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**The Bābī Movement in Iran:
From Religious Dissent to Political Revolt
1844-1853**

By
Ahmad Nur Fuad

A thesis
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Institute of Islamic Studies
McGill University, Montreal
1998



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Abstract

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Title : The Bābī Movement in Iran: From Religious Dissent to Political Revolt,
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This thesis is a study of the development of the Bābī movement and the political implications embodied in its religious teachings. The thesis basically assumes that in its early development (1844-1848), the movement may be seen merely as religiously dissenting from the mainstream of Shī'ī tradition. In the course of history, however, and especially after the Bāb, its founder, claimed in 1848 to be the return of the Hidden Imam and proclaimed the abrogation of Qur'anic *sharī'a*, the Bābī movement showed radical tendencies, thus threatening the established religious and political authorities. This later development (1848-1853) was characterized by armed revolts by the Bābīs against the government troops. This thesis also examines the nature of Bābī religious dissent and demonstrate that the Bābī revolts were to a large extent based on religious motives.

Résumé

Auteur : Ahmad Nur Fuad
Titre : Le mouvement Bābī en Iran: De la dissidence religieuse à la révolte politique, 1844-1853
Département : Institut des Études Islamiques, Université McGill University
Deplôme : Maîtrise ès Arts

Ce mémoire porte sur l'étude du développement du mouvement Bābī ainsi que des implications politiques de ses enseignements religieux. La thèse présume essentiellement que le mouvement, dans ses premiers développements, a peut être été perçu simplement comme une dissidence religieuse de la tradition Shi'ite. Cependant, tout au cours de son histoire; particulièrement à l'époque du Bāb, son fondateur, qui proclama en 1848 le retour de l'Imam Caché ainsi que l'abrogation de la *shari'a* coranique, le mouvement Bābī a manifesté des tendances radicales menaçant les autorités religieuses et politiques. Ce développement ultérieur (1848-1853) fut caractérisé par des révoltes armées menées par les bābīs contre les troupes gouvernementales. De plus, cette étude examinera la nature de la dissidence religieuse bābīe et démontrera que ses révoltes furent, dans une large mesure, fondées par des motifs religieux.

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However, none of the above are responsible for any of the inadequacies or shortcomings of this study. All these failings are mine alone.

Abbreviations

BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
EI ¹	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 1 st edition
EI ²	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 2 nd edition
EIr	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>
ER	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Religion</i>
IJMES	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
IS	<i>Iranian Studies</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
SI	<i>Studia Islamica</i>

Transliteration

The Arabic transliteration used in this thesis is as follows:

ب	b	ذ	dh	ط	ṭ	ل	l
ت	t	ر	r	ظ	ẓ	م	m
ث	th	ز	z	ع	‘	ن	n
ج	j	س	s	غ	gh	ه	h
ح	ḥ	ش	sh	ف	f	و	w
خ	kh	ص	ṣ	ق	q	ي	y
د	d	ض	ḍ	ك	k		

The Persian transliteration: و v

Short : ا a; u; i

Long : ā; ū; ī

Diphthongs : ay; aw

Alif maqṣūra : ā

Tā' marbūṭa : a; in *idāfa*: at

Table of Contents

Abstract		i
Résumé		ii
Acknowledgments		iii
Abbreviations		v
Transliteration		vi
Table of Contents		vii
Introduction		1
Chapter One	THE RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL CLIMATE OF LATE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRAN	10
	A. Politics and Religion in Shi'ism: an Overview	10
	B. The Uṣūlī-Akhhbārī Dispute	17
	C. Religious Controversy: Shaykhism	24
	D. State-'Ulama Relations and Messianic Trends	38
Chapter Two	THE RISE OF BABISM AND RELIGIOUS DISSENT	49
	A. The Bāb and the Rise of the Bābī Movement	49
	B. Some Bābī Doctrines and Their Relation to Shaykhism	61
	C. Bābī Religious Dissent	76
Chapter Three	THE BĀBĪ REVOLTS AND THEIR RELIGIOUS BASIS	85
	A. Radicalization of the Bābī Movement	85
	B. The Bābī Revolts: Causes and Aftermath	91
	C. The Religious Basis of the Bābī Revolts	105
Conclusion		118
Bibliography		122
Appendix: Map		131

Introduction

The Bābī movement constitutes an interesting phenomenon in Islamic history, particularly in that of Twelver (Ithnā ‘Asharī) Shi‘ism. The movement was founded by Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad (1819-1850), a young merchant of Shiraz, who in 1844 claimed that he was the gate (*bāb*) to the Hidden Imam. The doctrines which were formulated by the Bāb in his various works were largely inspired by Shaykhī thought, developed by Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā‘ī (d.1826) in the early nineteenth century, and then further elaborated by his disciple, Sayyid Kāzīm Rashū (d.1844). As will be seen in this study, the Bāb’s claim in 1844 to being the gate, and in 1848 to being the Mahdī (the Qā’im), seems to have been based on Rashū’s prophecy and on the Shaykhī doctrine of the progressive nature of divine revelation.¹ The Bāb’s higher claim thus abrogated the Islamic *sharī‘a* and proclaimed the coming of a new *sharī‘a* or religion.

Iran of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was to a large degree a society whose religious and political undercurrents favored the emergence of Shī‘ī messianic and millenarian movements.² From a theoretical point of view, such

¹Sayyid Kāzīm Rashū’s view on this subject is expressed in his *Sharḥ al-Qaṣīda al-Lāmīya*, which was written in 1258/1842 at the request of ‘Alī Ridā Pashā, the governor of Baghdad. A lithograph of this work was published in Tabriz in 1272/1855. See Vahid Rafati, “The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī‘ī Islam, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 1979, 133 and 173. See also Todd Lawson, “The Qur’ān Commentary of Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb,” Ph.D. dissertation, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1987, 306-8.

²See Said Amir Arjomand, “Millennial Beliefs, Hierocratic Authority, and Revolution in Shi‘ite Iran,” in *The Political Dimensions of Religion*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of York Press, 1993), 220. For further discussion of Islamic messianism, see, for example, Douglas S. Crow, “Messianism: Islamic Messianism,” *ER* 9, 477-481; and Abdulaziz

movements tend to develop in societies where little distinction is made between religion and politics. Such movements also acquire momentum particularly in societies where social discontent, injustice, discrimination and economic turmoil exist. Iranian society of this time therefore may be seen as a fertile soil for the rapid growth of millenarian movements.³ Moreover, there as elsewhere, these movements, more often than not, had political implications.

Scholars have paid considerable attention to Babism as a socio-religious movement. They have studied the movement from many different perspectives, and have laid particular emphasis on different aspects of the movement.⁴ Ivanov, for example, sees the Bābī movement as “a popular mass movement, born out of definite social conditions

Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981).

³A few centuries preceding the Bāb's claim, as Arjomand points out, “the leader of the Safavid movement, Shah Isma'il (1501-1524), claimed to be the Mahdi, and was worshipped by his Turkman followers as the reincarnation of 'Ali and the other Imam -indeed as the incarnation of God. However, the Safavid rulers modified their millenarian claims to being the lieutenants of the Hidden Imam.” Arjomand, “Millennial Beliefs, Hierocratic Authority, and Revolution in Shi'ite Iran,” 222. See also Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 182. The movement of millenarian tendencies that developed in late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the revived Ni'matullāhī Ṣūfī order, will be discussed in the last section of Chapter One.

⁴The works on the Bābī movement include, among others, Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran 1844-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), particularly 87-131; Lawson, “The Qur'ān Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb,” Ph.D. dissertation, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1987; Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992); Denis MacEoin, “From Shaykhism to Babism: A Study in Charismatic Renewal in Shī'ī Islam,” Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1979; Moojan Momen, “The Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals in Iran (1848-1853): A Preliminary Analysis”, *IJMES* 15 (1983): 157-83; Peter Smith and Moojan Momen, “The Babi Movement: A Resource Mobilization Perspective,” in *Studies in Bābī and Baha'ī History* 3, ed. Peter Smith (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1986); and Peter Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions; From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

and directed against the ruling class.”⁵ He also describes the Bābī revolts as uprisings of “peasants, artisans, urban poor, and small trades-people” against feudalism and the “enslavement of the country by foreign capital.”⁶ Another scholar, Peter Avery, contends that Babism “may be taken as a sign that the mercantile class and some of the religious classes associated with merchants were aware of the necessity for taking the matter of reform and modernization into their own hands.”⁷ However, it is difficult to observe whether the Bābīs aimed primarily at reforming certain aspects of Iranian life. Avery moreover maintains that among the elements which constituted the basis of the Bābī movement was the element of protest against social and economic injustice, the protest against the subordination of the orthodox ‘ulama to the government, and the protest against spiritual decadence.⁸ An observer, Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau, observes that the Bāb’s ideal was to establish “a government at once monarchical, theocratic and democratic,”⁹ all of which implies the political nature of the Bāb’s mission.

Viewing it from a historical perspective, Bayat regards the Bābī movement as having represented the continuation of the tradition of dissent in Shī‘ī Islam. The advent of Babism also marked the occurrence of messianic revolts as well as the beginning of a

⁵V. Minorsky, “Review of Ivanov’s *Babidski Vostanii*,” *BSOAS* 11:4 (1946): 878.

⁶M. S. Ivanov, “Babi Uprisings,” in *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 2 (New York: Macmillan Inc., 1973), 521.

⁷See Peter Avery, *Modern Iran* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 52.

⁸Avery, *Modern Iran*, 52. See also Farhad Kazemi, “Some Preliminary Observations on the Early Development of Babism,” *Muslim World* (1973): 119-31.

⁹Quoted by Nikki Keddie, “Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4 (1962): 269.

politicization of religious dissent.¹⁰ Moreover, she argues that the Bābī movement “constituted a revolutionary social movement irreconcilably hostile to the established political and religious order.”¹¹ However, this view can be questioned, particularly with regard to the extent of this “hostility”. In addition, Bayat maintains that the popularity of the Bābī movement lies particularly in the “strong laicization trends implicit in the Bābī system.” The non-existence of the Bābī clergy “proved to be extremely appealing to those members of the religious institutions who traditionally rebelled against the authority and social influence of the mujtahids.”¹²

Abbas Amanat has offered an excellent study based on historical analysis of the Bābī movement, which includes its birth, growth and the formation of the Bābī community. He maintains that the movement constituted a response to the prevailing socio-moral atmosphere by advancing the necessity of reforming religious doctrine.¹³ Amanat also observes the importance of messianic and millenarian beliefs embodied in the Bābī doctrine, such as those which concern the notion of progressive revelation and the advent of the Hidden Imam.

From one perspective, the Bābī movement may be described as a “value-oriented movement,” which may result in religiously inspired revolts. In such a movement religious beliefs and doctrines provide the most important basis for challenging the

¹⁰See Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 87.

¹¹Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 53-54.

¹²Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, 54.

¹³See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 406.

legitimacy of the existing political authority.¹⁴ Moreover, this challenge may also lead to an attempt to establish an independent political entity. However, the development of such a movement depends mostly on the response of the political regime. The movement will flourish when supported by the political elite, but in most cases, it will face suppression and persecution, which may bring about its collapse or transformation into a new movement.

One of the most vital elements in such a movement is charismatic leadership, which normally serves as a symbolic focus of identification and, to some extent, a source of authority.¹⁵ Although in such a movement there are attempts made by leaders to influence or manipulate religious collectivities in order to serve political purposes, the Bāb, as will be seen, was not a leader of this type. However, it may have been that the growing admiration for the Bāb served as a source of motivation for the Bābī revolts, and to a large degree led the Bābīs to become religiously and politically militant. The symbolic function of leadership was particularly evident when the Bāb was arrested. His death in 1850 at the hands of government troops significantly increased the militant spirit of the Bābīs, as they fervently believed in the Bāb as a prophetic figure.

¹⁴See Arjomand, "Millennial Beliefs, Hierocratic Authority, and Revolution in Shi'ite Iran," 219. The term 'value-oriented movement' is described by Smelser as a "collective attempt to restore, protect, modify, or create values in the name of a generalized belief." Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: The Free Press, 1962), 313. This definition includes the phenomena of 'messianic movement,' 'millenarian movement,' 'religious revolution,' and 'political revolution.'

¹⁵See Peter Smith, "Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha'i Religions," in *Millennialism and Charisma*, ed. Roy Wallis (Belfast: The Queen's University, 1982), 235. For a useful discussion on this topic, See Hillel Schwartz, "Millenarianism," *ER* 9, 521-532. See also Yonina Talmon, "Pursuit of the Millennium: The Relation between Religious and Social Change," in *Studies in Social Movements: A Social Psychological Perspective*, ed. Barry McLaughlin (New York: The Free Press, 1969), 410-411.

In light of these diverse scholarly viewpoints on the Bābī movement, and from a certain theoretical perspective, this thesis will concern itself primarily with two central elements of the Bābī movement, i.e., “religious dissent” and “political revolt.” In a literal sense, “to dissent” means “to differ from an established church in the matter of doctrines, rites or government.”¹⁶ What is meant by religious dissent in this study is the Bābī opposition to the mainstream interpretation of certain aspects of Shī‘ī doctrine held by the Shī‘ī theologians (‘ulama). As will be seen, the Bāb, having been inspired by Shaykhī teachings, interpreted many eschatological teachings such as “resurrection” differently from the way in which Shī‘ī ‘ulama had understood them. The Bāb’s belief in the perpetuation of the prophetic revelation also constituted a point on which he differed from the ‘ulama. The Bāb held that God sends a new prophet and a new revelation in every age in accordance with human progress towards maturity. Moreover, the Bāb’s claim to being the gate to the Hidden Imam, and to being the Mahdī and the bearer of divine revelation, formed the basis of Bābī dissent which would have political implications, in the sense that the Bāb challenged the legitimacy of the political regime. The Bāb seems to have believed that in the presence of the Imam no temporal ruler can claim any authority, be it religious or political. The Bāb’s claim to mahdihood therefore threatened the political order and the religious authorities. This brought the Bābīs into severe conflicts with the government in armed revolts. The term ‘revolt’ is generally used to signify an “uprising against legitimate authority,” and “a movement or expression of

¹⁶*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts: G & S. Merriam Company, 1968), 656. The term ‘dissent’ is normally used in conjunction with such other terms as heresy, and heterodoxy, and in contrast to orthodoxy.

vigorous dissent or refusal to accept.”¹⁷ The Bābī revolt can be said as representing the Bābī opposition to the existing political order, i.e., the Qajar government.

