kāsod there is no school house (although

members of the community have recently been considering the possibility

of building a Bahá'í bhavan – see Chapter 9 –), and consequently classes

are held in the open.   In both Rīchā and Garabelī government schools

have been erected, and consequently there is no real need for Bahá'í

schools.

The Manāsā primary school has twenty-one students, all of whom are

boys ranging in age from four to ten years.   Three of the pupils come from

status groups which have traditionally been classified as 'unclean' and

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[16] There were at one time close to twenty primary schools functioning in
Malwa villages, but lack of funds and trained teachers has resulted
in some of them having to be temporarily discontinued.

[17] Bahá'í News (India) of September – October, 1973 noted that several
additional schools had also applied for recognition (p. 10).

'untouchable', two being members of the Balāi caste and one coming from a Chamār family. The remainder of the children are members of the Rājput caste.

The resident teacher is a Rājput who has been in the service of the Bahá'í Faith for five years. He conducts daily classes in all of the above listed subjects, and his school is one of those recognized by the Madhya Pradesh Educational officer as meeting required government standards.

In addition to the standard subjects the teacher maintained that some time each day is relegated for the teaching of Bahá'í prayers, which is accomplished by means of oral repetition. In this process the teacher recites a line of verse which is then repeated by the child until he has mastered the prayer. As a result of this training, fifteen of the pupils know complete prayers by heart, and many of them can stand and recite verses without any difficulty.[18] The instructor also stated that besides the daily session of verse repetition, lessons relating to the central figures of the Faith are periodically presented.

The village school in Karaṅkani has not as yet been recognized by the Madhya Pradesh government. As in Manāsā, the resident teacher is in the employment of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee, as is his wife who also teaches in the school. In addition to his responsibility in Karaṅkanī the teacher periodically journeys to a nearby village to help direct the activities of a second Bahá'í village school.[19]

The subjects taught in the Karaṅkanī Bahá'í school are the same as those taught in Manāsā, and like its sister class emphasis is placed on teaching children prayers by means of oral repetition. Consequently, most all of the twenty children who attend the school know at least one

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[18] The author witnessed several children recite prayers.

[19] His wife's presence in the school has allowed him to perform this dual function.

Bahá'í prayer.

The same situation exists in Kāsod where apart from the standard curriculum the twenty-three students learn Bahá'í prayers and listen to stories about the leading figures in Bahá'í history. Significantly, the village teacher in Kāsod comes from an 'unclean' caste. Although a Balāi he teaches children from both 'clean' and 'unclean' caste backgounds, many of his students being the sons of Rājputs. It should be noted, moreover, that he is not an isolated example of this phenomenon, for among the ten village school teachers in Malwa two are Chamārs and two (including the Kāsod teacher) share Balāi ancestry.

In establishing village schools the Bahá'í Administrative Order hopes to accomplish two things: first, to help raise the literacy rate in rural Bahá'í communities by providing declarants' children with a primary education and the possibility for further advancement; and second, and perhaps more realistically, to make village children aware of the basic ideals and modes of behavior associated with the Bahá'í Faith, with the hope that as they mature they will be able to assimilate these ideals into their daily life patterns. As was mentioned earlier, one of the main problems associated with the consolidation plans of the Bahá'í Faith in Malwa has been that many of the concepts and modes of behavior found in its teachings are culturally alien to rural Hindus. By educating village children from an early age Bahá'í administrators in India hope to break down to some extent this type of cultural alienation, and in so doing, allow for the next generation of rural Bahá'ís to become more 'deepened' in the ways of the Faith. In fact, members of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee place much of their faith in future community development in village primary school, and consequently during the the Five-Year Plan there is hope that additional schools can be established in Malwa. In this regard, travelling teachers reported that many village communities are anxious to have similar

A Bahá'í village school and class

institutions established in their villages, but at the present time the Bahá'í community in India faces the financial problem of trying to maintain widespread teaching and consolidation activities on a very limited budget. If this problem can be eliviated, however, it is likely that the 1970's will see further educational activity at the village level.

The leaders of the Bahá'í Faith from Bahá'u'lláh to the Universal House of Justice have not only placed great emphasis on the importance of developing community education, they have also stressed the necessity of individual believers becoming actively involved in propagation efforts. In this sense the Bahá'í Faith is a proselytizing religion, for it seeks to find new converts by means of 'missionary' activity.

The writings of the Bahá'í Faith contain numerous references to propagation and proclamation. For example, in Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh the following is recorded:

> Center your energies in the propagation of the
> Faith of God. Whoso is worthy of so high a
> calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso
> is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who
> will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation,
> whose power hath caused the foundations of the
> mightiest structures to quake, every mountain
> to be crushed into dust, and every soul to be
> dumbfounded.[18]

And again,

> The Pen of the Most High hath decreed and imposed
> upon every one the obligation to teach this Cause...
> God will, no doubt, inspire whosoever detacheth
> himself from all else but Him, and will cause the
> pure waters of wisdom and utterance to gush out and
> flow copiously from his heart.[19]

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[18] Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 196-197

[19] Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 314

'Abdu'l-Bahá, whose entire life was dedicated to teaching the doctrines of his father, and to whom the Bahá'ís of the world turn as their perfect exemplar, penned the following words in his Tablets of the Divine Plan:

> In brief, I hope you will display in this respect the greatest effort and magnanimity. It is assured that you will become assisted and confirmed. A person declaring the glad tidings of the appearance of the realities and significances of the Kingdom is like unto a farmer who scatters pure seeds in the rich soil. The spring cloud will pour upon them the rain of bounty, and unquestionably the station of the farmer will be raised in the estimation of the lord of the village, and many harvests will be gathered.[20]

He supplemented this statement in a letter to an individual believer when he wrote:

> It seems that thou wast uncertain whether to occupy thyself in writing or delivering the tidings of the Cause of God. In these days, to deliver the glad-tidings is the best of all. Open then thy tongue to the guidance of the human race on any occasion that presents itself.[21]

As recorded in Chapter 1, it was Shoghi Effendi who personally organized and directed Bahá'í propagation plans between the years 1921 and 1957, launching several international campaigns, the most notable of which was the Ten-Year Crusade. Time and again in his writings the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith admonished the believers to arise and teach the religion of Bahá'u'lláh. For example, in 1930 he wrote:

> Indeed to bring this message to mankind in its darkest hour of need is the paramount duty of every believer. All the agony, the suffering, privation and spiritual blindness afflicting people today everywhere in the world, to a greater or lesser degree, is because they are unaware of, or indifferent to, the Remedy God has sent them. Only those who are aware of it can carry its healing knowledge to others, so that each Bahá'í has an inescapable and sacred duty to perform.[22]

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[20] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan, (Wilmette, Illinois, 1971), p. 34-35

[21] Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. II, p. 321

[22] Quoted in Directives from the Guardian, p. 74

In a like manner, upon its election in 1963 the Universal House of Justice reiterated that 'The high intensity of teaching activity reached at the end of the World Crusade, far from slackening, must now be increased as the friends everywhere draw on the vast spiritual powers released as a result of the celebration of the Most Great Jubilee and the emergence of the Universal House of Justice.'[23]

While the pleas of Bahá'í leaders have been consistent, it has only been in the last fifteen years that the Bahá'í Faith has entered into the arena of mass teaching, and, as we have seen in previous chapters, India was in the forefront of such activity. Although slow in starting, the active campaign of village teaching that characterized the 1960's changed the entire structure of the Indian Bahá'í community. India suddenly became a mass teaching community whose resources were channeled into programs and campaigns designed to propagate the teachings of the Faith among the subcontinent's vast rural population.