This thesis is about the Bābī movement with particular emphasis on its change in orientation from a movement merely dissenting from the prevalent religious thought of the time into one that launched revolts against the existing political order. This thesis therefore will proceed with the assumption that in the course of its development the Bābī movement underwent a significant shift in its format. As argued by writers such as Denis MacEoin and Peter Smith, in the early phase of its growth (1844-1848) the Bābī movement may be viewed as an expression of Islamic piety which remained within the realm of Shi‘ism, although the Bāb’s claim to being the gate and his early doctrines have been viewed by the ‘ulama as a deviation from mainstream orthodox Shi‘ism. However, with the Bāb’s higher claim to being the returned Hidden Imam and the bearer of a new revelation in 1848, the Bābī movement became not only dissenting in light of religious doctrines, but also a challenge to the political authorities.¹⁸ In light of this, the Bābī revolts in different places were thus the products of Bābī religious dissent. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that the doctrines espoused by the Bāb, considered as religiously dissenting, entailed from the very beginning political implications, and that the Bābī revolts against the political regime were largely inspired by religious motives.

¹⁷The other terms which have almost the same meaning as revolt, and have been used by scholars to describe the Bābī conflict with the state, are “uprising,” “insurrection,” “rebellion.” In this study, these terms are often used interchangeably. See *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, 1892 and 1944.

¹⁸Denis MacEoin, “Babism I. The Babi Movement,” *Elr* iii, 309; Smith, *The Babi and Baha’i Religions*, 31. Chapter one (*al-mulk*) of *Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf* shows the Bāb’s attitude towards the temporal rulers. See Lawson, “The Qur’ān Commentary of Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb,” 277.

As such, this work is a socio-historical analysis of the transformation or development of the Bābī movement. It tries to analyze historical sources as well as the scholarly works on Babism by modern scholars. Accordingly, this thesis will benefit from the works written by the Bāb, and by Bābī-Bahā'ī writers such as Muḥammad Nabīl Zarandī, Shoghi Effendi and H. M. Balyuzi. Although their writings cannot be considered as historical works in the contemporary sense, they serve as important sources for the study of the Bābī movement. In addition, this thesis relies heavily on the works of such scholars as Abbas Amanat, Denis MacEoin, Peter Smith, Moojan Momen, Vahid Rafati, Mangol Bayat and Todd Lawson. These scholars have shared opinions regarding the general understanding of the Bābī movement. However, they also have divergent viewpoints on several aspects of the movement. This thesis therefore attempts to observe critically these diverse viewpoints, demonstrating in the process its agreements and disagreements with these analyses. Nevertheless, this thesis would never have been possible without these studies to draw on.

This thesis contains three chapters. Chapter one discusses the religious and political milieu of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Iran in order to give a sense of the historical background for the rise of the Bābī movement. The discussion will touch on the place and significance of religion and politics in Shi'ism, the dispute between the Akhbārī and Uṣūlī schools and the religious controversy which arose from the emergence of the Shaykhī school, particularly in the early nineteenth century. Political developments and the growth of messianic tendencies also will be recounted.

Chapter two discusses the rise of the Bābī movement and religious dissent. It includes a discussion of the Bāb's life and his role in the making of Bābī doctrine, and the dissemination of the Bāb's claims and teachings. It goes on to explore some particular doctrines formulated by the Bāb, especially those most contrary to the beliefs held by orthodox Shī'ī theologians, and their relation to the theories of Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī. Further, this chapter will discuss the political implications of Bābī religious dissent and the reaction of the Shaykhīs to the Bāb's teachings.

Chapter three focuses on the process of radicalization of the Bābī movement. This process led to conflict between the Bābīs and the state authorities, often in the form of armed revolts. This chapter seeks to offer an analysis of the religious motives behind the Bābī revolts.

Chapter One

THE RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL CLIMATE OF LATE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRAN

A. Politics and Religion in Shi'ism: An Overview

Islam recognizes no separation between religion and politics, and is believed by Muslims to consist of teachings on all aspects of human life. Muslims believe that the Prophet Muḥammad was sent to bring not only a body of moral and ethical precepts, as embodied in the Qur'ān, but also to establish a community of believers. All believers have to abide by the law of God, derived from His Book, in their individual and communal affairs. As such, it can be said that Islam is both religion and polity, and that the Prophet was simultaneously a religious and political leader.¹

According to Shī'ī Islam, the leadership of the community after the death of the Prophet passed to the Imams who continued the cycle of charismatic authority (*walāya* or *imāma*). This was so because the cycle of prophecy (*nubuwwa*) had come to an end with the death of the Prophet. Accordingly, Shī'īs believe that Imams are designated to guide

¹Much has been written on this subject. See, for example, W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); and *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956); and *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961). In these works, Watt tried to demonstrate that Muḥammad's religious mission carried social and political implications. Hodgson also interestingly describes how Muḥammad founded a religious community (*umma*) and a new polity at Medina. See Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977), vol. I, 167-180. John L. Esposito, in his article entitled "Islam and Muslim Politics," maintains that "political and religious leadership was vested in Muhammad, God's messenger on earth, who served as both Prophet and political leader of the Islamic community/state." *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 4.

the community of believers, as illustrated by the original meaning of the word “imām.”² According to Shi‘ī belief, the Imams are the bearers of *walāya*.³ In brief, it can be said that the functions of the Imams consist of the following: “to rule over the Islamic community; to explain the religious sciences and the law; and to be a spiritual guide to lead men to an understanding of the inner meaning of things.”⁴ In addition, thanks to his personal qualities bestowed upon him by God, the Imam is the leader and spiritual instructor of Islam, and the successor to the Prophet.⁵ These facts clearly demonstrate that the Imam, in Shi‘ism, assumes both religious and political leadership in the same way that the Prophet does in “Medinan” Islam.

Consequently, given the Imam’s unique personal qualities as well as his role, he cannot possibly be elected by the mass of believers. As the spiritual guide, the Imam receives his authority only from the Divine, and his appointment is not done through election but through designation (*naṣṣ*) by the Prophet and the preceding Imams on the

²The word “imām” means literally “the guide of the community.” Yann Richard, *Shi‘ite Islam: Polity, Ideology and Creed*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 6. For a general discussion on Shi‘ism, see Mahmood Shehaby, “Shi‘a,” in *Islam the Straight Path*, ed. Kenneth W. Morgan (New York: Ronald Press, 1958), 209. See also Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities in Islam*, revised edition (London: Aquarian, 1994), 87, 161.

³On the development of the concept and usage of *walāya*, see Hermann Landolt, “Walāyah, *ER* 15, 316-323. See also Todd Lawson, “The Dangers of Reading: Inlibration, Communion, and Transference in the Qur’an Commentary of the Bab,” in *Scripture and Revelation*, ed. Moojan Momen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 176-177.

⁴Nasr, “Ithnā ‘Ashariyya,” *EI*² 4, 278.

⁵Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 183; Heinz Halm, *Shiism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 8; Yann Richard, *Shi‘ite Islam*, 6. For a useful discussion on the general development of Twelver Shi‘ism, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

basis of divine command.⁶ Moreover, it is believed that in order for the religious traditions to survive and to be in their purest form, the Imam must be infallible or protected from committing sins (*ma'ṣūm*). Accordingly, the claim to the imamate is not merely political, but is based on a specific characteristic, that is the possession of '*ilm*.'⁷

On this point, Marshall Hodgson states:

The idea of imamate by *naṣṣ*, restricted to a definite individual out of all the 'Alids, continuing through all political circumstances, was complemented by that of an imamate based not primarily on a political claim, but on special knowledge, '*ilm*.'⁸

Hodgson, however, asserts that the claim to the office of imamate was not initially a matter of knowledge ('*ilm*), but rather one of authority, which the Imam inherited from the Prophet or from the previous imams, i.e., "authority to decide cases."⁹ As an exclusively authorized source of knowledge, the Imams carry out important functions, such as guiding the community to righteousness and establishing a just social order.¹⁰

In line with Hodgson's opinion, Sachedina maintains that most of the early debates on the subject of the imamate took a political form at first. However, the discussion eventually and perhaps inevitably would have religious implications.

⁶Nasr, "Ithnā 'Ashariyya," 278.

⁷Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi discusses, in an interesting manner, the nature of '*ilm*' (initiatory knowledge) possessed by the imams in his *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 69-78.

⁸Marshall Hodgson, "How did the Early Shi'a Become Sectarian?," *JAOS* 75 (1955): 11.

⁹Hodgson, "How did the Early Shi'a become Sectarian?," 11.

¹⁰Hodgson, "How did the Early Shi'a become Sectarian?," 11. Despite the significant political role of the Imams, it is '*ilm*' that forms the primary basis for the Imams' authority.

Sachedina claims that "Islam as a religious phenomenon was subsequent to Islam as a political reality."¹¹ He also argues that the rise of several individuals as leaders, Imams, and zealous followers clearly shows that there was an endeavor to actualize the formation of a just society, including its political organization.¹²

Therefore, it is not wrong to assert that, seen from the historical perspective, Shi'ism was from the very outset an opposition party, to a certain extent. This view was expressed by Ignaz Goldziher who said that from the beginning Shi'ism had been a protest against the fierce repression of divine right, i.e., "the usurpation of the right of the 'Alids, who alone had a legitimate claim to rule."¹³ Indeed, it can also be argued that Shi'ism has been frequently employed as a vehicle or instrument with which many disappointed Muslim groups rebelled against existing regimes. This fact led some scholars, such as Mangol Bayat, to assert that the emergence of Shi'ism had been mostly a "result of a social discontent or political dissent, rather than a cause for it."¹⁴ It must also be noted that the increasing social discontent and political unrest fueled a messianic tendency among certain Muslim groups.

Therefore, one can argue that the aspiration for a world free from oppression, and the search for a just social order, had contributed significantly to the transformation of political opposition into a sectarian religious movement. This transformation also brought doctrinal implications with regards to the nature and function of the rightful leader, i.e.,

¹¹Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 4.

¹²Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 4.

¹³Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 199.

¹⁴Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 3.

the Imam.¹⁵ And as such, one can observe that the protest movements, which were organized under the leadership of some members of the *ahl al-bayt*, were an attempt to achieve political goals on the basis of religious sentiments and prerogatives.¹⁶

From a historical perspective, Shīʿī opposition came to a head with the violent conflict between the third Imam and the Umayyads. However, from then on the Imams abandoned all activities that could be considered political. Instead, they retained only a spiritual and intellectual opposition to the temporal rulers.¹⁷ The quietist tendency of Twelver Shiʿism in the ninth century led to a state of affairs intensifying the separation of the religious sphere from the political. This tendency also eventually encouraged a significant break between the imamate and actual political rule.¹⁸ This break was facilitated by the widespread acknowledgment of the Imam's possession of divine knowledge (*ʿilm*). By that time, the Imam was believed to be the abode of God's knowledge and the interpreter of His revelation. Consequently, the implication of this tenet was that the duties of the Imam were totally separate from those of the rulers, making the former the "final authority in matters of salvation, conscience and sacred law."¹⁹

¹⁵Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 3.

¹⁶Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 7.

¹⁷Amir-Moezzi calls this period the "radical apoliticalism" of the early development of Imamism. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*, 68. Watt, however, prefers to call the early stage of Shīʿī development "proto-Shiʿism". See Montgomery Watt, "The Significance of the Early Stages of Imāmī Shiʿism," in *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shiʿism from Quietism to Revolution*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 21-32.

¹⁸Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, 37.

¹⁹Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, 36.

Nevertheless, the Shī'īs were faced with numerous challenges and with much resistance and hostility when they tried to define and defend their identity through their concept of salvation.²⁰ As is well known, the Shī'īs not only strove for the recognition of the legitimate Imam as a leader with a messianic role, but more importantly, they questioned and often threatened the right of the extant regime to rule. This issue seems to have become a pivotal point for all those who regarded themselves as being set apart from or abused by the ruling political elite.²¹ Early Shī'īs, by opposing the caliphate, consolidated their support for 'Alī as the Imam (leader) after the Prophet, and their aspiration for a just order under the authority of 'Alī and his progeny.

From another perspective, but still in relation to what has been described above, one can note that Shi'ism came into being as a movement centered on the question of authority over the community of believers. When the Imam was still alive, the influence of the Shī'ī 'ulama had been notably confined by the appearance on earth of a paramount center of authority, i.e., the Imam. However, the void in leadership due to the Imam's absence gave the 'ulama wider room to expand, theoretically and practically, the basis for their own authority over the Shī'ī community.²² As a result, with the absence of the

²⁰The word 'salvation' (*najāt*) can mean the "redemption from ultimate damnation through divine agency," or the "saving of a person's soul from eternal punishment and its admission into heavenly beatitude." See *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. According to Shī'ī belief, it is impossible for a person to gain salvation if he does not believe in the role of the Imam as the only agent to guide the believers to the right path and establish a just social order. The idea of salvation also has a messianic implication. See Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 2-3. For further discussion, see Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashūrā in Twelver Shi'ism* (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1978).

²¹Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 8.

²²Denis MacEoin, "The Shi'i Establishment in Modern Iran," in *Islam in the Modern World*, ed. Denis MacEoin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 92.

Imam, the primary concern of the community was to identify and legitimize authority in a situation where a single individual no longer held ultimate authority. Therefore, the legitimization of authority took several forms, one of the most important of which was the formulation of the role and status of the Shī'ī 'ulama, who had started to gain increasing importance.²³

Moreover, from the period of the occultation of the twelfth Imam (260/873-4) onward the question of authority increasingly came to dominate the scene. During this period, fundamental questions emerged, such as: "who would be the center of authority and what would be the source of legislation?"²⁴ In answer to these questions, two groups of 'ulama emerged. There were, on the one hand, some Shī'ī scholars who believed that it was legitimate to make use of dialectical-reasoning to answer and resolve problems which had not been given clear solutions or explanation in the Qur'ān and the Traditions. On the other hand, many other Shī'ī scholars believed in the adequacy of the Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Imams to serve as sources for legislation. The latter maintained that the use of individual reasoning, for answering religious problems and social queries, was not needed because the Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Imams contain definite solutions for every problem.