In Malwa, teaching activities are supervised by the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee. In directing local campaigns the Committee has made an effort to utilize village manpower whenever possible, and as a result it has organized a corps of travelling village teachers. In Chapter 6 it was noted that one of the functions of travelling teachers in Malwa is to act as channels of communication between the village communities and Bahá'í administrative institutions, more particularly the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee. Their second responsibility is to propagate the Faith in the rural areas. Concerning this vital function the Universal House of Justice in a letter to all mass teaching national spiritual assemblies stated the following:

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[23] 'Message to national conventions, May 7, 1963', Wellspring of Guidance, p. 6

> From among the believers native to each country,
> competent travelling teachers must be selected
> and teaching projects worked out. In the words
> of our beloved Guardian, commenting upon the
> teaching work in Latin America: "Strong and
> sustained support should be given to the vitally
> needed and meritorious activities started by the
> native...travelling teachers,...who, as the
> mighty task progresses, must increasingly bear
> the brunt of responsibility for the propagation
> of the Faith in their homelands".[24]

In another letter written specifically to the Indian National Spiritual

Assembly the Universal House of Justice elaborated on the implementation

of this institution:

> ...the progress and growth of the Cause in India
> depend on the services of your own people, and to
> this end, a concerted effort should be made to
> integrate the friends in India into the work of
> the Cause in all its aspects, to assure universal
> participation that will result in winning even
> greater victories for the Cause. In this connection,
> your idea of engaging a number of well trained
> travelling teachers in India is, in principle
> correct. You have various Teaching Institutes and
> a number of devoted, well-informed teachers at your
> disposal for this service.[25]

Over the years the Bahá'í Administrative Order in India has trained

numerous travelling teachers to carry forth the message of Bahá'u'lláh

to the village communities of Malwa.   These individuals have come from

local towns and villages, and they have been responsible for bringing many

of the new declarants into the Bahá'í Faith.[26]   At the present time there

are thirteen such teachers actively working in the region. All of them

have been specially selected by the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee,

and they have all participated in specific training courses.   Among the

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[24] 'Letter to all national spiritual assemblies engaged in mass teaching,
        February 2, 1966', _Arise to Serve_, p. 111

[25] 'Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India,
        February 15, 1968', _Arise to Serve_, p. 121

[26] For example, three of the five 'model village' communities cited in this
        study, Richā, Karankanī, and Kāsod, were initially contacted by local
        travelling teachers.

communities observed in this study only Richā harbors a travelling
teacher, but Garabelī contains an ex-teacher who was very active during
the initial years of mass teaching in Malwa, and the other three all have
resident primary school teachers.[27]

Travelling teachers are supported by funds supplied by the Ujjain
Regional Teaching Committee. Each month they receive a given allowance
to help maintain themselves in the field, but they are not considered
permanent employees of the Bahá'í Faith, as Shoghi Effendi considered such
an act tantamount to having a payed clergy, an institution forbidden by
Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian expressed this feeling when he wrote:

> Likewise travelling teachers should be assisted
> financially to carry out "projects" assigned to
> them. The friends should not for a moment confuse
> this type of support with the creation of a paid
> clergy. Any Baha'i can, at the discretion of the
> N. S. A. (National Spiritual Assembly) receive this
> necessary assistance and it is clearly understood
> it is temporary and only to carry out a specific
> plan.[28]

The Universal House of Justice supported the Guardian's view when in a
letter addressed to all national spiritual assemblies engaged in mass
teaching they stated:

> There is a danger in this situation which must be
> avoided at all costs. Despite the pressing
> requirements of the Nine Year Plan, no Baha'i
> teacher anywhere should consider himself as
> permanently employed by the Faith. We do not
> have in the Cause of God any paid career open
> to Bahá'í teachers.[29]

As their name implies, travelling teachers traverse the rural areas of
Malwa proclaiming the message of the Bahá'í Faith in towns and villages.

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[27] Primary school teachers often engage in proclamation activities, but
their essential task is the maintenance of village schools.

[28] 'Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Great
Britain, May 29, 1946', Arise to Serve, p. 108-109

[29] 'Letter to all national spiritual assemblies engaged in mass teaching ,
June 25, 1964', Arise to Serve, p. 108

They often travel on foot, as in many areas it is the only suitable mode of transportation. The general policy of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee has been to instruct teachers to engage in one hour of prayer before starting on their journey. In addition, although there is no official method of teaching the Faith, they are encouraged to follow certain procedures which have proved to be helpful in village teaching.

First, and perhaps most importantly, travelling teachers are reminded that the most essential element in introducing the Faith to new listeners is not the knowledge the teacher possesses but his spirit and love for Bahá'u'lláh. They are instructed to make themselves instruments through which Bahá'u'lláh can work. For example, in one training session teachers were told about an illiterate village teacher who upon entering a rural community only said the name Bahá'u'lláh, but he said it with such sincerity that several members of the village declared. Thus, above all, teachers are advised to be sincere and loving and not to force the message upon unwilling listeners.

One technique employed by most travelling teachers in Malwa is to initially seek out the village headman. This procedure is followed for several reasons. In the first place, as this individual maintains a position of traditional authority in the village it is considered a mark of respect to ask his permission before initiating any teaching activity. Second, since he often holds great influence in the community his declaration is likely to result in other members of the village taking interest. Finally, since the headman generally comes from a 'clean' caste, by approaching him Bahá'í teachers are not marking themselves as missionaries who are aiming at converting 'low' caste Hindus.[30]

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[30] As stated in Chapter 3 this procedure was adopted in Malwa during the mid-1960's when it was learned that many 'clean' caste Hindus considered the Bahá'í Faith to be a religion for 'untouchables'.

Furthermore, because of the historical antagonism between Hinduism and Islám, travelling teachers are advised not to identify the Bahá'í Faith with the latter. For example, they are advised not to use the phrase 'Alláh'u'Abhá'(see Chapter 6) in front of new contacts, as the Arabic is too easily identified with Islám. In fact, a number of village teachers initially refer to Bahá'u'lláh as Bhagavān Bahā.[31] In the same vein, travelling teachers often greet their listeners with the traditional greeting'Jay Jay Rāma'. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 7, Bahá'u'lláh is spoken of in terms of the avatāra tradition, and in many instances passages from the Rāmāyana and Bhagavad Gītā are used to exemplify the ideals of the Bahá'í Faith.[32]

Propagation campaigns in Malwa are often stimulated by teaching conferences. On these occasions Bahá'í teachers from throughout the region gather for two or three day sessions during which time they prepare themselves both mentally and spiritually for the tasks they are called on to accomplish. As was noted earlier in this chapter, conferences are often visited by important Bahá'í personalities who address the assembled group concerning the import of mass teaching. For example, Hand of the Cause Rúhíyyih Khánum spoke at numerous teaching conferences during her 1964 trip to the subcontinent. At one conference held in Indore she told the Bahá'í teachers that:

> ...a Bahá'í teacher should be so dedicated to the
> Cause that no obstacles could dishearten him, his
> heart must be overflowing with love for all humanity
> and he must be absolutely assured of Bahá'u'lláh's
> guidance and protection.[33]

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[31]Removing the cultural connotations, the two have basically the same meaning.

[32]For example, one teacher declared that he often identified Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation: 'My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting.' with Rāma's claim: 'I accept the man with the pure heart; I don't accept the man with the impure heart.'

[33]Nakhjavani, p. 55

During the last few years teaching activity in Malwa has not been as intense as it was in the early and mid-1960's. This is primarily due to the fact that much of the movement's energy in recent years has been directed towards consolidation programs. However, the Universal House of Justice's new Five-Year Plan calls for an increase in the number of local spiritual assemblies in India from the current number of 4,369 to 7,000 by the year 1979. Consequently, one can assume that teaching activity will once again be accelerated. In directing the new campaign Bahá'í administrative institutions in India will be guided by the closing words of the new Plan:

> As the old order gives way to the new, the
> changes which must take place in human affairs
> are such to stagger the imagination. This is
> the opportunity for the hosts of the Lord.
> Undismayed and undeterred by the wreckage of
> "long-cherished ideals and time-honoured
> institutions", now being "swept away and relegated
> to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines",
> the world community of Bahá'ís must surge forward
> eagerly, and with ever-increasing energy, to build
> those new, God-given institutions from which will
> be diffused the light of the holy principles and
> teachings sent down by God in this day for the
> salvation of all mankind.[34]

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[34] Five-Year Plan for the Bahá'ís of India, page numbers not listed.

Chapter 12   Conclusion

It is now time to draw together the various pieces of information
presented in the body of this study and attempt to make some comprehensive
statements about the role of the Bahá'í Faith in Malwa.   In the process
two fundamental questions must be answered: first, what are the movement's
primary teaching objectives and consequential methods of approach;   and
second, what functions do its institutions perform in the contemporary
village social system?   The first theme will involve looking at several
additional questions regarding the Faith's evolution from a Persian
sectarian movement into a universal religion and the resulting effects this
development has had on its relationship with Hinduism, while the second
will include both an examination of the reasons why Malwa villagers are
declaring their belief in Bahá'í doctrines and an analysis of the present
state of Bahá'í institutions in the five 'model village' communities.
Regarding the second theme, the author is not in a position to make
finalized conclusions.   As has been mentioned several times throughout the
study, the amount of first hand observational data he was able to gather in
the village communities was limited by the official restrictions placed
upon him, and consequently, although some examples of Bahá'í activities in
the 'model villages' were personally observed, additional information had
to be obtained from Bahá'í administrators and village teachers.   Yet, while
for the present finalized conclusions can not be drawn, the author's
knowledge of the movement's doctrines and teaching methods when combined
with both the data received from informants and his own personal observations
allows him, he believes, to make educated speculations as to the current
condition of Bahá'í institutions in these communities, and consequently,
although the primary purpose of the present study has been to examine the

doctrinal and institutional components of the Bahá'í Faith in the light

of how they are being taught in a specific cultural environment - the

'model village' data being primarily supplementary information designed to

give the work's abstractions some basis in reality - some remarks regarding

their actualization in the rural communities will be attempted.

In one sense the Bahá'í Faith can be interpreted as a response to the

world's growing awareness of the oneness of the human experience.   The

collision of worlds that accelerated with the Crusades during the middle

ages and has in the last two centuries intensified to ever increasing

degrees is shattering, admittedly not without a struggle, the ideal of

cultural exclusiveness.   Mankind is slowly coming to the realization that

cultural forms are only outward expressions and that the human experience

which lies behind them is of greater structural significance. In its present form the

Bahá'í Faith embodies this ideal.   Its orientation is religious; that is,

it seeks to explain the oneness of the human experience in terms of the

Sacred - all men are created and sustained by one transcendent and

omnipotent reality which has revealed itself through numerous manifestations

who have in turn been the inspiration for the development of the world's

great religions.   The forms and symbolic modes of expression these

religions have assumed have varied according to the environment and cultural

milieu in which they have developed, but the essential experience they

engender - that of man confronting the Sacred - is universal.   It is this

last point that makes the Bahá'í Faith world embracing in scope, for

numerous religions have claimed that there is only one God and that mankind

is His creation, but the former goes a step further and claims that all of

the world's major religious traditions spring from the Sacred; a Hindu

confronting the Divine through the cultural vehicle of Hinduism has had

just as valid and real experience as the Christian encountering the Holy

through Christ or the Muslim experiencing the Word of God through Muḥammad.

If a universal outlook characterizes the Faith's contemporary attitude

towards other religious traditions, has this position resulted from an

evolutionary process within the movement itself, or have such ideas existed

from the early days of the religion's founding?   E. G. Browne, who was

studying the Bahá'í Faith at a time when it was just beginning to develop

into an international movement, felt that the religion had undergone great

changes since the time of the Báb.   As he wrote in the introduction to

his translation of The Táríkh-i-Jadíd:

> At the present day, therefore, the vast majority of
> Bábís are Behá'ís, whose doctrines, sentiments, and
> ideals are already far removed from those of the
> primitive Bábís or modern Ezelís. No sooner was
> Behá (Bahá'u'lláh) firmly established in his authority
> than he began to make free use of the privilege accorded
> by the Báb to "Him whom God shall manifest" to abrogate,
> change, cancel, and develop earlier doctrines. His
> chief aim seems to have been to introduce a more settled
> order, to discourage speculation, to direct the
> attention of his followers to practical reforms pursued
> in a prudent and unobtrusive fashion, to exalt ethics
> at the expense of metaphysics, to check mysticism, to
> conciliate existing authorities, including even the Sháh
> of Persia, the Nero of the Bábí Faith, to abolish
> useless, unpractical and irksome regulations and
> restrictions, and, in general, to adapt the religion at
> the head of which he now found himself to the ordinary
> exigencies of life, and to render it more capable of
> becoming, what he intended to make it, a universal
> system suitable to all mankind.[1]

At a later date (December, 1917) Browne felt that Bahá'í doctrine had been

influenced by its introduction in the United States to various international,

pacifist, and feminist movements.[2] Consequently, Browne implied that both

Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had adapted the original teachings of the Báb

to suit an international audience.

The official position of the Bahá'í Faith is that Bahá'u'lláh was given

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[1] E. G. Browne, Introduction to The Táríkh-i-Jadíd, p. xxiv-xxv

[2] E. G. Browne, Introduction to Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion, p. xix

the right as 'Him whom God shall manifest' to abrogate many of the laws
and teachings of the Báb.   Moreover, it is held that the young Siyyid's
teachings were designed to be enforced only for a short transitional period
between his own revelation and that of Bahá'u'lláh.   Accordingly, it is
the latter who is seen to be the true formulator of the Bahá'í Faith's
'world view', while the former, although considered a manifestation of God,
is viewed more as Bahá'u'lláh's forerunner,[3] a position not far removed
from Browne's interpretation.   Furthermore, Bahá'ís maintain that the
movement's evolution into a world religion was not the result of his
successors ('Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi) manipulating his teachings
to suit an international audience.   Rather, these individuals are seen to
be the instruments who constructed the superstructure Bahá'u'lláh had
envisioned.[4]

Regardless of whether Bahá'u'lláh's successors were only bringing to
fruition the prophet's original vision or were chartering the movement in
new directions as determined by their own interpretive creativity, there is
no doubt that under the leadership of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi the
Bahá'í Faith broke loose from its Persian moorings and began to take on
universal significance.   There is no need to reiterate the details of this
transformation.   Rather, from the point of view of the present study one
specific development is particularly significant, and that is 'Abdu'l-Bahá
and Shoghi Effendi's interpretation that Bahá'u'lláh had included among
God's messengers the Indian figures of Krsna and the Buddha.   By stating
that these figures were manifestations of God, the Bahá'í leaders were
breaking down barriers which had separated the orthodox Judeo-Christian-
Islamic tradition from the religions of India, as the former have tended to
view Buddhism and Hinduism as at best misguided religions.   Thus,

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[3] Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 98

[4] Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day Is Come, p. 122

'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi must be looked upon as playing leading roles in the adaption of Bahá'u'lláh's principle of the oneness of religion to the specifics of the Indian cultural environment, an adaption which at a later date would be refined and developed by Bahá'í administrative institutions in the subcontinent. It is fair to say, therefore, that while Bahá'u'lláh may have had the vision of a universal faith, it has been his successors who have enabled this vision to become a reality, and it is in this sense that one can speak of the evolution of the Bahá'í Faith from a Persian sectarian movement to a world religion.

The Bahá'í Faith, however, is not merely interested in proclaiming the oneness of the religious experience. If this were the case, like the Theosophical Society or other liberal religious organizations it would be satisfied with working for toleration between the various religions of the world. Instead, as this study indicates, Bahá'í teachers are actively involved in converting people to their cause and subsequently educating them within a framework of specifically designated socio-religious institutions. In carrying out these activities, what, we might ask, are the movement's fundamental objectives, and moreover, what are the assumptions that lie behind them?