Although there were important differences between these two orientations in the early period, they did not seriously fracture the already diffuse Shī'ī community. In the late fifteenth century, however, the struggle for power, which was based on tribal

²³See W. Madelung, "Authority in Twelver Shi'ism in the Absence of the Imam," in *La notion d'autorité au Moyen Age. Islam, Byzance, Occident, Colloques internationaux de la Napoule*, Paris, 1982, 163-173.

²⁴Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 21.

impulse, and was taking place in northwestern Iran, to some degree influenced the religious thinking of the Shī'ī 'ulama in that they affiliated themselves to a certain religious (juridical) school. Needless to say, this state of affairs led to greater friction between the two groups which came to be called the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs.

B. The Uṣūlī-Akhbārī Dispute

The conflict between the Uṣūlī and Akhbārī tendencies can be traced back to the very beginning of Imāmī Shi'ism, although it became more intense in the course of time.²⁵ During the first juridical period (from the fourth to fifth century of the Hijra) the Imāmī jurists residing in Baghdad, such as al-Mufid (d.1021), Sayyid Murtaḍā (d.1044), and Shaykh Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d.1067) outlined the principles of *uṣūl*. These scholars are said to have been influenced by both al-Shāfi'ī and Mu'tazilī doctrines.²⁶ Al-Shāfi'ī is regarded as the first Muslim jurist to elaborate on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) in his work entitled *al-Risāla*. The Mu'tazila is known as a school that had adopted a rationalist approach to Islamic thought, which had

²⁵The works on this subject are many, among which are: Andrew J. Newman, "The Development and Political Significance of the Rationalist (Uṣūfī) and Traditionalist (Akhbārī) Schools in Imāmī Shī'ī History From the Third/Ninth to The Tenth/Sixteenth Century A. D." Ph. D. dissertation (University of California, Los Angeles, 1986); Norman Calder, "The Structure of Authority in Imāmī Shī'ī Jurisprudence," Ph. D. dissertation (School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1980); H. Modarressi, "Rationalism and Traditionalism in Shī'ī Jurisprudence: A Preliminary Survey," *SI* 59 (1984): 141-158; Juan Cole, "Shī'ī Clerics in Iraq and Iran 1722-1780: The Akhbārī-Uṣūlī Conflict Reconsidered," *IS* 18, 1 (1985): 3-34; Andrew J. Newman, "The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid. Part 1: 'Abdallāh al-Samāhijī's 'Munyat al-Mumārīsīn'" Part 2: The Conflict Reassessed," *BSOAS* 55 (1992): 22-51; 250-261.

²⁶See Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'ī Islam*, 78-79

greatly helped the Shī'ī 'ulama formulate their scholastic theology (*'ilm al-kalām*).²⁷ However, before these Shī'ī 'ulama, there had been the Imāmī jurists and traditionists residing in Qum and Ray, such as Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d.329/940) and Ibn Babūya al-Ṣadūq (d.381/991), who were more inclined to a traditionalist position.²⁸

Regardless of the tendencies of these early Shī'ī 'ulama, the terms "Akhbārī" and "Uṣūlī" did not appear in the early works of the Imāmī 'ulama. Rather, Shaykh Ṭūsī had called the Akhbārīs *aṣḥāb al-jumal* (literalists), i.e., those who did not make use of reason, but based the fundamentals of religion on the text of the Traditions (ḥadīth). The first writer to mention the terms Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs was 'Abd al-Jafīl Qazvīnī (d.1170), an Ithnā 'Asharī author who described the Akhbārīs as strict traditionalists.²⁹

It was during the Ṣafavīd period, however, that Imāmī Shī'ī thought underwent a crucial development. This development came as a result of the intense religious debates that had arisen within the Shī'ī community concerning the question of authority. With these debates, the friction between the two groups, i.e., Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs, became more serious.

²⁷W. Madelung, "Akhbāriyya," *EI*², 56. See also Martin J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* [d.413/1022] (Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq Editeurs, 1978), 1-8; Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi, "The Establishment of the Position of Marja'iyat-i Taqlid in the Twelver-Shi'i Community," *IS* 18:1 (1985): 36. Sayyid Murtaḍā was influenced by al-Shāfi'ī's methodology and the theology of the Mu'tazila when he wrote the first Shī'ī book on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, namely *al-Dhari'a*. It was Shaykh Ṭūsī, however, who established these principles in his treatise *'Uddat al-Uṣūl*. See also N. Calder, "Doubt and Prerogative: the Emergence of an Imami Shī'ī Theory of Ijtihād," *SI* 70 (1989): 60-61.

²⁸al-Kulaynī wrote an important work entitled *al-Kāfi*, while Ibn Babūyā al-Ṣadūq produced a work entitled *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*. See McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd*, 78. See Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Just Ruler (al-sulṭān al-'ādil) in Shi'ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 10-11.

²⁹Madelung, "Akhbāriyya," 56.

Akhbarism is a school in Imāmī Shi'ism that maintains that the traditions (*akhbār*) of the Imams constitute the main source of religious knowledge. This position is in contrast to the Uṣūlī school that admits the use of speculative reason in the principles of theology and religious law.³⁰ With regard to the Akhbārīs, later Shī'ī writers commonly considered them as innovators who came onto the scene only in the seventeenth century with the rise of Mullā Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d.1033/1623-4).³¹ The reformation of the Akhbārī school at that time obviously represented an opposition movement against the increasing influence of the *mujtahids* and against the development of Uṣūlī doctrine.

From the Akhbārī point of view, the elevation of the *mujtahid*'s role to that of someone having the authority to interpret the command of the Imam is a concept that does not have a strong foundation in Imāmī teachings. Therefore, according to MacEoin, it would not be wrong to say that the Akhbārī position seems to be less innovatory than conservative. Moreover, one has to note that after the victory of the Uṣūlīs the true positions of these two schools became much distorted.³²

Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī believed that the Akhbārīs represented the most original line of thought and purest doctrinal teaching within Shi'ism. Astarābādī is

³⁰E. Kohlberg, "Ak̄bārīya," *Elr* i, 716-718.

³¹He studied ḥadīth under Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Husayn al-'Āmilī (d.ca.1600), and received the *ijāza* at the beginning of 1598. He also spent some years in his youth in Shiraz, and later lived in Medina and Mecca, where he died in 1626/7. See E. Kohlberg, "Astarābādī, Moḥammad Amīn," *Elr* i, 845.

³²Denis M. MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 25.

regarded as “the first to open the door of reviling against the mujtahids.”³³ He wrote a book entitled *al-Fawa'id al-Madanīya*,³⁴ which he completed in Mecca in 1622. In this book, Astarābādī sought to formulate a coherent argument to challenge the Uṣūlī school. The author states that the book was written at the instruction of his master, Muḥammad ‘Alī Astarābādī (d.1619), who told him that he had been designated to revive the method of the Akhbārīs.³⁵

Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī aimed primarily to renovate the Shī‘ī doctrines that he believed to have been espoused by the Imams themselves. Astarābādī himself maintains that the single most important source of law is the Traditions of the Imams. Moreover, since the Traditions provide the community with an infallible guide for all aspects of life, they are also central to a correct understanding of the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s teachings. Indeed, without the exegesis and the Traditions of the Imams, the Qur’ān would remain beyond human perception and could never serve as a source of law.³⁶

The revival of the Uṣūlī school, on the other hand, cannot be mentioned without acknowledging the great role of the Persian ‘ulama or the ‘ulama of Persian descent who

³³MacEoin, “From Shaykhism to Babism,” 25.

³⁴Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī, *al-Fawa'id al-Madanīya* (Iran: Dār al-Nashr li Ahl al-Bayt, 1984).

³⁵Madelung, “Akhbāriyya,” 56.

³⁶Astarābādī, in his *al-Fawa'id*, asserts that it is prohibited to depend upon the law produced by the dialectical process of reasoning. *Al-Fawa'id*, 131; See also Kohlberg, “Akhbāriyya,” 717.

had received their formal training in the 'Atabāt.³⁷ In many instances, these 'ulama were influenced by the earlier Traditionist school of Isfahan, as developed by Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d.1699) and his disciples. One particular figure who contributed greatly to the reformation of the modern Uṣūlī school was Aqā Muḥammad Bāqir Bihbahānī (1118-1205/1706-1790).³⁸ He is credited with being the "first to realize the need for a more critical approach to *fiqh* (jurisprudence)."³⁹

He first studied under his father, before undertaking rigorous studies under such distinguished 'ulama as Shaykh Yūsuf Baḥrānī (1695-1772) and Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabaṭabā'ī (d.1826).⁴⁰ Bihbahānī's views on the authority of the 'ulama to legislate Shī'ī laws were universally accepted in Shī'ī circles thanks to the efforts of some of his important students who worked to make the Uṣūlī doctrines more popular.

³⁷'Atabāt, literally, means "thresholds." It refers to the "Shī'ite shrine cities in Iraq - Karbalā', Kāzīmāyn, Najaf, and Samarrā- containing the tombs of six of the imams as well as secondary sites of pilgrimage." Hamid Algar, "'Atabāt," *Elr* ii, 902.

³⁸Cole has traced the development of the conflict between the Uṣūlīs and the Akhbārīs, and has even proposed a new perspective concerning this conflict. He claims that there was a moderate tendency within Akhbārism as represented, for example, by Shaykh Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d.1772) who "moved away from a strict Akhbarism to a neo-Akhbari position which had Usuli elements." See Cole, "Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran 1722-1780: The Akhbari-Usuli Conflict Reconsidered," 14. In the same way, Newman reassesses the nature of the dispute between Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs, and notes that within the Akhbārīs there was a group of pure Akhbārīs (*muḥaddith*) and a group of moderate Akhbārīs (*muḥaddith-mujtahid*). Newman, "The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran, Part 2: The Conflict Reassessed," 261.

³⁹Since Bihbahānī wrote numerous works on Uṣūlī thought, he became well known among the Shī'a as "Muassis Bihbahānī, Murawwij Bihbahānī, Ostad-i Akbar, Ostad-i Kull." See Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 25.

⁴⁰According to Amanat, these scholars are all considered to have been Akhbārīs, since their main emphasis was on the theory that in addition to the Scripture, the entire body of *akhbār* provides the only other premise for juristic investigation. See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 34-35.

The Uṣūlī school, which carried on the thought of al-Mufid or al-‘Allāma Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥilī (d.726/1325), as mentioned above, was reorganized at this time, and the idea of *ijtihād* became one of the methodological bases of Imāmī Shī‘ī jurisprudence.⁴¹ Moreover, the revival of the Uṣūlī school in the eighteenth century elevated the *mujtahids* to a dominant position within the Shī‘ī community by means of the doctrine of *taqlīd*. This doctrine exhorted all Shī‘īs to follow the teachings of the living *mujtahid* on all matters of faith and practice.⁴² Hence, *ijtihād* brought significant political and religious power to the jurists and theologians, i.e., the *mujtahids*. Thus, the doctrine of *ijtihād* contributed to the promotion of the *mujtahid* to the rank of general representative of the hidden Imam (*naʿib ʿamm*), with the four agents (*wukalāʾ*, sing. *wakīl*) of the period of the minor occultation from this time on being called the particular representative of the Imam (*naʿib khāṣṣ*).⁴³

Mahmood Shehabi argues that the relation of the ‘ulama to the Hidden Imam is similar to that of the Imams to God. According to him, the ‘ulama are, in a limited sense, intermediaries between the community and the Imams, with some of the authority of the latter reflected upon them. They also serve as the proofs (*ḥujaj*, sing. *ḥujja*) of the Imams. Likewise, the Imams are intermediaries between the community and the source of divine guidance.⁴⁴ However, as Algar argues, “it would be wrong to conclude that the ‘ulamā possessed any authority similar to that of the Imams, or that they could legitimately lay

⁴¹ Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*, 139.

⁴² Calder, “The Structure of Authority in Imāmī Shī‘ī Jurisprudence,” 235, 239-240.

⁴³ Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*, 139.

⁴⁴ See Shehabi, “Shi‘a”, 202.

claim to infallibility."⁴⁵ This is so because they were not members of *ahl al-bayt*, and therefore not protected from committing sins. Moreover, as the Shī'īs believe, the Imams are designated through divine command.

Contrary to the Uṣūlīs, the Akhbārīs held that only the Imam is infallible, protected from sin, and therefore deserving of leadership. All persons, including learned scholars (the *mujtahids*), are to follow the Imam. Consequently, they held that the Qur'ān and the traditions reveal the will of God, and provide sufficient instruction for the practice of Shi'ism.⁴⁶ The Akhbārīs, who dominated the shrine cities of Iraq in the period between the decline of the Ṣafavīd dynasty and the coming of Qajar rule, rejected the *mujtahids*' function as incompatible with the authority of the Imams. In addition, the division of the community into *muqallid* (imitator) and *mujtahid* was rejected by them in favor of the earlier concept of the whole community being *muqallid* to the Imams.⁴⁷

The rationalists (Uṣūlīs), on the one hand, asserted that the *mujtahids*, as general representatives of the Hidden Imam, could replace the Imams in performing such tasks as giving legal judgments, implementing rulings, receiving and distributing alms, i.e., *zakāt* and *khums* (religious tax), commanding holy war (*jihād*) and leading the Friday congregational prayers. The Akhbārīs, on the other hand, accepted that the narrator (*muhaddith*) of oral reports from the Imams could perform the function of a judge.

⁴⁵Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 6.

⁴⁶Momen has listed three domains in which the Uṣūlīs and Akhbārīs have different points of view on a number of religious matters. See Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 223-225.

⁴⁷Algar, *Religion and State*, 7.

However, as Cole says, in practice the Akhbārīs also made use of interpretation in explaining Shī'ī doctrines.⁴⁸

Historically, the rise and decline of certain schools of thought largely coincided with the social and political circumstances of the time. The victory of the Uṣūlī position in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, cannot be separated from the fact that the contemporary rulers supported the Uṣūlī 'ulama (*mujtahids*), and made them the state officials. The need of the Shī'ī community for guidance also caused the role of the 'ulama to flourish.