It has already been suggested that the Bahá'í Faith can be interpreted as a religious response to a unifying world. In this type of interpretation the international structure that the Faith embodies would be seen to have been the formulation of a charismatic individual who like all visionaries was ahead of the majority of his contemporaries in realizing the realities of the new world. However, one must remember that in the eyes of the charismatic formulator he was not reacting to a historical situation - he was creating it. Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be a manifestation of the Sacred; he was the instrument through whom God would accomplish his preordained plan for man and civilization, a plan which began with

Adam[5] and would culminate with the establishment of 'The Most Great Peace'.

Hence, from the point of view of the Bahá'í Faith the religion of

Bahá'u'lláh is the cause of, and not the response to a unifying world, and

consequently while Bahá'í teachings espouse the historical validity of

other religious traditions, they also claim that these movements were

preliminary steps in the evolution of a world civilization whose religious

base will be the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. This point is important, for

it is the conviction that they are building 'God's Kingdom on Earth' that

sustains Bahá'í teachers both in India and other countries around the world.

The Bahá'í Faith's conversion objectives are also influenced by a sense

of the apocolyptic. Within Bahá'í writings there are several references

to a 'catastrophe' that is following mankind. For example, Bahá'u'lláh

warns:

> O YE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD!
>
> Know verily that an unforeseen calamity is following
> you and that grevious retribution awaiteth you.[6]

Shoghi Effendi reiterated Bahá'u'lláh's admonition in the following words:

> That the forces of a world catastrophe can alone
> precipitate such a new phase of human thought is,
> alas, becoming increasingly apparent. That nothing
> short of the fire of a severe ordeal, unparalleled
> in its intensity, can fuse and weld the discordant
> entities that constitute the elements of present-day
> civilization, into the integral components of the
> world commonwealth of the future, is a truth which
> future events will increasingly demonstrate.[7]

There is, consequently, a sense of urgency in the Bahá'í world to lay an

institutional groundwork capable of surviving the calamitous machinations

of a strife-torn humanity. In fact, it is this sense of urgency that has

precipitated the mass teaching and consolidation campaigns in India. Hand

of the Cause Rúhíyyih Khánum expressed this feeling during her trip to the

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[5] Adam symbolizes the first manifestation of God.

[6] Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words, p. 44

[7] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 46

subcontinent in 1964:

> The destiny of the human race is to accept
> Bahá'u'lláh, we know that as Bahá'ís. Now, it has
> to start sometime and it is a little late in
> starting, because this Cause is over 120 years old
> and we are only beginning to get the entrance of
> people by troops into the Faith. We must not say
> this is too soon, we must say this is too late.
> We are in a hurry. We have lost a hundred years
> of the Bahá'í cycle. We want it to go faster every
> day, no matter what kind of problems arise from its
> going faster.[8]

Hence, the teaching and consolidation work presently being carried out in
India is a reflection of the Bahá'í Faith's supposition that the old world
order is soon to be rolled up and a new one laid out in its stead, and it
is only in light of this belief that the movement's policies in rural Malwa
can be fully understood.

The primary objective of the Bahá'í Faith, therefore, is to create a
new world social order whose values and socio-religious institutions will
be based on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and as a result its teachers are
currently engaged in promoting an active international propagation campaign.
In the process they employ a culturally adaptive teaching technique whereby
Bahá'u'lláh is presented as being the fulfillment of the latter-day
prophecies of the world's various religious traditions. In India this has
meant that Bahá'u'lláh has been identified with the avatāra doctrine,
primarily as it is formulated in the Bhagavad Gītā. It would be wrong,
however, to suppose that the purpose of employing a culturally adaptive
teaching technique in Malwa is to absorb Hindu elements into its mainstream
and thereby facilitate religious understanding. In fact, one of the most
common misunderstandings concerning the Bahá'í Faith's approach to other

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[8] Nakhjavani, p. 27-28

religious traditions is that it is eclectic in nature. In truth, the

Faith's teachers use this technique solely as a means of identifying the

movement's teachings with traditional eschatological expectations. They

do not compromise these teachings with those of Hinduism or any other

religion but use traditional conceptual frameworks to construct cross-

cultural bridges.[9] Thus, by speaking of Bahá'u'lláh as an _avatāra_ Bahá'í

teachers allow Hindus to understand his prophetic claims in terms of their

own culturally derived conceptual constructs, but they do not adopt the

various formulations the Hindu mind has built around these constructs.

Consequently, although the Bahá'í Faith claims to be the fulfillment of

the _avatāra_ tradition, it also asserts that its own doctrines are the true

expression of traditional expectations and that the numerous doctrines which

have been built up around the _avatāra_ concept are extraneous accumulations

of man-made ideologies. Therefore, the main purpose behind the movement's

use of a culturally adaptive teaching technique in Malwa is to establish

a meaningful channel of communication through which its own teachings can

be introduced and implemented.

As mentioned in Chapter 7, when joining the Bahá'í Faith Hindus are

not made to renounce Hinduism. At first glance this policy seems to be in

conflict with the one stated above. On the one hand, the Bahá'í Faith does

not compromise its own teachings with those of contemporary Hinduism, and

yet converts are not made to renounce this heritage. How are these

positions reconciled?

The apparent conflict is resolved by the movement's teachers

identifying it as the renewal of true Hinduism. Reference was made in

Chapter 7 to the fact that Hindus believe they are living in the _kali-yuga_,

a time of religious decline. The Bahá'í position is similar in that it

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[9] Thus in terms of its presentation in Malwa the movement has taken on a
Vaiṣṇavite coloring, as is reflected in the numerous allusions made
to this sect's religious concepts and symbols.

portrays contemporary religion as diluted by man-made trappings.
Accordingly, Bahá'í teachers refer to Bahá'u'lláh's doctrines as being the
essence of pure religion, and consequently Hindus are not asked to negate
their heritage but find its fulfillment in the Bahá'í Faith. This type
of teaching approach, however, presupposes the need for educational follow-
up. A villager whose patterns of behavior have been determined by a
traditional set of values will not likely be able to conform to new
standards without some degree of organized reinforcement, and it is for this
reason that the Bahá'í Administrative Order has organized consolidation
programs in Malwa.

The consolidation or 'deepening' activities of the Bahá'í Faith in
Malwa are under the direction of the Ujjain Regional Teaching Committee.
As was stated earlier, the Committee's lack of resources and manpower has
meant that in approaching this assignment it has had to concentrate its
efforts on trying to 'deepen' a limited number of declarants who can in turn
help promote the movement's teachings in the rural areas. The result of
this approach has been that institutional development has been primarily
limited to a number of 'model village' communities, while the majority of
communities in rural Malwa have not advanced beyond the level of
ideological acceptance of Bahá'í doctrine.

Even in the 'model villages', however, the educational activities of
the Bahá'í Faith have been characterized by their sense of gradualism.
As all of the chapters in Part III indicate, the Bahá'í Administrative Order
in India has not tried to overwhelm new declarants by introducing the
entire galaxy of Bahá'í laws, ordinances, and institutions into village life.
Rather, it has concentrated on trying to establish a basic institutional
framework within which change can begin to take place – the various

institutions examined in this study being the building blocks in this

process. Moreover, in introducing these institutions into 'model village'

communities the Bahá'í Administrative Order has not tried to influence

direct change in conventional social situations. While declarants are

urged to put the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh into practice in their daily lives,

there has been no active attempt made to change traditional modes of behavior

outside of Bahá'í institutions, and consequently most of the declarants

in the five communities examined in this study still function within the

Hindu ritual idiom.

In order to fully understand this 'indirect' approach to consolidation

it must be kept in mind that the Bahá'í outlook assumes the eventual

collapse of present world social structures. According to the Bahá'í view,

as the world continues to move towards internationalism its various

traditional social systems will to ever-increasing degrees be unable to cope

with the new problems that arise. This view was poignantly stated by

Shoghi Effendi when he wrote:

> The whole world, wherever and however we survey it,
> offers us the sad and pitiful spectacle of a vast,
> an enfeebled, and moribund organism, which is being
> torn politically and strangulated economically by
> forces it has ceased either to control or comprehend.[10]

Thus, the Faith's leaders assume that radical change will be the order of

the day and that the movement does not so much have to engender change as

be able to provide doctrines and institutions that can cope with it.

Accordingly, Bahá'í administrative institutions in India are not interested

in using their efforts to tear down a system which they feel will eventually

collapse of its own weight. Rather, they are trying to construct the

foundations of a new socio-religious system whose institutions will provide

declarants with alternative frames of reference in which to participate as

the old system continues to become disfunctional to the modern world. In

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[10] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 188

fact, the Administrative Order's entire program of developing a small number of 'model village' communities - a policy which at first glance might appear to be insignificant in terms of the amount of behavioral change it can induce - must be understood in terms of this futuristic outlook. To Bahá'ís the continual breakdown of the world's social systems makes it imperative that people are at least made aware of the alternatives that the Bahá'í Faith offers, and therefore it is the feeling of Bahá'í administrators in India that if a framework of Bahá'í community life can be established, even on a limited scale, in a number of key village communities, the time will come when large numbers of declarants will be able to be brought into active participation in Bahá'í institutions.

Seen in this light the current consolidation policy seems to be realistic in approach. Demanding sudden and thorough change or directly attacking traditional institutions in their conventional setting would no doubt result in a backlash that might remove the Bahá'í Faith from the villages altogether. Instead, by opting for a policy of gradual resocialization the Bahá'í Administrative Order has placed its faith in the power of the Bahá'í message and its implications for the future.[11]

From what we know of the Bahá'í Faith's beliefs, social principles, and

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[11] The philosophy behind this approach is one which asserts that as new declarants begin to gain a deeper understanding of Bahá'í principles and the implications they hold for their daily lives significant changes will begin to occur in their overall patterns of behavior. Indeed this was the position expounded by Shoghi Effendi in the following statement recorded by his secretary: 'He fully appreciates the fact that believers are still somewhat attatched to the different cults from which they have come; this is a problem which always faces the Faith in a new region; it existed a long time in America, and seems part of the growth of the Cause. He feels your Assembly can afford to be patient with the friends, while at the same time educating them into a deeper understanding of the Cause. As their awareness of the true significance of Baha'u'llah grows, they will become weaned from the old ideas and give full allegiance to His teachings.' ('Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of South America, June 30, 1952', Arise to Serve, p. 79)

teaching and consolidation techniques, what kind of speculations can be made as to why a substantial number of Malwa villagers have declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh?

It seems apparent that one of the reasons villagers have declared themselves followers of Bahá'u'lláh is that for many of them the Bahá'í Faith offers a means by which they can raise their own self-esteem. Here reference is made to the large number of 'unclean' and 'untouchable' caste members who have reportedly enrolled in the Faith. In this regard, the Bahá'í principle of the oneness of mankind is very significant. 'Low' caste Hindus are naturally attracted to a movement which preaches the equality of believers and the elimination of status group segregation. Thus, an overriding causal factor in the great rise of declarations in Malwa in recent years must be the egalitarian ideals that the Faith enshrines. However, this factor alone does not provide a complete explanation. If the ideal of social equality were the only issue involved one would expect that most 'unclean' and 'untouchable' Hindus would have converted to one of the several 'egalitarian' religions which have found their way to the subcontinent over the centuries. Moreover, as the statistics from the five communities cited in this study indicate, a number of 'clean' caste members have also declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh. Therefore, there must be additional variables influencing villagers' decisions.

Another factor which must be considered is the movement's attitude towards Hinduism. Although this attitude is not eclectic in formulation, it is still syncretic, in that it does not disdain what it considers to be 'true' Hinduism but rather exalts it to a position of equality among the world's great religious traditions. Consequently, when a Hindu declares his belief in Bahá'u'lláh he does not do so at a cost to his own psycho-cultural identification. One of the main reasons that 'low' caste Hindus have not converted en masse to other religions is because in the process

they are required to denounce their Hindu heritage. On the other hand, by declaring themselves followers of Bahá'u'lláh Hindus of any caste background are not cutting their religio-cultural roots but proclaiming their belief in pure religion as revealed by the yugavatāra, a position which allows them to remain within the Hindu fold and protects them from being labled converts to a 'foreign' religion.

Here a point has been touched on which at first glance might seem to be a case of hair splitting. Is there really a great deal of difference, one might ask, between a religion which proclaims certain socio-religious doctrines independently of the Hindu tradition (for example, Christianity or Islám) and another religion which preaches similar ideals but does so in the framework of the Hindu tradition? The author feels that there is a difference, and that an awareness of this distinction and its ramifications when combined with an understanding of the Bahá'í policy of not directly attacking the conventional social system gives one a better insight into why Hindus are declaring their belief in Bahá'u'lláh.

It has already been stated (Chapter 7) that as a socio-religious organism Hinduism allows its adherents a great deal of flexibility in terms of their conceptualization of the Sacred. In this vein, socially acceptable action has always been considered more important than metaphysical speculation. However, in order to truly grasp what it means to be a Hindu, one must take a further step and say that beyond the acceptance of any particular doctrine or adherence to certain patterns of behavior, being a Hindu means identifying oneself with a specific cultural tradition. Thus the historian A. L. Basham defines a Hindu as '...a man who chiefly bases his beliefs and way of life on the complex system of faith and practice which has grown up organically in the Indian sub-continent over a period of at least three millennia.'[12] It is this intangible 'feeling' of belonging,

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[12] A. L. Basham, 'Hinduism', The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths, ed. by R. C. Zaehner, (London, 1959), p. 225

which can not always be put into specific categorical frames of reference,
either doctrinal or behavioral, that lies at the base of a Hindu's self-
identity.   Consequently, one may not only hold diverse theological opinions
but also, as is the case with adherents of many bhakti sects, follow
unconventional patterns of behavior and still be considered a Hindu, whereas
if an individual were to convert to Islám, regardless of the similarities
that might exist between the doctrines and patterns of behavior to which he
would adhere as a result of such a conversion and the doctrines and patterns
of behavior ascribed to by certain unconventional bhakti sects, he would
no longer be considered a Hindu, for in claiming himself a Muslim he would
have denied his own cultural tradition.

By presenting Bahá'u'lláh as an avatāra who has come to revitalize
Hinduism as well as the other religions of the world Bahá'í teachers do not
put a new declarant in the position of having to deny his cultural heritage,
and in effect he can psychologically remain a Hindu, as Bahá'u'lláh is not
only the return of Christ and the 'Most Great Announcement' but the
'Immaculate Manifestation of Krishna'.   Therefore, it is the author's
contention that although the Bahá'í Faith is a universal religion, in the
eyes of many of its declarants in Malwa the movement would probably be more
closely identified with what he has termed the bhakti tradition.   As
mentioned in Chapter 9, bhakti movements have often offered alternative
systems of metaphysical conceptualization (often strongly monotheistic) and
provided frameworks for 'deviant' behavior, but they have not denounced the
Hindu cultural heritage, both of which are characteristic of the operating
procedures of the Bahá'í Faith in Malwa.   This contention seems even more
plausible when it is remembered that to this day Bahá'í teachers have not
actively tried to tear down or attack traditional village institutions but
have concentrated on developing independent frames of reference in which
the movement's ideals can be outwardly manifested.   Consequently, it may

well be the _bhakti_ style of approach in contrast to the cultural militancy of Islám or Christianity that has been partially responsible for many villagers declaring themselves followers of Bahá'u'lláh.