The decline of the Akhbārīs, by contrast, was caused by various factors. The most important factor, in Kohlberg's analysis, was "their refusal to consider any role for intermediaries between the believers and the Hidden Imam."⁴⁹ Moreover, the Akhbārīs seem to have ignored the practical and emotional needs of the Shī'ī populace for the 'ulama to help them comprehend and apply Shī'ī teachings. In short, the growing power of the *mujtahids* and their social significance certainly contributed to the decrease of Akhbārī influence.

C. Religious Controversy: Shaykhism

On the religious and intellectual planes of the early nineteenth century, there emerged a theological school called the *Shaykhīya*,⁵⁰ which was founded by Shaykh

⁴⁸Cole, "Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran 1722-1780: The Akhbari-Usuli Conflict Reconsidered," 13.

⁴⁹Kohlberg, "Akbarīya," 718.

⁵⁰Steven Scholl, "Shaykhīyah," *ER* 13, 231. The followers of the Shaykhī school were also called "Posht-i Sarīs" which literally means "behind the head". When visiting the shrine of

Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī. Shaykh Aḥmad was born in Rajab 1166/1752 in the village of Muṭayrafi in the region of Aḥsā', a hinterland of Bahrayn.⁵¹ In the early 1790s, Shaykh Aḥmad left his native country, and went to Iraq. Here, he came into direct contact with the controversies existing at that time amongst the Twelver 'ulama, especially with those called Bālāsārīs.⁵² Disputes between Shaykhīs and Bālāsārīs began with the excommunication (*takfīr*) of Shaykh Aḥmad by Mullā Muḥammad Taqī Baraghānī (d.1847), an uncle of the future Bābī Ṭāhira, Qurrat al-'Ayn, and other 'ulama around 1238/1822. This conflict became more intense during the leadership of Shaykh Aḥmad's successor, Sayyid Kāzīm Raštū (d.1259/1844).⁵³

However, Shaykh Aḥmad did not intend to establish a new sect different from the teachings of the Imams. Moreover, the term "Shaykhī" itself came not from Shaykh Aḥmad but from his opponents who coined this term in order to identify the followers of

an imam, Shaykh Aḥmad normally stood at the foot of the tomb showing respect and politeness. His followers then adopted this practice, and it is this that distinguished them from other Shī'a who were called "Bālā Sarīs" (literally, "above the head"), "because they circumambulate the graves of the imams." See Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 227. The Shaykhīs are also known as *Kashfīya*, because God has lifted the veil of ignorance from them and removed uncertainty from their hearts. See Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 48. See also C. Huart, "Shaykhī," *Et* 4, 279; Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), iv, 205-255; A. L. M. Nicolas, *Le Cheikhisme* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, Editeur, 1911).

⁵¹For a more detailed account on Shaykh Aḥmad's life and spiritual experiences, see Muḥammad Nabil Zarandī, *The Dawn-Breakers*, ed. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Illionis: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1962), 1-18; also Denis M. MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 75-81, 105-115; also Ḥusayn 'Alī Maḥfūz, *Sīrat al-Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī* (Baghdad: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif, 1957).

⁵²See Denis M. MacEoin, "Bālāsārīs," *Et* iii, 583-585.

⁵³MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 75-81, 105-115.

this doctrine as disciples of the Shaykh.⁵⁴ Bayat maintains that Shaykhism may be seen as representing the tradition of dissent in Shī'ī Islam, and that it has become a new school of theology within Imāmī Shi'ism.⁵⁵ Despite this position, it is necessary to take Amanat's point of view into account. He maintains that the Shaykhī school may be considered the result of a fusion of "three major trends in post-Safavid Shī'ism; (1) the Sadrā'ī theosophical school of Isfahan, which itself benefited from the theoretical sufism of Ibn al-'Arabī, as well as the illuminist theosophy of Suhrawardī; (2) the Akhbārī traditionist school of Baḥrayn which traced its chain of transmission to the early narrators of ḥadīth; and (3) the diffuse gnosticism that was strongly influenced by crypto Ismā'īlī ideas as well as other heterodoxies of southern and south-western Iran."⁵⁶

Therefore, it may be asserted that Shaykhism represents a very complex "system" or body of thought. As for its founder, Shaykh Aḥmad, he is said to have been an heir to the philosophical school of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, known as Mullā Ṣadrā (d.1640/1) and the library of Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (d. after 904/1499), although he was a critical and selective heir, and therefore can be seen as the champion of gnostic Shi'ism.⁵⁷ Moreover, in spite of the fact that he had studied under many prominent Uṣūfī and Akhbārī 'ulama in the 'Atabāt, he did not strictly adopt the thought of either of these two groups. According to Amanat, it was Baḥr al-'Ulūm (d.1797) who had exerted a special influence on the

⁵⁴Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996), 352.

⁵⁵Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 37

⁵⁶Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 48.

⁵⁷See Todd Lawson, "Ebn Abī Jumhūr Aḥsā'ī," *Elr* 7, 662-3; W. Madelung, "Ibn Abī Djumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī," *El²*, Supplement, 380.

thought of Shaykh Aḥmad.⁵⁸ However, even though he benefited much from those thinkers, it is important to note that Shaykh Aḥmad developed an original body of thought and a peculiar understanding of Shī'ī teachings. On some points, he also disagreed with Ibn al-'Arabī (d.1240), Mullā Ṣadrā, and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d.1680),⁵⁹ particularly on the doctrine of God and His attributes.⁶⁰ It is not the purpose of the present study to examine these points of disagreement. However, it is worthwhile to take Moussavi's analysis of this point into account:

In contrast to the theosophic tradition of Mullā Ṣadrā, Aḥsā'ī seems to be against the idea that it is possible for man to have personal experience of God. In his celebrated work, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra 'l-Jāmi'a 'l-Kabīra*, Aḥsā'ī attacks Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ who, as Aḥsā'ī understood his view, equated mankind with God by declaring in his *Wāfī* that they are all God's emanation. A similar attack is made against Ibn 'Arabī who, according to Aḥsā'ī, spoke of God as identical to his creature. Aḥsā'ī refers to people and their relationship to God in terms of man's servile status vis-a-vis God as follows "No Muslim can change his relationship since he is no body but a slave servant who possesses nothing but the Divine command." Here Aḥsā'ī appears to be reacting to the school of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being), especially that of Mullā Ṣadrā who exalted human beings by declaring them capable of entering the divine realm.⁶¹

⁵⁸Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 50.

⁵⁹See Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 344; Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 176-179.

⁶⁰Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 80-87.

⁶¹Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi, "The Struggle for Authority in The Nineteenth Century Shi'ite Community: The Emergence of the Institution of Marja'i Taqlid," Ph.D. dissertation, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal, 1991, 82-83; idem, *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam: From the Office of Mufti to the Institution of Marja'* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute Of Islamic Thought and civilization, 1996), 130-131. See also Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 80-87.

Shaykh Aḥmad himself, as the founder of this school, has been described as an *'arīf* (gnostic) amongst the *'ulama* and an *'alīm* (cleric) amongst the gnostics.⁶² As a result, one may argue that this combination of perspectives was the main factor that led to his distinctive contribution to modern Shi'ism. In addition, early Shaykhism may also be seen as an attempt to purify what Shaykh Aḥmad regarded as innovations, and to revive the true teachings of the Imams. Shaykh Aḥmad also endeavored to reconcile revelation with reason, and theology with philosophy.⁶³ In other words, one can argue that Shaykh Aḥmad not only intended to reconcile theosophy (*ḥikma*) with the *sharī'a*, but also endeavored to implement his theological approach to various issues that were subject to controversy in the Shī'ī milieu, such as prophecy, imamate and resurrection.⁶⁴

One of the central teachings of Shaykh Aḥmad was the belief that it was essential to purify Shi'ism of intellectual innovation. Such purification could only be achieved by a return to infallible sources of guidance, namely the Qur'ān, the Ḥadīth (the Traditions) and the Imams.⁶⁵ Shaykh Aḥmad also believed that human beings cannot reach and comprehend God's essence, because God is beyond human comprehension, and because God is not comparable to human beings. According to Shaykh Aḥmad, as Momen asserts, the knowledge of God possessed by humans is only a figment of the latter's imagination,

⁶²Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, 253.

⁶³Peter Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 10.

⁶⁴Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 48. See also Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 102-103.

⁶⁵Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 11; Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 69.

i.e., an image or reflection of God that can never attain His reality.⁶⁶ Shaykh Aḥmad's view of God essentially negated the Ṣūfī concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the oneness of being) and the mystical union with God. In order to arrive at knowledge of the divine attributes, it was necessary for human beings to have intermediaries to guide them. These intermediaries were the prophets and the Imams, who constitute "the causal and creative agents of the Primal will."⁶⁷

Nevertheless, the most controversial element in Shaykh Aḥmad's teachings was his doctrine of eschatology, particularly the issue of resurrection. Indeed, it was this issue that formed the ground for the initial proclamation of excommunication (*takfīr*) against him. In sharp contrast to orthodox Shī'ī views, Shaykh Aḥmad maintained that on the Day of Judgment, creation would return, not to God as its source but to the Primal Will. He further asserted that the resurrection will take place, not in the material body but in a "subtle body" which comes into being in the inter-world, a realm which is between the material and heavenly realms, and is normally referred to as *hūrqalyā*.⁶⁸

The issue of resurrection had actually been a subject of debate amongst the theologians and philosophers before Shaykh Aḥmad. Mullā Ṣadrā, a philosopher, also

⁶⁶Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī, *Ḥayāt al-Nafs* (Tabriz: Dār al-Ṭabā'a al-Ridā'ī, 1337), 10-11.

⁶⁷Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 83-85; See Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi'a al-Kabīra* (Kirmān: Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, 1980), vol. 1, 22-23. Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 11. Momen has noted that another aspect of Shaykh Aḥmad's thinking bringing him into conflict with mainstream Twelver Shī'ī theologians was his view regarding the knowledge of God. Shaykh Aḥmad has asserted that God had two types of knowledge: "an essential (*dhatī*) knowledge which is inseparable from His Essence, and a created (*muhdath*) knowledge which comes into being when God acts within creation." Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 226. See also Aḥsā'ī, *Ḥayāt al-Nafs*, 4.

⁶⁸Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 106-109; Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 12.

insisted that the world of images and its contents are real: “a real body, a real paradise, a real hell with its fire, none of which are material.”⁶⁹ Ṣadrā, however, believed in the theory of “essential motion” (*ḥaraka jawharīya*),⁷⁰ and explained how the human form and everything else go through a constant process of renewal. According to him, the body, upon death, sheds its profane matter, and acquires a purified spiritual body in the intermediary world, thus experiencing a minor resurrection. Moreover, in the intermediary world, the body prepares itself for the final transformation, thus undergoing a greater resurrection in order to reach the realms of the intellect.⁷¹

Mullā Ṣadrā, therefore, refused the corporeal resurrection of the body in its worldly form. Ṣadrā’s doctrine of essential motion, which is perceived to be irreversible, does not allow for a physical resurrection. In the same manner, Ṣadrā also refuted the theologians’ conception of a physical afterlife.⁷² He asserted that the Qur’ān “repeatedly

⁶⁹Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 257.

⁷⁰The ‘essential motion’ of being is “the source of all motions in the accidents of place and position, and all changes of quantity and quality.” The universe is “ceaselessly being renewed and passing away, originating and ending. There is no cause for its continual origination and renewal, since what is essential is something not caused by anything but its own essence. And the Maker, when He made [the essence of being] made it to be continually renewed. This continual renewal is not made or acted upon or influenced by anything.” Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 16, quoting James Winston Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 122.

⁷¹Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*, 257.

⁷²Here Ṣadrā differs from al-Ghazālī who portrayed the resurrection of the body as a variant of transmigration. In Ṣadrā’s opinion, “the body as it will be ‘resurrected’ (i.e., created by the soul) will be identically the same as this body, except that it will not be material.” Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*, 256; Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 45.

tells us that the afterlife is a new creation, a new level of existence. This clearly means that we cannot look for a reappearance of earthly elemental bodies there.”⁷³

Shaykh Aḥmad endeavored to explain the doctrine of resurrection in a way that philosophy could accept it.⁷⁴ He maintained that each human being possesses four bodies (two are referred to as *jasad*, and two as *jism*), which undergo purification and development during the course of time.⁷⁵ The first two form the accidental body, whereas the second two form the essential body.⁷⁶ Shaykh Aḥmad drew a somewhat complex scheme in which he described his thoughts on resurrection. Basing his analysis on Corbin, Todd Lawson clearly describes Shaykh Aḥmad’s scheme as follows:

The first *jasad* is the elemental body, which decomposes after death. The second *jasad* is also composed of elements, but these are the elements of the interworld, *Hūrqaḷyā*, or the *‘ālam al-mithāl*. It survives after death and will be reunited with the spirit at the time of the Great Resurrection. The first *jism* is composed of the element of the heaven of *Hūrqaḷyā*, and is an astral body, occupied by the spirit at the time of its descent to this world. It also accompanies the spirit at the time of departure from this world and depending upon the circumstances, enters either paradise or hell; it disappears at the time of the great resurrection. The second *jism* is the essential, archetypal body, both imperishable and inseparable from the spirit. At the time of the Great resurrection it will be finally united with the

⁷³Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadra*, 225, 252, 254.

⁷⁴Todd Lawson, “The Qur’ān Commentary of Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad, The Bāb,” 36.

⁷⁵Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā’ī, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra*, vol. 4, 26. Lawson, “The Qur’ān Commentary of Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad, The Bāb,” 36. See also Rafati, “The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī‘ī Islam,” 108, 109.