Another variable which must be weighed when considering this question is the overall pattern of social conflict that is becoming more characteristic of Indian society as it tries to adjust to the influences of modernism. As was noted in Chapter 4, this clash of values has been felt in the rural areas as well as within the urban centers, and consequently villagers are continually confronted by the forces of a changing world - ranging in scope from the more subtle effects of increased technological development to the more overt manifestations of political activism - to which they must try and adjust. This is especially true of younger individuals who are less able to hide in the shadows of tradition. Seen in this light, the Bahá'í Faith may well offer the younger generation of villagers (there are apparently a large number enrolled in Malwa) a synthesis between the past and the future. On the one hand, the Bahá'í Faith supposes many of the principles that are part and parcel of contemporary social idealism, particularly the concept of human equality, yet it still preaches the necessity of maintaining the religious element as a vital dimension of the human experience. Thus, to many declarants the movement might represent a means of alleviating the psychological conflicts engendered by the collision of traditional and modern worlds.

In summation, given the Bahá'í attitude towards Hinduism, the Hindu ideal of cultural identity, and the changing social scene in contemporary India, it is safe to posit that many people in rural Malwa are declaring their belief in Bahá'u'lláh because such a declaration allows them to express in a culturally acceptable way their socio-religious attitudes and feelings, many of which are in conflict with traditional ideals, without having to actively negate in word or deed either their cultural heritage or the traditional power structure.

It has already been suggested that the activities of the Bahá'í Faith should be viewed in terms of the movement's futuristic vision. Nevertheless, the contemporary situation can not be completely ignored, and it would be helpful, therefore, if some general statements concerning the present state of Bahá'í institutions in the 'model village' communities could be made.

Looking at the assumptions which underlie Bahá'í beliefs and values in light of the corresponding assumptions of popular Hinduism it is apparent that the former would be essentially at variance with the latter. The core of Bahá'í metaphysical doctrine, the indivisibility of the Sacred, is a case in point. Although monotheism is by no means alien to Hindu thought, even on the popular level, its formulation whereby the One Supreme Force is seen to have numerous forms, is basically at odds with the Bahá'í conception of the Sacred as a transcendent and omnipotent God. More importantly, the resulting social manifestations of this difference pose points of conflict. The stratification of the Sacred in Hinduism provides a theological base for status group stratification in the profane sphere as is borne out by the fact that different status groups have different primary deities, whereas the strong emphasis placed on the unity of the God-head in the Bahá'í Faith results in a similar emphasis being applied to the temporal world where normatively all men worship one Creator as brothers.

In a similar fashion, the various Bahá'í socio-religious institutions discussed in this work would theoretically conflict with those of the traditional system. The institutions of the Nineteen-Day Feast and the various holy day observances which stress knowledge of the revealed word and are lacking in religio-dramatic activity are at variance with traditional ritualistic and ceremonial institutions whose basic structures and modes of operation revolve around this type of symbolic performance. Furthermore, the Bahá'í abandonment of a religious functionary who presides over

devotional activity challenges the traditional assumption which holds that
in order for rituals to be sanctified they must be officiated by a Brāhman
or other 'clean' caste priest.   Even the institutions of the Local
Spiritual Assembly and community consultation are largely at variance , for
although democratic ideals and institutions have become part of contemporary
village life, they are still at odds with traditional leadership patterns.

Given the theoretical divergence between the two systems one would
expect that the role of Bahá'í doctrines and institutions in the 'model
village' communities would be primarily dysfunctional in nature, and as a
result they would either clash with traditional institutions or be isolated
from them.   From the information the author was able to obtain it would
seem that the latter situation is the more prevalent one.   The traditional
social structure does not seem to have reacted adversely to the introduction
of Bahá'í institutions into village life but to have set them off as
distinct religious phenomena.   Here two important factors come into play.
The first – to which the author has already made numerous references – is
the Bahá'í approach of not directly attacking the traditional system, while
the second is related to Hinduism's ability as a social organism to
categorize and isolate 'deviant' behavior.

The Bahá'í Administrative Order's policy of gradually introducing
Bahá'í values and principles into village life and thereby not forcing new
declarants to violate conventional mores has resulted in Bahá'í village
institutions not being strong enough to offer a viable social alternative
to traditional institutions, and consequently at the present time the
movement does not present a threat to the existing social structure.
As the examples cited in the body of this work demonstrate, Bahá'í
institutions are still in the formative stages of development.   While
devotional and administrative meetings are held in the name of the
yugavatāra they are not reflections of Bahá'í norms: feasts and holy day

observances are generally short in duration and centered around 'deepened'
believers; local spiritual assembly meetings are irregular and dominated
by specific individuals; and community consultation is infrequent.   This
is not to say, however, that by following a policy of gradualism the
Bahá'í Administrative Order in India has made a conscious effort to retard
Bahá'í institutional development.   Perhaps by following a more stringent
policy whereby all declarants would be required to renounce old patterns
of behavior and adhere to the letter of the law regarding participation
in Bahá'í institutions a greater degree of structural development might
already have taken place in the 'model village' communities, but the number
of persons accepting Bahá'í doctrines and participating in Bahá'í
activities would be greatly reduced, as the Bahá'í Faith would most likely
be labeled a hostile religion.   As it is, with Bahá'í institutions
reflecting little more than a basic framework of 'religious' activity,
Bahá'í teachers can continue to educate new declarants in the application
of the Faith's principles and at the same time be tolerated by the
traditional social system, a supposition which leads to the next point,
namely, Hinduism's ability to compartmentalize 'deviant' behavior.

Although the Indian social system is often regarded as a fortress of
conservatism, historically one of its great strengths has been its ability
to adapt to certain socio-religious challenges by channeling 'deviant'
behavior into specific sociological frames of reference.   Thus, the system
has created institutional safety valves within which unconventional
activity can manifest itself without becoming a threat to society at large.
These safety valves apply not only to challenges from outside the Hindu
fold but to innovative developments within Hinduism as well.   The former
has resulted in the creation of specific non-Hindu castes,[13] while the latter
has produced not only a great range of Hindu castes and subcastes, whose

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[13] See Ghaus Ansari, Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh, (Lucknow, 1960).

rules of dharma often vary but the previously mentioned bhakti sects.
One scholar has gone as far as to say that the adaptive response has been
the primary means by which Indian Civilization has dealt with change
throughout the ages.[14]   A striking example on the personal level of this
type of compartmental mentality is an account reported by J. Michael Mahar
of an elderly Rājput who had kept a Chamār mistress for twenty years.
'When asked to explain how he reconciled this liason with his quite orthodox
views on polluting powers of Untouchables, the gentleman replied that he
felt no qualms as he had never accepted as much as a glass of water from
her hands.[15]

In terms of the Bahá'í Faith, then, it would appear that the village
social system has been able to compartmentalize it as a specific 'religious'
phenomenon, which although essentially dysfunctional in nature, can still be
accomodated within its spectrum.[16]

Given the present state of Bahá'í institutional development in rural
Malwa and the nature of the movement's role in village life, what are its
prospects for future development?

In many ways the position of the Bahá'í Faith in rural Malwa seems
precarious.   On the one hand, if it hastens its institutional development
in the village communities with the result that its adherents begin to
cultivate new modes of behavior at a cost to their traditional roles, the

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[14] S. N. Eisenstadt, 'Some Remarks on Patterns of Change in Traditional and
Modern India', Change and Continuity in India's Villages, p. 24

[15] J. Michael Mahar, 'Agents of Dharma in a North Indian Village', The
Untouchables in Contemporary India, p. 18

[16] Again the author can not help but compare this phenomenon with the
role of many Hindu bhakti movements which often provide for 'deviant'
socio-religious behavior.

movement may find that its present harmonious relationship with the
village social system could well change, and that a type of backlash reaction
might set in. Were this to happen, the Faith might even meet the fate
that other socio-religious movements have met, namely, being categorized as
a specific caste. This would mean that in order to declare their belief
in Bahá'u'lláh or participate in Bahá'í activities individuals would have
to change status group identification,[17] a predicament that would no doubt
greatly reduce its following as well as nullify its potential for acting as
a vehicle of cross-caste interaction. On the other hand, if Bahá'í
institutions in the 'model village' communities remain static and do not
develop beyond their present state of reflecting little more than a
structural outline of Bahá'í community life there does not seem much hope
for them becoming strong enough to influence significant behavioral change,
and consequently the Bahá'í movement in the rural areas will remain
primarily an ideological set of beliefs with little basis in social reality.

It seems, therefore, that Bahá'í administrators and teachers in
Malwa must tread the thin line of continuing to structurally strengthen
the 'model village' communities without alienating the movement from the
traditional social structure. While it remains a 'religious' phenomenon
the Bahá'í Faith will probably be free from direct antagonism, but should
any great shift in declarants' conventional patterns of behavior take place
a defensive reaction might well set in. If, however, the movement is
able to maintain a balance between these two poles, a condition which would
seem to necessitate a continuation of the policy of gradual resocialization,
its prospects for future development appear to be favorable, as the forces
of change that are sweeping across India will continue to give rise to the

[17] If this type of reaction were to set in, non-Bahá'í members of a given
caste might refuse to marry or dine with Bahá'í members of that caste,
a situation which would mean that Bahá'í members would either have to
reject the Bahá'í Faith or be forced to inter-marry and accept the
same commensal status, thus forming a new caste.

demand for alternative social, religious, and political responses, and the Bahá'í ideal of combining religious elements with progressive socio-political concepts seems to be a realistic option. Consequently, the hope of the Bahá'í Faith in Malwa lies in the future. In fact, it is fair to say that the movement has staked its future in India on the belief that the new world will demand an alternative socio-religious structure. For the present it is determined to build.

Appendix   A

Appendix A

Islám is divided into over seventy-two sects. The two major divisions,
however, are known as Sunní and Shí'ah, and both groups have their own
beliefs as to the origins of their religions. According to the Sunnís, the
Shí'ah sect was founded by 'Abd Allâh b. Saba', a Yamanite Jew who was
converted to Islâm. He is supposed to have taught doctrines which regarded
'Alí b. Tâlib, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, as being divine.[1] Shí'ahs
deny this, claiming that he was an extremist (ghulât), and some maintain
that 'Alí had him and his followers burnt. Shí'ahs, however, are
themselves divided into a number of different groups, of which the major are
the Ismá'ílis and the Ithna'asharís. As the Ithna'asharí branch of Shí'ism
has been the state religion of Irán since the early sixteenth century and
was therefore the basis of the religio-cultural milieu in which both the
Bábí and Bahá'í movements developed, this appendix will be concerned
primarily with the case of the Ithna'asharí Shí'ahs as presented by
themselves.

The Ithna'asharís (also called ráfizí, or forsakers by Sunnís) believe
that the divine light of which Muhammad came to be the custodian was equally
shared by 'Alí, and they base this claim on a number of traditions. They
attatch great importance to the Prophet's last sermon at Ghadír Khumm where
he had stopped on his return from his last pilgrimage in March 632. At
this time Muhammad took 'Alí's hand and said, 'He of whom I am the mawlá
(the patron?), of him 'Alí is also the mawlá.'[2] Shí'ahs also insist that
during his last illness Muhammad asked 'Umar to provide him with material
to write his last will, but 'Umar avoided the request and thus the testament
was never written. Moreover, Shí'ahs hold that after Muhammad's death the

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[1] M. G. S. Hodgson, entry on 'Abd Allâh b. Saba', The Encyclopaedia of Islam,
(London, 1960), vol. I, p. 51

[2] L. Veccia Vaglieri, entry on Ghadír Khumm, The Encyclopaedia of Islam,
vol. II, p. 993

leadership of the community was usurped by Abū-Bakr (one of the most prominent companions of the Prophet) who was raised to the position of Caliph (Khilāfa - representative of the Messenger of God) by ʿUmar and a group of followers during a meeting of the religious elite of Medina at which ʿAlī was not present as a result of his performing the last rites for Muḥammad.[3]

According to the Shīʿahs, ʿAlī disputed Abū-Bakr's right to community leadership. The two men's relations were further constrained, moreover, because of the claim of Fāṭimah (ʿAlī's wife and Muḥammad's daughter) to the property of Fadak[4], a claim which was disregarded by Abū-Bakr. After Fāṭimah's death, however, ʿAlī acquiesced to what had become a socio-political reality and remained busy with his literary activities until the assassination of the third Caliph, ʿUthmān.

The Caliphate of ʿUthmān (644 - 656) was plagued with factional disputes which finally led to his murder in 656. After his assassination ʿAlī reluctantly accepted the position of Caliph, but Muḥammad's favorite wife, ʿĀʾisha, who had opposed the killing of ʿUthmān, joined against him in battle in 656 in what was later to become known as the Battle of the Camel.[5] ʿAlī's forces were victorious, and ʿĀʾisha later chose to abandon her leadership. During the five years of ʿAlī's Caliphate a number of different parties emerged, and it was also at this time that his followers consolidated themselves, thus crystallizing the Shīʿah sect. The founding of the Umayyad Caliphate (660) drove a large number of ʿAlī's followers into

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[3] For a full discussion of the events surrounding the death of Muḥammad see the entries on ʿAlī b. Ṭālib and Abū-Bakr in vol. I of The Encyclopaedia of Islam.

[4] A property originally held by Jews which was allocated to Muḥammad. He apparently devoted the revenues received from it to needy travellers (The Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. II, p. 725). Fāṭimah claimed that Fadak should come to her as she was Muḥammad's heiress. Abū-Bakr, however, claimed it was public property as shown by the Prophet's use of it for benevolent purposes.

[5] For a more complete explanation of this battle see The Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. I, p. 308

the bosom of Shí'ism, and the murder of 'Alí's son, Ḥusayn, at Ḳerbela[6] in 680 permanantly divided the Muslims into Sunnís, Shí'ahs, and other different groups.

Although it would emerge from the above discussion that the conflict between Sunnís and Shí'ahs started over the question of succession, both groups evolved their own theological doctrines and theories. While Sunnís regard the first four Caliphs as rightful successors, Shí'ahs maintain that 'Alí and his descendants are the true imáms (supreme leaders) whose rights were usurped by the first three Caliphs, and around this belief has developed the politico-theological doctrine of the imáma (imámate).[7]

Shí'ahs believe that the task of divine guidance does not end with the death of a prophet, for it is the will of God that the Islamic community should not be left on its own. Thus they maintain that a series of divinely appointed hereditary imáms beginning with 'Alí were assigned the function of intermediaries. According to Ḥasan b. Yusuf b. 'Alí Ibnu'l-Muṭahhar al-Hillí (d. 1325), one of the most well-known Shí'ah scholars,[8] three of the most important issues concerning the imáma are: 1) that it is a necessary institution, 2) that the imám must be immune from sin, and 3) that the imám must be specified.

From the Shí'ah point of view the imáma is necessary for the same reason that Prophethood is necessary, namely, so that God can provide men with a leader who by his real knowledge and right actions can guide them

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[6] A spot located fifty miles south-west of Baghdad and about six miles west of the Euphrates. Today it is the location of Husayn's sepulchre, and is one of the holiest spots in the Shí'ah world.

[7] The Ithna'asharís trace the development of their theology from the 6th imám, Ja'far aṣ-Ṣádiq, who was recognized by Sunnís as well as Shí'ahs as a great scholar.