⁷⁶According to Shaykh Aḥmad, the *jasad* (material body) is comprised of two parts: *jasad A* (body of terrestrial flesh), and *jasad B* (the body of spiritual flesh). *Jism* is also comprised of two parts: *jism A* (astral subtle body), and *jism B* (the supra-celestial archetypal body). Aḥsā’ī, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra*, vol.4, 26-30; Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 184-185; Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 355; Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 51.

second *jasad*, forming the complete resurrection body, or in alchemical terms, the body of diamond, in the Aeon to come.⁷⁷

Accordingly, Shaykh Aḥmad differed from the orthodox theologians who believed in the physical resurrection of the body on the Day of Judgment and in a physical afterlife. The theologians applied a literal understanding of the Qur'anic statements on the subject. A case in point is Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī who, in his *Biḥār al-Anwār*, the collection and exposition of Imāmī Shī'ī *akhbār* (traditions) and theology, discussed the issue of resurrection and understood it in a literal sense.⁷⁸ Likewise, Majlisī confirmed that the Imam's return to this world at the end of time will mark the physical resurrection of human beings.⁷⁹

In contrast to this belief, Shaykh Aḥmad maintained that the bodies of the Prophet and the Imams would not be exempted from physical decomposition. Shaykh Aḥmad also believed that the Hidden Imam lived not in this world, but rather in *hurqalyā*. Likewise, the manifestation (*ẓuhūr*) of the Imams would not occur in this world, but in *hurqalyā*.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Lawson, *The Qur'ān Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb*," 36-37. See Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 186-188; Denis M. MacEoin, "Aḥsā'ī," *EI* i, 677.

⁷⁸Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 45. The literal understanding on several religious issues is also apparent in Majlisī's view that the Imam is still alive and ever present on earth, but that human beings cannot perceive him. He also argued that it was not impossible for the Imam to live for a very long time. He even maintained that the Imam had been seen sometimes, had performed miracles, and had taken part in pilgrimage rituals in Mecca. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Wafā', 1983), vol.7, 47-53; vol.27, 305-306.

⁷⁹Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 45; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol.27, 307.

⁸⁰This is implied from the belief in the purity of the Prophet's and the Imam's body. Shaykh Aḥmad used the terms *hurqalyā* to indicate an intermediate realm because he believed that "since spirit is pure spirit and the physical body is pure matter, there should be another realm between the two, which is neither one nor the other. The elements of the *Hurqalyā* are described as having less density than the temporal elements that make up the material world, yet more density than pure spirit." Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 107.

Needless to say, these ideas were diametrically opposed to the mainstream of Imāmī Shī'ī doctrine.

From this point, one can note that the *hūrqalyā*, or the *'ālam al-mithāl* (the world of images), occupied an important place in Shaykhī teachings, particularly in Shaykh Aḥmad's thought.⁸¹ For the Shaykhīs, it is this *hūrqalyā* that constitutes the abode of the Hidden Imam, as well as the place of the resurrection of the body.⁸² In Shaykhī belief, as Lawson asserts, "the hidden Imam, residing in the *'ālam al-mithāl*, is accessible through the spiritual imagination of those members of the Shī'a who are capable of purifying their consciences to a degree which allowed the Hidden Imam, or Qā'im, to appear to them (i.e. the Perfect Shī'a)."⁸³

Therefore, according to Shaykhī teachings, the *mujtahid* cannot serve as an adequate intermediary between the community and the Hidden Imam. A more authoritative incarnation of divine guidance is necessary for such a task, one which, as has been stated, can be found in the "Perfect Shī'a" (*Shī'a Kāmil*), described by the later Shaykhīs as the fourth pillar (*al-rukn al-rābi'*). The authority of the Perfect Shī'a, who are said to have direct contact with the Hidden Imam, would of course put to an end the function and role of the *mujtahids*.⁸⁴

Besides these views, Shaykh Aḥmad also taught that the Prophet's night journey to heaven (*mi'raj*) was made only within the created realm and with the Prophet's subtle

⁸¹Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 107.

⁸²Lawson, "The Qur'ān Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb," 36.

⁸³Lawson, "The Qur'ān Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb," 36.

⁸⁴Algar, *Religion and State*, 7-8.

rather than material body.⁸⁵ The theologians, on the other hand, basing their ideas on a literal interpretation of the Qur'ān, have asserted their belief in the physical *mi'raj*. Shaykh Aḥmad rejected this view, and understood *mi'raj* to "mean a spiritual experience symbolizing an ascent to the highest level of cognizance of the divine."⁸⁶

In matters of jurisprudence, Shaykh Aḥmad appears to have adopted an intermediary position between the Uṣūlīs and the Akhbārīs. He did not deny the validity of *ijtihād*, but recommended that it remain within the area determined by the Traditions of the Imams.⁸⁷ Moreover, he states that his method of arriving at conclusions in religious law was essentially that of the Uṣūlīs who base their thinking on the Qur'ān, *ijmā'* (consensus), and logical reasoning, except that Shaykh Aḥmad emphasized the use of evidence from intuition (*ḥikma*).⁸⁸ Momen, however, contends that although Shaykh Aḥmad's method of jurisprudence was Uṣūlī in nature, "his pious veneration of the Imams and his use of argument based on the Traditions of the Imams rather than on rational discourse is very reminiscent of Akhbārī thought."⁸⁹

However, what spurred the severe opposition of many 'ulama to Shaykh Aḥmad's doctrine was undoubtedly their fear of Shaykh Aḥmad's preference for intuitive

⁸⁵Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 10; Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 115.

⁸⁶Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 45. Shaykh Aḥmad discussed the spiritual nature of the Prophet's *mi'raj* in at least two places. See his *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi'a al-Kabīra*, vol.3, 129, 313. Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 45.

⁸⁷Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 228.

⁸⁸Aḥsā'ī, *Ḥayāt al-Nafs*, 52.

⁸⁹Moojan Momen, *The Works of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī: A Bibliography*, based upon Fihrist Kutub Mashāyikh 'Izām of Shaykh Abū 'l-Qāsim Kirmānī (Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin Monograph, no. 1, 1991), 19.

knowledge, which he claimed to have obtained through direct inspiration from the Imams. This claim led to the description of Shaykh Aḥmad as a Perfect Shī'ī, and hence to him being the gate (*bāb*) to the Imams. Shaykh Aḥmad's teachings thus threatened the authority and influence of the *mujtahids* who based their knowledge on the rational processes of *ijtihād*. With respect to Shaykh Aḥmad's preference for the intuitive uncovering of knowledge (*kashf*), his school is also called "Kashfiya." Shaykh Aḥmad similarly believed that his knowledge was granted him directly by the Prophet and the Imams. He writes:

The 'ulamā derive their knowledge one from the other, but I have never followed in their way. I have derived what I know from the Imams of guidance, and error cannot find its way into my words, since all that I confirm in my books is from them and they are preserved from sin and ignorance and error. Whosoever derives his knowledge from them shall not err, inasmuch as he has encountered the Imams."⁹⁰

After the death of Shaykh Aḥmad in 1826, the Shaykhī school was led by his most important pupil Sayyid Kāzīm Rashī (d.1843/4). In some instances, Rashī further developed the Shaykhī teachings and elaborated certain ideas which had been espoused by Shaykh Aḥmad, such as that of the Perfect Shī'ī and that of a new revelation.⁹¹ In Rashī's time, the interpretation of the role of the Perfect Shī'ī seems to have gone in a messianic direction, which eventually gave rise to the Bābī movement.

⁹⁰Denis MacEoin, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Nineteenth-Century Shi'ism," *JAOS* 110:2 (1990): 327, quoting Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ al-Fawā'id* (n.p., 1272/1856), 4.

⁹¹For a more detailed discussion of the Shaykhī school at the time of Rashī as well as Rashī's ideas on certain doctrines, see MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Bābism," 96-124. See also Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 52

In spite of the fact that the messianic aspects of Shaykhism developed in his time, Rashī made an attempt to situate Shaykhism, as a theological school, within mainstream Shī'ism, even though there were still many bones of contention between Shaykhism and the orthodox Shī'ī theologians and jurists of the time. Rashī also argued that he never sought to establish a new *madhhab* different from Shī'ī Islam.⁹² Amanat asserts that Rashī even tried to conform numerous Shaykhī teachings to Uṣūlī doctrine, particularly in external matters.⁹³ This attempt to move Shaykhism closer to orthodoxy was made in order to avoid the criticism and persecution which had been inflicted upon Shaykhīs at the end of Shaykh Aḥmad's life and throughout Rashī's leadership (from 1826 to 1844). In order to avoid being accused of deviation, Rashī also attempted to justify his ideas, and even, to some extent, to situate Shaykhism within mainstream Shi'ism.⁹⁴ At the end of his life, Rashī alluded to the possibility of the coming of post-Muhammadan revelation from God shortly after his death. Accordingly, his disciples began to expect the arrival of a more significant figure than either Shaykh Aḥmad or Rashī.⁹⁵ Therefore, we find that claims to leadership, after Rashī, proliferated within Shaykhī communities everywhere.⁹⁶

⁹²MacEoin, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Nineteenth-Century Shi'ism," 328, referring to Sayyid Kāzīm Rashī, *Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn* (n.p., 1276/1859-60), 64.

⁹³Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 58.

⁹⁴See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 58.

⁹⁵Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 61, referring to Rashī, *Risāla-yi Fārsi dar Uṣūl-i 'Aqā'id*, 186-89; and *Risāla* (in reply to Muḥammad Riḍā Mirzā). Collection of two treatises, INBA no.4.

⁹⁶Yazd, Adharbayjān, Mazandaran, Kirmān and other cities became important bases for the Shaykhī community. This was so because many Persians had studied under Rashī in the 'Atabāt, and had then established teaching circles and religious networks in their villages.

The most important claim was made by Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb (d.1850), whom his followers believed to be the one Rashī had alluded to. At this point, it may be argued that these Shaykhīs were a group within the Shī'ī community that had expected the coming of the Imam after the greater concealment. According to Donaldson, over nine hundred years had passed since the close of the lesser occultation, after the death of the last agent (*wakīl*). In their support of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad some Shaykhīs (later called the Bābīs) were virtually affirming the coming of the expected Imam.⁹⁷

However, not all the Shaykhīs accepted Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad's claim. In Kirmān, there was Ḥajjī Muḥammad Karīm Khān (1809/10-1870/1), with a considerable number of followers, who would not admit the claim of the Bāb. Henceforth, the Shaykhī school was divided into two important groups: the Kirmānī Shaykhīs and the Bābīs.⁹⁸

Although the doctrine of the fourth pillar (*al-rukṅ al-rābi'*) had its root in Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī's works, and was even developed by the Bāb, it also became one of the Kirmānī Shaykhī doctrines. According to orthodox Shī'ī doctrine, there are five supports of Shi'ism: the unity of God, the justice of God, the authority of the Prophet, the Imamate, and the Resurrection. The Shaykhīs reduced these five to three by arguing that the justice of God and the resurrection are embodied in the authority of the Prophet. They added another doctrine to the remaining three (the unity of God, prophecy, and the

⁹⁷Dwight M. Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Irak* (London: Luzac and Company, 1933), 363.

⁹⁸According to Algar, "it is true that Babism had many roots in Shaykhism; but Shaykhism was not bound inevitably to develop in the direction of Babism. Indeed, the direction it took under Ḥajjī Muḥammad Karīm Khān was strongly opposed to Bābism." Algar, *Religion and State*, 69. This opposition may be understood partly in light of struggle for authority, since as a relative of the Qajars, Karīm Khān had at least a partial interest in gaining support from the dynasty.

imamate) called the fourth pillar. This doctrine argues that there must always be a perfect Shī'ī, capable of serving as an intermediary between the Hidden Imam and the believers.⁹⁹ The other faction, the Bābīs, however, made use of the fact that Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad appeared just about one thousand years after the occultation of the twelfth Imam, and some even believed that he was the return of the Hidden Imam.¹⁰⁰

D. State-'Ulama Relations and Messianic Trends

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Iran was marked by significant social, political and religious transformations.¹⁰¹ During this period, there was a noticeable Western influence and dominance in the economic and political affairs of the country. This period also witnessed the emergence of several social protests, either caused by economic problems or stimulated by religious fervor. The important features of the period were represented by the intense relations and sometimes tensions between the

⁹⁹For further discussion of Kirmānī Shaykhism, see, for example, Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 59-86.

¹⁰⁰Amanat, to a certain extent, disagrees with Corbin's assessment that the Bābī movement deviated from the mainstream of Shaykhī thought. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, iv, 228, 283. Rather, he asserts that Babism was the "final outcome of almost half a century of Shaykhī speculation on the problem of Resurrection." Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 69.

¹⁰¹The general history of Qajar Persia has been studied extensively by many scholars. The relation between the state and the 'ulama, and the role of the latter in this period has been dealt with by Algar's *Religion and State in Iran*, a work cited elsewhere here. In addition, R. G. A. Watson's *A History of Persia from the beginning of the Nineteenth Century to the Year 1858* (London, 1866), although very old, is also useful. Discussion of political, social and cultural development during the Qajar dynasty can be found in *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change 1800-1925*, eds. Edmond Bosworth and Carole Hillenbrand (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1992). A comprehensive study of a particular personality of the Qajars, Naṣīr al-Dīn Shāh, has been done by Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

'ulama and the state¹⁰² as well as the emergence of messianic trends and tendencies which were reflected in what Amanat signifies as "the revived Sufi orders and the widespread popular prophecies."¹⁰³ The latter tendency appears to have caused the conflicts between the orthodox 'ulama and the Ṣūfīs of millenarian persuasion, and provided a basis for the later messianic claim of the Bāb in 1844.

In the period from 1797 to 1834 the Qajar dynasty was ruled by Faḥ 'Alī Shāh (d.1834) who favored the 'ulama and developed a religious policy which endorsed the doctrines of the orthodox 'ulama against all heretical tendencies, and also against various ṣūfī movements of the time, as will be seen later. In short, there was a kind of alliance between the 'ulama and the state during his reign, against any doctrine or movement which threatened the religious and political authorities.¹⁰⁴ During the reign of Faḥ 'Alī Shāh, the position of the Uṣūlī 'ulama was strong. Under the influence of Āghā Muḥammad Bāqir Bihbahānī (1118-1205/1706-1790) they dominated the religious circles in the 'Atabāt, and put an end to the predominance of the Akhbārīs, and even denounced the Akhbārīs as infidels (*kāfir*).¹⁰⁵ In short, both the 'ulama and the ruler supported each other's religious and political influence over the population.

¹⁰²See, for example, Algar, *Religion and State*, 26.

¹⁰³Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 70. Amanat's chapter "Prophets and Prophecies" provides a comprehensive picture of messianic tendencies in Iran prior to the Bāb's claim in 1844.

¹⁰⁴Michel M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 10.