[8] There have been numerous Ithna'asharí divines known for their scholarly works. For a discussion of some of the more well-known of these scholars see Dwight Donaldson, The Shí'ite Religion, (London, 1933), especially chapters xxvii and xxviii.

toward the correct path and steer them away from wrong:

> For the Imāmate is the successor (khilāfa) of
> Prophecy and stands in its place (qā'im maqāmahā),
> except in the matter of receiving (talaqqī)
> divine inspiration (wahy)without a mediator.
> And in the same way in which Prophecy is
> incumbent upon Allah the Most High on philosophical
> grounds, so also is the Imāmate.[9]

Consequently, the _imām_ is necessary to Islām as a guardian of the Law of

the Prophet; '...to protect it from change or misinterpretation, and from

additions or subtractions.'[10]

The doctrine of sinlessness is also fundamental to Shī'ah belief.

In the words of Mullā Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī:

> Also we could not consider that the Imamate belonged
> to anyone who had done that which was forbidden,
> whether the offence were great or small, even though
> he should afterwords repent, for the command to
> scourge another can not be allowed to one who
> himself deserves scourging. The Imam, therefore,
> must be sinless.[11]

In a like manner al-Hillī concludes:

> And also because if he committed sin (ma'sīya)
> and if it were incumbent upon men to disapprove
> of him, he would lose his place in men's hearts
> and the value of his appointment would be nullified.[12]

Finally, the _imām_ must be specified; that is, he must be appointed by

God and not by the people.[13] Consequently, the _imāma_ is a succession from

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[9] Miqdād-i-Fādil al-Hillī's commentary on
Hasan b. Yusuf b. 'Alī Ibnu'l-Mutahhar al-Hillī, _A Treatise on the Principles of Shī'ite Theology_, trans. by William McElwee Miller, (London, 1958), p. 64

[10] Donaldson, p. 308

[11] Mullā Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī, quoted in Donaldson, p. 322

[12] al-Hillī, p. 64

[13] This is in contrast to the Sunnī theory of the Caliphate which maintains that the leadership of the community is a public interest to be delegated to the Muslim nation for consideration and appointment. In this regard see Ibn Khaldūn, _The Muqaddimah_, trans. by Franz Rosenthal, vol. I, 2nd ed., (London, 1967).

God and His Messenger, and it can not be acquired except through their

delegation.   In this regard, it is incumbent upon a prophet to appoint

an _imám_ and for every _imám_ to appoint his successor.   According to

Ithna_ʿasharís_, therefore, the following descendants of ʿAlí were the

rightful _imáms_:

> ʿAli's son al-Ḥasan (d. 669)
> al-Ḥasan's brother al-Ḥusayn (d. 680)
> al-Ḥusayn's son ʿAlí Zayn-al-ʿábidín (d. 712)
> Zayn-al-ʿábidín's son Muḥammad al-Báqir (d. 731)
> Muḥammad's son Jaʿfar as-Ṣádiq (d. 765)
> Jaʿfar's son Músá al-Kázim (d. 799)
> Músá's son ʿAlí ar-Riḍá (d. 818)
> ʿAlí's son Muḥammad at-Taqí (d. 835)
> Muḥammad's son ʿAlí al-Hádí (d. 868)
> ʿAlí's son al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarí (d. 874)
> al-Ḥasan's son Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarí

The twelfth _imám_ (Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarí) mysteriously disappeared

in a grotto of a Samarra mosque at the age of perhaps four or five years.

According to his followers he did not die but went into concealment.   The

twelfth _imám_, therefore, became known as the 'hidden _imám_', and although

absent (_ghá'ib_) he is considered the true and infallible leader of the

Islamic community:

> The doctrine of his ghaiba, or concealment
> declares simply that he has been withdrawn by
> God from the eyes of men, that his life has
> been miraculously prolonged, that he has been
> seen from time to time, has been in correspondence
> with others, and maintains control over the
> fortunes of his people.[14]

During the 'Lesser Concealment' (874-940) four men succeeded in establishing

themselves as his envoys (_wakíls_), the last dying in 940.   At this time

the 'Lesser Concealment' ended and the 'Greater Concealment' began. Since

940, therefore, _Shíʿah mujtahids_ began to claim themselves as

representatives of the twelfth _imám_, a situation which denies supremacy to

secular power and thus gives the _mujtahids_ a type of authority unknown to

the Sunní ʿulamá.

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[14] Donaldson, p. 235

The 'hidden imám' is also considered by Shí'ahs to be al-mahdí (the guided one), and he is expected to return (raj'a) before the end of time and usher in a period of justice and blessedness. Unlike the Sunní mahdí[15], however, he will be the same Muhammad al-Ḥasan al-'Askarí who disappeared in 874. He has numerous titles which include al-Hujjat (the proof), al-Muntazar (the one awaited), and Qá'im al-Zamán (the master of time).[16] The continued delay of his return, however, no doubt caused a type of eschatological anxiety[17] among many Shí'ahs, and it was in such a climate that the Bábí and Bahá'í movements raised their heads.

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At this point it would be appropriate to compare the Bahá'í concept of the 'prophet' as found in contemporary Bahá'í literature with that found in Islám. According to the Bahá'í view, prophets (or manifestations –

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[15] The Sunní mahdí, who according to Ibn Khaldún is not, as in Shí'ah theology, an essential part of Sunní creed, but a commonly accepted eschatological figure who has arisen from the needs of the masses of Muslims over the ages (The Muqaddimah, vol. II, p. 156 – 200), is looked upon as a restorer of the faith of Islám, but he will restore the concensus of Islám which has been reached by the successive generations of Sunní scholars. Thus, the Sunní view maintains that the Muslim nation will be the interpreter of Islám, whereas the Shí'ahs give this right only to the imám mahdí.

[16] Qá'im (literally, 'he who arises') is one of the common titles used in reference to the imám mahdí. This title was used by Bahá'u'lláh in referring to the Báb who was considered by his followers to be the mahdí.

[17] An interesting example of this type of phenomenon was reported by Ibn Baṭṭúta during his travels in Persia and Iraq. In the city of Hilla (not far from Samarra) he reported that believers came daily to the local mosque and proceeded to call for the return of the 'Master of the Age'. When he did not come they returned to their homes. The same process was repeated day after day. For a more complete description of this event see The Travels of Ibn Baṭṭúta, trans. by H. A. R. Gibb, Hakluyt Society, Series 2, vols. 110 and 117, (Cambridge, 1962).

mazáhir-i-Iláhiyya) are lawgivers and founders of new cycles in religious history. There have been numerous manifestations in the past, as there will be in the future. Bahá'í literature, however, generally recognizes nine such independent 'prophets': Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Krsna, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh. All manifestations are seen to be in reality one and the same. Thus it is stated, 'In this respect, if thou callest them by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attributes, thou hast not erred from truth.'[18]

In Islamic theology, both Sunní and Shí'ah, there are two types of prophets: a rasúl is a prophet who brings a revealed book[19], while a nabí is one who, while receiving divine inspiration, does not create a new sharí'ah. While there have been both kinds of prophets in the past, Muhammad is believed to be the 'seal of the prophets', as his revelation as embodied in the Qur'án was complete and final. In this vein Ibn Khaldún states:

> All this indicates that the Qur'án is alone
> among the divine books, in that our Prophet
> received it directly in the words and phrases
> in which it appears. In this respect, it differs
> from the Torah, the Gospel, and other heavenly
> books. The prophets received them in the form of
> ideas during the state of revelation. After their
> return to a human state, they expressed those ideas
> in their own ordinary words. Therefore, those books
> do not have 'inimitability' . Inimitability is
> restricted to the Qur'án.[20]

The main distinction, therefore, between the Bahá'í and Islamic concepts of the 'prophet' (at least as far as Bahá'í missionary activity outside the Islamic world is concerned) is that the former asserts that finality in prophethood (here meaning the revelation of a new Law) was not reached in Muhammad but was carried on in the personage of Bahá'u'lláh, a belief which takes the movement beyond the pale of Islám.

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[18] Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 51

[19] Thomas Hughes, A Dictionary of Islam, (London, 1935), p. 535

[20] Ibn Khaldún, vol. I, p. 192 - 193

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