¹⁰⁵Algar, *Religion and State*, 34-34.

Despite this close relationship between the ‘ulama and the state, Fath ‘Alī Shāh’s religio-political policies in effect produced two contrasting results: “binding them [the ‘ulama] to the regime,” on the one hand, and “preparing the way for their later autonomy,” on the other.¹⁰⁶ However, as Algar maintains, Fath ‘Alī Shāh appears not to have played any decisive role in religious disputes amongst the ‘ulama, specifically in the case of the Shaykhīs. Rather, this decisive role was assumed by ‘Alī Naqī Mirzā, the governor of Qazvin, who made a serious attempt to defuse religious controversies, particularly when Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā’ī was accused by Mullā Muḥammad Taqī Baraghānī, an uncle of Bābī Qurrat al-‘Ayn, of being an infidel (*kaḥfīr*).¹⁰⁷

The reign of Muḥammad Shāh (1834-1848) witnessed the growing dominance of foreign powers, particularly Britain, in the economic and political affairs of Iran. This dominance brought about the marginalization and dislocation of the Iranian people within Iran’s economics and politics. Consequently, numerous merchants (*bazārīs*) sent the Shāh petitions against Western involvement. At the same time, a plethora of religious movements began to emerge alongside the social protests and political revolts of this period.¹⁰⁸ One of these involved Iran’s Ismā‘īlī community. The head of this Ismā‘īlī community, who assumed the title of Aghā Khān, became involved in a conflict with the

¹⁰⁶Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 573.

¹⁰⁷Algar, *Religion and State*, 69. The denunciation of Shaykh Aḥmad was based on the ground of his belief that resurrection is spiritual (*ruḥānī*) in nature. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 66, referring to Rashtī, *Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn*, 52-68.

¹⁰⁸Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 573.

provincial government and, eventually launched a revolt in south central Iran. He was defeated, and as a result fled along with many of his followers to India.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, one might argue that the relationship between the 'ulama and the Qajar regime was complex. There were various precedents for collaboration between the state and the 'ulama, as demonstrated by a tradition of quietism amongst the 'ulama and their avoidance of involvement in political activities. They mostly concentrated on intellectual, theological and religious activities, and respected the authority of the state, which, in turn, appointed them as officials. Hence, most 'ulama were dependent on the state for their salaries, grants of land, and endowments for shrines and schools. This fact resulted in the subordination of the 'ulama to state authority.

The tension between the state and the 'ulama became stronger in the reign of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (1848-1896) under the ministry of Mirzā Taqī Khān, Amīr Kabīr (d.1852) when the government introduced a political reform intended to strengthen the authority of the state.¹¹⁰ This reform sought to limit the influence and jurisdiction of the 'ulama by establishing new courts. Similarly, the government produced regulations that limited the role of religious institutions such as mosques and shrines. It also became involved in controlling endowments and competed with the 'ulama in the realm of education by establishing secular schools.¹¹¹ The most important feature, for the purpose

¹⁰⁹Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: an Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 48. See Hamid Algar, "The Revolt of Aghā Khān Mahallāī and the Transference of the Ismā'īlī Imamate to India," *SI* 29 (1969): 55-81.

¹¹⁰For further discussion, see Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, chapters 3 and 4.

¹¹¹Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 573.

of this study, of Naṣīr al-Dīn Shāh's reign was the severe opposition of both the state and the 'ulama against the Bābī movement, a topic which will be dealt with in Chapter Three.

In short, it can be said that under the Qajars, the religious elite, to some degree, formed an opposition to the state, with the result that the former could not wholly incorporate or control the 'ulama. And, although the 'ulama were granted allowances by the government, which might have compromised them, they still demonstrated a degree of independence, and therefore were still honored by, and even able to exercise restraint upon, the government. More interestingly, they were also sometimes associated with movements that led to outbreaks of violence in the cities, between the masses and the government.¹¹²

Messianic Trends

Although the ruler and the 'ulama attempted to eradicate the Ṣūfī orders, which have millenarian tendencies, particularly during the reign of Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh, the growing popularity and wide acceptance of Ṣūfī masters and their teachings among the population cannot be ignored. The development of Ṣūfī orders in fact entailed what Amanat calls "premessianic" or "protomessianic elements" which exemplified the intense expectation to the appearance (*zuhūr*) of the Hidden Imam. The revival of the Ṣūfī orders containing millenarian tendencies was represented by the activities and teachings of Ni'matullāhī Ṣūfis.¹¹³

¹¹²A.K.S. Lambton, *Qajar Persia* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1987), 29-30.

¹¹³Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 70-71.

The most important Ni'matullāhī teacher to make a significant attempt to revive the legacy of this Ṣūfī order was Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh, who arrived in Shiraz in 1776.¹¹⁴ Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh and his two prominent disciples, Nūr 'Alī Shāh and Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh provided the order with a variety of mystical teachings and a manual of Ṣūfī practices. They attempted to revive the legacy of the Ni'matullāhī teachings as well as to lay sufficient emphasis on the importance of the *sharī'a*. More importantly, the Ni'matullāhī teachings contained messianic elements and convictions. The writings of the Ni'matullāhī teachers also included some claims which in essence became the basis for the rise of messianic tendencies.¹¹⁵ In addition, what made this Ṣūfī order popular and attractive was the fact that the common people saw in them saintly characteristics coupled with their "claims to a divinely endowed gift to prognosticate and influence the course of events."¹¹⁶ However, the 'ulama accused them of being infidels, since they felt threatened by the growing influence of the Ṣūfīs and individual dervishes.¹¹⁷ The 'ulama's hostility toward the Ṣūfīs also appeared in various works which contained anti-Ṣūfī polemics.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 71. The Ni'matullāhī order was founded by Ni'mat Allāh Wafī Kirmānī (d. around 834/1431). See Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, i, 89; ii, 286.

¹¹⁵For example is the poetry of Nūr 'Alī Shāh: "I came again like Moses to reveal the Magic Hand; Drown Pharaoh and his legions again the Sea; I came again like Jesus to cut the throat of Antichrist; And by Mahdi's command resurrect the universe with a breath." Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 73, quoting *Dīvān-i Nūr 'Alī Shāh Isfahānī*, ed. J. Nurbakhsh (Tehran, 1349 Sh./1970), 105-106.

¹¹⁶Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 73.

¹¹⁷Algar, *Religion and State*, 38; Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, 244.

¹¹⁸Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 76-77. The important anti-sufi works were the *Risāla Khayrātīya* and *Qaṣ' al-Maqāl fī Radd Ahl al-Ḍalāl* written by Muḥammad 'Alī Bihbahānī. In the *Risāla* Bihbahānī denounced the Sufis for their "master's claim to leadership,

It is apparent that the question of authority characterized the nature of the Ṣūfī-‘ulama encounter, and particularly the ‘ulama’s appeals to the rulers to exterminate their enemies. The ‘ulama attempted to gain state support in order to reduce and eliminate the political implications of sufism. When the Ṣufis gained popularity, the role of the ‘ulama in leading the community was challenged, and their influence was undermined by the Ṣūfis’. Therefore, the ‘ulama sought to persuade Karīm Khān Zand (r.1763-1779), and then Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh to support their cause against Mir Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh and his followers.¹¹⁹

Beside the Ni‘matullāhī revival, other orders which underwent renewal were the Dhahabīya and Nurbakhshīya. As Amanat notes, the Dhahabīya revival was partly facilitated by the efforts of Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Dhahabī Nayrīzī (d.1173/1760). This order was then developed by his leading followers and brought to different cities, such as Shiraz where it attracted a following.¹²⁰ This is also the case with the Nurbakhshīya

and the Ṣūfis’ ignorance and neglect of the provisions of the Shari‘ah.” Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh was killed in 1797 in Kirmānshāh on the order of Bihbahānī. See Hamid Algar, “Religious Forces in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Iran,” *The Cambridge History of Iran 7: From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 721. See also William R. Royce, “Mir Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh and the Ni‘mat Allāhī Revival 1776-7 to 1796-7: A Study of Sufism and its Opponents in Late Eighteenth Century Iran,” Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1979, 170. See also Michel de Miras, *La méthode spirituelle d’un maître du Soufisme iranien, Nūr ‘Alī-Shah, circā 1748-1798*. Lettre-preface par Henry Corbin (Paris: les éditions du Sirac, 1973).

¹¹⁹As Royce observes, “it was the political rather than moral threat which turned the rulers against the Ṣūfis. The ‘ulama not only appealed to the size and influence of the Ṣūfī movement, but also emphasized its political implications. The records seem to demonstrate that it was the authority of the ‘ulama as religious leaders of the community, rather than that of the rulers, which was potentially threatened by the Ṣūfis.” Therefore, the reason that underpinned the ‘ulama’s condemnation and rejection of the Ṣūfis’ role was based on the question of authority and political influence. Royce, “Mir Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh and the Ni‘mat Allāhī Revival 1776-7 to 1796-7,” 191-192.

¹²⁰Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 79-80.

whose leader in this period, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Nā’in (d.1212/1797), made efforts to renew some messianic prophecies embodied in the Nurbakhshī teachings, which were initially established and formulated by the founder, Sayyid Muḥammad Nurbakhsh.¹²¹

The accession to power of Muḥammad Shāh in 1834 and the appointment of Mirzā Aqāsi (prime minister between 1835 and 1848) provided a new atmosphere for Sufism, however. The ruler even patronized the Ṣūfis, particularly the Ni‘matullāhīs. Muḥammad Shāh’s ṣūfī tendencies allowed many Ṣūfis to hold prominent offices during his reign. Moreover, during Muḥammad Shāh’s reign, other Ṣūfī orders such as Dhahabīya and Nurbakhshīya developed and flourished significantly.¹²² By the early nineteenth century, the city of Shiraz, where the Bāb was born, had become one of the important centers of ṣūfī activities, such as those of the Ni‘matullāhī, Dhahabī and Nurbakhshī orders. These orders attracted many followers from a variety of backgrounds.¹²³ It is probable that their leaning to ṣufism was partly due to the hope to experience spiritual visions, in addition to the fact that the ṣūfī teachings of these orders basically contained Shī‘ī doctrine, such as belief in the advent of the Hidden Imam.

The proto-messianic claims and elements during this period can also be observed in the revival of some aspects of Ismā‘īlī messianic teachings with regard to the advent of

¹²¹Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 80, referring to Ma‘ṣūm ‘Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā‘iq al-Haqā‘iq*, 2nd ed. M. J. Mahjub, vol.3 (Tehran, 1345/1966), 247-50.

¹²²Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 79. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 313-317. See also Hamid Algar, “Religious Forces in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Iran,” *The Cambridge History of Iran 7: From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 721.

¹²³Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 81. For further discussion, see R. Gramlich, *Die Schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1975-76).

the Hidden Imam, as well as in the claims made by such individual dervishes as Muḥammad Qāsim Bag in 1216/1801.¹²⁴ But the most interesting feature which marked the spread of messianic tendencies in the early nineteenth century was speculation made by a historian, Muḥammad Hāshim Aṣaf, known as Rustam al-Ḥukamā'. As Amanat observes, Rustam al-Ḥukamā' often interpreted the historical and political events of the time using millenarian ideas, and linked them with the idea of the advent of the Hidden Imam.¹²⁵

In addition to these phenomena, there had been pre-messianic prophecies advanced by some individuals who intensely expected the advent of the Hidden Imam. One important case was Sayyid Kāzim Rashī's allusions to the appearance of the divine manifestation soon after his death. Rashī's allusions appear to have convinced some Shaykhīs to seek the person whose qualities had been described by their leader. Rashī also believed in the progressive nature of revelation or a cyclical concept of prophethood.¹²⁶ Eventually, Rashī's allusions and the anticipation it generated became the basis for the acceptance of the Bāb's claim by some Shaykhīs who later became the Bāb's disciples, such as Mullā Ḥusayn.

We have seen that in the early nineteenth century, prior to the Bāb's claim, the popular expectation of the appearance of the Hidden Imam (*zuhūr*) grew significantly and

¹²⁴See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 83-88.

¹²⁵Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 89-92. For a detailed study on has studied Rustam al-Ḥukamā' s political theory see, for example, A.K.S. Lambton, "Some New Trends in Islamic Political Thought in Late 18th and Early 19th Century Persia," *SI* 39 (1974): 95-128.

¹²⁶See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 58, referring to Rashī, *Sharḥ al-Qaṣīda al-Lāmīya* (Tabriz, 1270/1853) which was compiled in 1257/1841 towards the end of his life.

spread with intensity. In different cities the population speculated on the messianic appearance of the Hidden Imam. In Zanjan, for example, messianic militancy also emerged.¹²⁷ This development was largely provoked by the influence of a prominent Akhbārī personality, namely Mullā Muḥammad ‘Alī Ḥujjat Zanjānī, known as Ḥujjat (1812-1851). He was influential partly because his family, especially his father, enjoyed respect and popularity among the majority of the Zanjan population. The intensity of messianic expectation was in fact enhanced by Ḥujjat’s belief in the coming of a new manifestation. His influence often frightened the state authorities, with the result that the latter called Ḥujjat to the capital where he was arrested. Amanat maintains that “Ḥujjat’s views on the appearance of the Promised One did not comply with the teachings of Akhbārīs, who take the Traditions at face value, but were closer to those of Shaykhīs.”¹²⁸ It is not surprising therefore that Ḥujjat’s anticipation of a messianic manifestation inevitably increased the expectation of *zuhūr*, and caused conflict between the state authority and Ḥujjat’s followers. Ḥujjat himself eventually became a leading follower of the Bāb, and led the Bābī revolts in Zanjan against the religious and political establishment there. We will discuss Ḥujjat and Zanjan below in Chapter Three.

Concluding Note

We have seen from the previous discussion that religion and politics have strong ties in Islam, and particularly in Shi‘ism. The emergence of Shi‘ism can be regarded as

¹²⁷ Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 101.

¹²⁸ Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 102, referring to, among others, ‘Abd al-Aḥad Zanjānī, “Personal Reminiscences of the Babi Insurrection in Zanjan in 1850,” trans. E. G. Brwone, *JRAS* 29 (1897): 771-75.

the result of complex historical events which involved religious motives as well as political aspirations. This relation can be clearly seen in the dispute between the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs on the issue of authority in the period of occultation. We can see therefore that the emergence and the development of religious thought cannot be fully separated from its social and political contexts. The dispute between the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs, along with the political climate of nineteenth century in Iran, inspired the rise of Shaykhism which in the course of history paved the way for the rapid growth of a radical messianic tendency amongst the Shī'īs. The expectation of the return (*raj'a*) of the Hidden Imam gained such momentum due partly to Shaykhī teachings, but more importantly due to the fact that the early nineteenth century marked the thousandth anniversary of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam. We will address this tendency in the following discussion on the rise of the Bābī movement and Bābī religious dissent.

Chapter Two

THE RISE OF BABISM AND RELIGIOUS DISSENT

The rise and development of Babism cannot be separated from the life of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad. Bābī teachings and doctrines can be said to be identical to the thought of the Bāb. Up to his death in 1850, the Bāb had become the central figure of the movement, provided its ideological basis, directed the movement, and inspired his followers even during his time under arrest. Therefore, it is important first of all, to throw some light on the life of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad, and in particular the major role he played in the establishment of the Bābī movement and in the forming of its doctrine.

A. The Bāb and the Rise of the Bābī Movement

Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad was born in the city of Shiraz on Muḥarram 1, 1235 or October 20, 1819 into a distinguished family of that town. The title *sayyid* which he used indicates that his origin can be traced back to the Prophet Muḥammad. His father, Sayyid Muḥammad Riḍā, was highly honored and respected by society for his piety and virtue. He died when Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad was still a child. His maternal uncle, Ḥajji Mirzā Sayyid 'Alī, then took responsibility for Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad's upbringing and education. In this phase, Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad was sent to a tutor by the name of Shaykh 'Ābid. The latter was known as a man of piety and learning, and he is said to have

been a disciple of Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī and Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī, the leaders of the Shaykhī movement.¹

Since his childhood, Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad had exhibited extraordinary abilities and qualities. Shaykh 'Ābid, the teacher, was surprised at Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad's intelligence and wisdom, a fact that led Shaykh 'Ābid to return the child to his uncle because "he had nothing to teach this gifted pupil."² Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad was only five years old when he was sent to receive education from Shaykh 'Ābid.

On one occasion some of Shaykh 'Ābid's students raised a question that remained unanswered after a long discussion. Shaykh 'Ābid told them that he would consult some authoritative works, and would give the solution at their next meeting. Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad, who had been listening, gave reasonable answers which surprised both the teacher and the students.³ These occurrences demonstrated that Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad was not an ordinary child, rather, one of a high intelligence. These qualities and his charismatic personality later become one of the important factors which led many Shī'is, particularly Shaykhīs, to give allegiance to his claims and support his cause.

Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad studied at a local *maktab* (school) for six or seven years. Then he began to get involved in the family business. When he was fifteen, he went to

¹Muḥammad Nabīl Zarandī, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabīl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā'ī Revelation*, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1962), 75. For detailed information regarding the childhood of the Bāb, see Stephen Lambden, "An Episode in the Childhood of the Bāb," in *In Iran: Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History*, ed. Peter Smith (Los Angeles, Kalimat Press, 1986), 1-31. And for a detailed account of the life of the Bāb, see among others H. M. Balyuzi, *The Bāb* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973). See also MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 137-142; Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 110-121.

²Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, 33.

³Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, 33-35.

Bushihr with his guardian.⁴ In the year 1255/1839-40, however, Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad left for the ‘Atabāt in Iraq. There he spent some time, mostly in Karbalā’, where he studied under Sayyid Kāzīm Rashī, the leader of the Shaykhī school at that time.⁵ The duration of his stay in the ‘Atabāt varies depending upon sources. Some sources limit his study under Rashī in order to minimize the influences of the latter and to show that Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad had developed his thoughts independently since his youth. Apart from this controversy, however, Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad became close with several of Rashī’s students, including a number of persons who later became his own disciples. It is somewhat difficult to determine the definite aspects of Shaykhī doctrines that influenced the Bāb’s thought, or the exact Shaykhī-Bābī relationship in general. The Bāb and his followers, nevertheless, still regarded Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā’ī and Sayyid Kāzīm Rashī as the precursors of their movement, or even as “the two preceding Bābs.”⁶

In 1256/1840-41, Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad’s family insisted on his return to Shiraz. He then married Khadīja Begum, a daughter of his mother’s paternal uncle in Rajab 1258 or August 1842.⁷ It is after this event that Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad began the composition of some of his early works, and launched his early claims.

⁴Denis MacEoin, “Bāb, Sayyed ‘Alī Moḥammad Šīrāzī,” *Elr* iii, 279.

⁵MacEoin, “Bāb,” 279.

⁶Denis MacEoin, “Early Shaykhī Reactions to the Bāb and His Claims,” in M. Momen, *Studies in Babi and Baha’i History* 1 (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982), 10.

⁷Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, 46. See MacEoin, “Bāb,” 279.

The Bāb's works and claims

The works of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad are extensive in number and unusual in nature, particularly his works of *tafsīr*. The first major work written by Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad in the early stage of his mission was *tafsīr sūrat al-Baqara*.⁸ However, the most important of his writings in this period was his commentary on *Sūrat Yūsuf*, or *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*, known also as *Aḥsan al-Qaṣaṣ*, or simply the *tafsīr* par excellence, in which he claimed for himself the title of the *bāb* (gate) and *dhikr* (remembrance).⁹ From that time (1844) onward, Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad was known as the Bāb, among other titles.

The *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* was widely distributed among his followers during his early mission. The Bābīs even regarded the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* as their Qur'ān before the Bāb wrote the Persian *Bayān*, which later became the holy book of the Bābīs. The *Bayān* was composed during the Bāb's imprisonment at Mākū in 1847-8. Compared to the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*, however, the *Bayān* seems to have not been so widely circulated.¹⁰

⁸Lawson, "The Qur'ān Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb." 68-77; see also Todd Lawson, "Interpretation as Revelation: The Qur'ān Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb (1819-1850)," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 233-242.

⁹Lawson has studied the meaning and significance of the terms *dhikr* and *bāb*, which frequently appear in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*. Todd Lawson, "The Terms 'Remembrance' (*dhikr*) and 'Gate' (*bab*) in the Bāb's Commentary on the Sura of Joseph," in *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, ed. Moojan Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1989), 24.

¹⁰Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 32.

The Bāb also composed the Arabic *Bayān*,¹¹ which is much shorter than its Persian version, and which may be considered a “condensation of the Persian *Bayān*.”¹²

In addition, the Bāb’s works include a number of letters to the Shāh and his chief ministers. To the ‘ulama residing in the cities of Iran and particularly in the shrine cities of Iraq, the Bāb too wrote several letters. He also composed treatises on Islamic law, and made commentaries on various Qur’anic verses in addition to the previously mentioned *tafsīrs*.¹³ Moreover, the Bāb formulated a manual or guideline for spiritual exercises, and wrote the *Kitāb al-Asma’* (Books of Names) along with a number of talismans.¹⁴

As far as the Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad’s works on *tafsīr* are concerned, it is interesting to note that he wrote and completed his works after having a dream or vision. It is most likely that these dreams convinced him that he occupied a high spiritual station. During his early mission, the Bāb benefited from “spiritual” experiences. One such

¹¹ The complete text of the Arabic *Bayān* can be found in ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ḥasanī, *al-Bābīyūn wa al-Bahā’īyūn fī Ḥādīrihim wa Mādīhim* (Ṣaydā: Maṭba‘at al-‘Irfān, 1962), 81-107.

¹² E. G. Browne, *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne on the Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions*, edited by Moojan Momen (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), 318. The complete text of the Arabic *Bayān* can be found in ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ḥasanī, *al-Bābīyūn wa al-Bahā’īyūn fī Ḥādīrihim wa Mādīhim* (Ṣaydā: Maṭba‘at al-‘Irfān, 1962), 81-107.

¹³ Among others are the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Kawthar* (Cambridge University Library, E. G. Browne Oriental Manuscripts, F.10, dated 1296/1879), which was written for Sayyid Yaḥyā Darabī (d.1850) who had been sent by Muḥammad Shāh (r.1834-1848) to investigate the Bāb, but then became a follower of the Bāb; and the *Tafsīr Sūrat Wa’l-‘Aṣr* (Cambridge, Browne Or. Ms, F.9), which was written for the Sulṭanu’l-‘Ulamā, the Imām Jum‘a of Isfahan, Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad, between September 1846 and March 1847. The latter *tafsīr* has been studied by Todd Lawson, “The Dangers of Reading: Inlibration, Communion and Transference in the Qur’ān Commentary of the Bāb,” particularly 178-207. The location of Bābī manuscripts is based on Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992).

¹⁴ For more detailed discussion and a fuller categorization of the Bāb’s works, see MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History*.

experience happened on Rabī' al-Thānī 15, 1260 or May 4, 1844 which was then followed by another vision in which he encountered the Imam Ḥusayn. This encounter marked the beginning of his work on *tafsīr*, i.e., *tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*. Most scholars agree that this *tafsīr* is unusual and unconventional in nature, since it resembles the Qur'ān in its style.¹⁵

Amanat calls the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* a "Bābī manifesto."¹⁶ According to the Bāb, this work forms an explanatory book, which encompasses all the scriptures of the past.¹⁷ The first chapter of this commentary, called *sūrat al-mulk*, is characterized by among other things the attention directed to two sources of authority; the state and the 'ulamā. The Bāb called for them both to be responsible as leaders of the community.¹⁸ In this chapter, the Bāb challenged the rulers of the time, Muḥammad Shāh and his prime minister Mirza Aqāsī, to submit to and obey the command of the remembrance (*dhikr*), that is the Bāb.¹⁹

¹⁵MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 158. See also idem, "Bāb," 279; The Bāb began composing this *tafsīr* in 1260/1844 and completed later that year or in early 1261/1845. The Bāb states that this work was widely distributed during the first year of his career. The *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* is divided into one hundred and eleven *sūras*, and each *sūra* is devoted to a verse of *sūrat Yūsuf*. This work consists of some 400 pages, and is described as having been sent down by God to the Hidden Imam and subsequently revealed by him to the Bāb. See MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History*, 55-56. See E. G. Browne, "The Bābīs of Persia II: Their Literature and Doctrines," *JRAS* 21 (1889): p.908. The list of chapters in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* can be found in Lawson, "The Qur'ān Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb," 285. Lawson's work is the most important study of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*. The manuscript of *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* exists in Cambridge, Browne Or. Ms, no.F.11 (dated 1891).

¹⁶Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 201.

¹⁷Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 202, basing on *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*, X, folio 15a.

¹⁸Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 203, basing on *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*, I, folio 2a-2b.

¹⁹Lawson, "The Qur'ān Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb," 277.

The Bāb claimed that initially sovereignty belongs to him. However, the Bāb would accept the sovereignty of temporal rulers as long as they work to implement the command of God and the policies of the Bāb. The Bāb would also recognize their legitimacy to the extent that they serve as the defenders of religion, and strive for the purification of “the Sacred Land” from the infidels.²⁰ The Bāb would neither struggle for power nor regard the temporal rulers as illegitimate usurpers of power, insofar as they fulfill the above conditions.²¹ It can be said therefore that in this respect the Bāb differentiated, although not strictly, between the spiritual and political (temporal) powers.

It is also interesting to observe the relationship of Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad’s claim and his concept of “*bāb*” to Shi‘ism in general. From the early period of Shi‘ism, the term Bāb had been used to refer to the senior disciples of the Imam.²² The Shi‘ites also believed that the Prophet had used the term *bāb* in reference to ‘Alī, quoting a statement from the Prophet, “I am the city of knowledge and ‘Alī is the gate thereof.”²³ However, it is still not clear when Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad used the term *bāb* whether he meant that he was the gate to the Hidden Imam or the Hidden Imam himself. But, as Lawson asserts,

²⁰Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 203. Later in the Persian *Bayān*, the Bāb stated that “God has made it incumbent on every King who is raised up in the Religion of the *Bayān* to allow no one in his land who believes not this religion.” Browne, *Selections*, 392.

²¹Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 203; *Qayyūm al-Asma’*, I, folio 2a-2b, 3b.

²²Bernard Lewis, “Bāb,” *Et*² 1, 832.

²³Al-Ḥākim al-Naysabūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, vol.3 (Riyād: Maktabat al-Naṣr al-Ḥadītha, n.d), 126-127; Donaldson, *Shi‘ite Religion*, 362. See also Lawson, “The Terms ‘Remembrance’ (*dhikr*) and ‘Gate’ (*bab*) in the Bāb’s Commentary on the Sura of Joseph,” 27-28.

the Bāb eventually appears to have claimed to be not merely the gate but the Hidden Imam himself in person.²⁴

As far as Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad’s claim to being the Bāb is concerned, Shoghi Effendi asserts that it was put forward on May 22, 1844, and marked “the opening scene of the initial act of this great drama”²⁵ in the religious history of humankind. The participants in that event were the Bāb, then twenty-five years old, and the young Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū‘ī, the first to believe in the Bāb. Their meeting seemed to be purely accidental,²⁶ as Shoghi Effendi notes, although Mullā Ḥusayn had sought for a possible successor to Sayyid Kāẓim Rashī, as alluded to by the latter.

The most important factor which led to Mulla Ḥusayn’s conversion and allegiance to the Bāb’s claim was the proof that Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad used to endorse his claim. Amanat says that the proof is basically centered on two elements. First is the prophecy of Rashī. Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad did not claim himself to be merely Rashī’s successor or the Perfect Shī‘ī but claimed a position close to that of prophethood. The Bāb also alleged that the title of *bāb* (gate), *dhikr* (remembrance), and *nuqta* (point) which he used were authorized for him not simply by the Twelfth Imam but by a divine authority, that is God. The second proof was the Bāb’s writings, especially his skill and efficiency (speed) in producing a tremendous amount of verses.²⁷ It is obvious that what forms the important

²⁴Lawson, “The Terms ‘Remembrance’ (*dhikr*) and ‘Gate’ (*bab*) in the Bāb’s Commentary on the Sura of Joseph,” 28.

²⁵Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Illinois: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1965), 5.

²⁶Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 5.

²⁷Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 171.

proof of his mission was the immense amount of ‘verses’ (*āyāt*) which he revealed, together with the speed with which he recorded them. This was the most direct proof, which he presented invariably as miracle, sign and a revelation from God.²⁸

Shoghi Effendi notes that the dominant features that signaled the rise of the Bābī movement, which constitutes “the inception of the most glorious era in the spiritual life of mankind”²⁹ include:

the claim to be no less than the mouthpiece of God himself, promised by the prophets of bygone ages; the assertion that he was, at the same time, the herald of One immeasurably greater than himself; the summons which he trumpeted forth to the kings and princes of the earth; the dire warning directed to the chief magistrate of the realm, Muḥammad Shāh; the counsel imparted to Ḥajji Mirza Aqāsi to fear God, and the peremptory command to abdicate his authority as grand *wazīr* of the shah and submit to the One who is the inheritor of the earth and all that is therein, the challenge issued to the rulers of the world proclaiming the self sufficiency of his cause, denouncing the vanity of their ephemeral power.³⁰

The Dissemination of the Bāb’s claim

In the summer of 1844, the Bāb left Shīrāz after having instructed his followers known as the Letters of the Living to scatter throughout Iran to disseminate the Bāb’s claim. This new doctrine rapidly gained success and attracted many followers even outside and beyond the Shaykhī community. Instructed by the Bāb, the Letters of the

²⁸Smith notes that “the Qur’ān itself, revealed over a 22-year period, consisted only a little more than 6,000 verses. By contrast, according to the Bāb’s own account in the Persian *Bayān* (1847), he had by then revealed some 500,000 verses, 100,000 of which had been circulated.” Peter Smith even states that Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad lived in “an atmosphere of revelation.” Smith, *The Babi and Baha’i Religions*, 32. See also Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 172.

²⁹Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 6.

³⁰Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 6-7.

Living did not mention the name of the Bāb explicitly in their preaching, but only taught that the gate to the Imam (*bāb al-imām*) had appeared and would shortly enter Karbalā' to fulfil the messianic prophecies. The Letters of the Living also informed people that this *bāb* would give support to the Qā'im, who would appear soon.³¹

The Bāb also assigned his early prominent disciples a specific mission, that is, to proclaim the rise of the gate to the Hidden Imam to various cities throughout Iran. Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī, the first to believe in the Bāb, was instructed to go to Tehran to notify Muḥammad Shāh and his chief minister of the Bāb's cause.³² Another disciple, Mullā 'Alī Baṣṭāmī was sent to the 'Atabāt to declare the Bāb's claim particularly to the leading Shī'ite cleric, Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Najafī (d.1850).³³ The Bāb himself prepared to perform the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca. There he announced his claims to the Sharīf, the Custodian of the holy shrine of the Ka'ba.³⁴

However, the result of these missions was relatively dissatisfying, if not tragic. Mullā Ḥusayn did not succeed in approaching the Shāh, while Mullā 'Alī Baṣṭāmī was arrested, accused before a joint tribunal of Sunnī and Shī'ī 'ulama of propagating

³¹Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 15.

³²MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 188.

³³MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 188.

³⁴Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 15.

heretical teachings,³⁵ and finally sentenced to hard labor in Istanbul's naval dockyards. The Bāb himself failed to obtain any response in Mecca.³⁶

After performing the pilgrimage, and having failed in his mission, on Šafar 24, 1261/ March 4, 1845 the Bāb sailed from Jidda, and reached Bushihr on Jumādā al-Ūlā 8/May 15. He planned to go to Karbalā, but shortly after his arrival at Bushihr, he sent Ḥajji Sayyid Jawād Iṣfahānī with a letter to Karbalā, to tell his disciples there that it had proved necessary to change his plans (*bada'*)³⁷ and return directly to Iran. The Bāb also instructed them to go forth to Isfahan and remain there until the Bāb gave further commands. His reason for changing the plan is not clear. However, the Bāb's change of direction appears to have brought about a serious split in the ranks of his followers in Karbalā. It also led a number of his followers to abandon him.³⁸

In 1263/1847, he spoke of the *Ḥurūf Ḥayy* (the Letters of the Living) as the members of the first *wāḥid* (unit) of nineteen, an entity which he himself headed.³⁹ The number 19 has a significant place in the Bāb's thought. It becomes the basis of the created All-Things (*kullu shay'*); it also means that the Bāb shared with the Letters of the Living (their number is eighteen) the formation of the unit of nineteen. This implies that the Bāb

³⁵For a detailed discussion of this, see Moojan Momen, "The Trial of Mullā 'Alī Bastāmī: A Combined Sunnī and Shī'ī Fatwā against the Bāb," *Iran* 20 (1982): 113-143.

³⁶Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 15.

³⁷On a general view of *bada'* in Shi'ism, see Mahmoud Ayoub, "Divine Preordination and Human Hope: A Study of the Concept of *Bada'* in Imāmī Shī'ī Tradition," *JAOS* 106 (1986): 623-632. See also *Et*², s.v. "Badā'"

³⁸MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 192.

³⁹Browne, *Selections*, 327.

also shared with them the formulation of the Bābī religious order.⁴⁰ The Letters of the Living are also to represent the fourteen Infallibles, namely the Prophet, the twelve Imams, and Fāṭima, plus the four agents (*abwāb*). Therefore, the number of the Bāb's early disciples and that of the Shī'ī Infallibles, is equivalent. This implies that the "representatives of the past revelation now are regenerated in the Letters of Ḥayy to witness the resurrection where each letter represents the corporal existence of a name."⁴¹

In March 1847 the Bāb left Isfahan (the former Ṣafavid capital) shortly after the death of his patron, Mu'tamad al-Dawla, Manuchir Khān. The Bāb then was brought under escort towards Tehran. The route took him through Kāshān, past Qum, and on to the village of Kulayn, about twenty miles from the capital. The Bāb remained in this village for about twenty days, until Ḥajji Mirzā Aqāsī, then chief minister, instructed his escort to remove the Bāb to confinement in the town of Mākū near the Ottoman border.

The Bāb and his guards left for Azerbaijan, passing near Qazvīn en route to Tabrīz, where he was kept for forty days until his final removal to Mākū. He arrived at Mākū late in the summer of 1847 and remained there nine months. The Bāb left Mākū on April 9, 1848, and arrived at his new prison at Chihriq in the first days of May, 1848. Three months later, at the end of August, he was transferred to Tabriz to be examined, then brought back to Chihriq. It is at this point that he proclaimed himself to be the return of the Hidden Imam in person, and even implied that he was the prophet, thus announcing

⁴⁰Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 191

⁴¹Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 191; MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 145-146; The significance of number 19 in the Bāb's thought has also been discussed at length by E.G. Browne in his "The Bābīs of Persia II: Their Literature and Doctrines," 919. See also Browne, *Selections*, 327.

the abrogation of Islamic law (*sharī'a*). This assertion was publicized before the 'ulamā of Tabriz at the government tribunal of 1847-8.⁴² The period during which the Bāb was imprisoned shortly before his death at the hands of the government's troops can be regarded as his most productive period, in which he developed the elaborate expression of Bābī doctrine. Finally, the Bāb was removed to Tabriz and executed there in July 1850.⁴³

B. Some Bābī Doctrines and their Relation to Shaykhism

Most of the Bābī doctrines are expressed in the Persian *Bayān*, which was composed by the Bāb during his imprisonment in Mākū in 1847-48. According to Browne, there are at least three peculiarities in the *Bayān*, which were quite striking and impressive. The first concerns the arrangement of the chapters into groups of nineteen. The second concerns the emphasis which is given to the doctrine that the revelation he brought is not final. His mission would be continued and perfected by "Him whom God shall manifest" who would confirm what he revealed in the *Bayān*. The third is the certainty with which the Bāb believed that his religious doctrines would obtain an ultimate predominance and attract the majority of people.⁴⁴

The Persian *Bayān* describes various aspects of Bābī doctrine. Bausani notes that its content however can be sorted and seen to contain four principal points. The first is the abrogation of Qur'anic laws (*sharī'a*) of prayer, fasting, marriage, divorce, and inheritance; and that the Prophet Muḥammad was the last prophet within his prophetic

⁴²MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History*, 82.

⁴³MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History*, 82.

⁴⁴Browne, "The Babism of Persia II: Their Literature and Doctrines," 919.

cycle, which closed in 1260/1844 when the Bāb proclaimed his mission. The second is concerned with the symbolic or spiritual interpretation of the eschatological terms in the Qur'ān, such as Paradise, Hell, Death, Resurrection, Return, Judgment, and Bridge. The third is the establishment of new institutions, such as a new *qibla* (towards the house of the Bāb, replacing the Ka'ba), and a new, but rather elaborate, regulation of inheritance. The fourth is the Bāb's prophecy regarding the "one whom God will make manifest" (*man yuzhiruhu Allāh*), that is the future prophet.⁴⁵

Among these points, the doctrines that concern the future life (eschatology) constitute perhaps the most difficult parts to understand of the *Bayān*, and generally of the Bābī doctrine. This is so since the Bāb interpreted all such doctrines as the questioning in the Tomb, the resurrection, and the bridge (*ṣirāṭ*) in an allegorical manner.⁴⁶

To begin with, the issue of resurrection (*qiyāma*) forms one of the most important aspects in the Bāb's thought. In the Bāb's view, resurrection means the "appearance of the Primal Will in its latest manifestation; just as all things were originally created in one person, so all will be resurrected in one person, whereupon they will be individually resurrected in their various places."⁴⁷ The Bāb therefore appears to assert that physical resurrection of bodies from their graves would not happen, a view which was similarly held by Shaykh Ahmad. The Bāb maintained that the Day of resurrection continues from

⁴⁵A. Bausani, "Bāb," *EI*² 1, 834. Discussing Bābī doctrine, Smith is of the opinion that Bābism as a religious movement "may be characterized by four inter-related religious motifs: legalism, esotericism, 'polarity' and millenarianism." See Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 31-44.

⁴⁶See Browne, *Selections*, 330.

⁴⁷MacEoin, "Bāb," 283.

the period of the appearance of the tree of Truth (i.e., the prophet) in each age until his disappearance. "What is meant by the Day of Resurrection is the day of the Manifestation of the Tree of Truth," the Bāb said.⁴⁸

This concept implies that the disappearance of one prophet and the coming of the other constitute the Day of Resurrection. Thus, the resurrection of Moses took place from the coming of Jesus until the latter's ascension, and the resurrection of Islam (the Prophet Muḥammad) began with the Bāb's proclamation of his mission on the evening of Jumādā al-Ūlā 5, 1260 or May 22, 1844, and would end at his death, or in the advent of 'him whom God shall make manifest.'⁴⁹ In this resurrection the return (*raj'a*) of Muḥammad, the Imāms, Fāṭima and the four *abwāb* (gates, agents) has taken place in the persons of the eighteen *ḥurūf al-ḥayy* (the Letters of the Living), the Bāb's early disciples.⁵⁰ The Letters of the Living therefore were the return of the eighteen mentioned above

It is clear therefore that the Bāb's thinking contradicted the traditional Shī'ī view of the Day of Resurrection. In orthodox Shī'ī belief, the day of resurrection is the day, on which the dead will be resurrected to meet their final judgment; the good to be rewarded with paradise, the bad to be punished with Hell.⁵¹ The Bāb instead interpreted the resurrection as the era of a new revelation, in which those who accept and believe in it

⁴⁸The Persian *Bayān* unit 2 chapter 7. See Browne, "A Summary of the Persian Bayān," *Selections*, 330. In the Arabic *Bayān*, the Bāb also speaks of the day of resurrection, although very briefly, which in substance sums up what he states in the Persian *Bayān*. See unit two of *Bayān 'Arabī* in al-Ḥasanī, *al-Bābīyūn wa al-Bahā'īyūn*, 83-84.

⁴⁹Browne, *Selections*, 330.

⁵⁰MacEoin, "Bāb," 3, 283. Browne, *Selections*, 333.

⁵¹See, for example, Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol.7, 48.

will experience a heavenly life, while those who disbelieve will suffer the agony of Hell; both in a spiritual sense.⁵²

The Bāb's rejection of the orthodox doctrine of resurrection, for some scholars, seems to have been reminiscent of the Nizārī Ismā'īlī doctrine on the same issue. The turning point of Ismā'īlī deviation from mainstream Islam was marked by the proclamation of the Resurrection (*qiyāma*) by Ḥasan 'alā dhikrihī al-salām on Ramaḍān 17, 559/August 8, 1164.⁵³ This proclamation entailed the abrogation of the *sharī'a* as a symbol of the sovereignty of Islam. According to Ismā'īlī teachings, the resurrection was "the manifestation of the unveiled Truth in the spiritual reality of the imam, which actualized Paradise for the faithful capable of grasping it while condemning the opponents who continued to adhere to the shell of the law to the Hell of spiritual nonbeing."⁵⁴ Two centuries before, the Qarmaṭīs of al-Baḥrayn had also proclaimed the *qiyāma*, the advent of the Mahdī (Qā'im), and therefore the end of the Islamic era.⁵⁵

⁵²Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 103. This is also expressed early in the *Risāla fī al-Sulūk*, Tehran, Iran National Baha'i Archives (INBA), 4011C, 121-23. See also Todd Lawson, "The Bāb's 'Journey towards God' (*Risāla fī's-Suluk*): Translation and Text," *Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts*, vol.2, no.1 (1998); available on the World Wide Web at <http://h-net2.msu.edu/~bahai.trans.htm>. Quoted with the permission from the author.

⁵³Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, N.Y.: Persian Heritage Foundation, 1988), 103.

⁵⁴Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, 103. For a detailed discussion on this subject, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 388-392. See also Jorunn J. Buckley, "The Nizārī Ismā'īlites Abolishment of the Sharī'a during the Great Resurrection of 1164 A.D./559 A.H.," *SI* 60 (1984): 142-157; and Christian Jambet, *La grande resurrection d'Alamut: les formes de la liberte dans le Shiism Ismaelien* (Legrasse: Verdier, 1990), particularly 13.

⁵⁵Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, 103.

Related to the issue of resurrection was the Bāb's notion of *barzakh*, or the intermediary realm where, after death, the soul goes to await the last judgment. The Bāb, however, maintained that the *barzakh* is nothing but the time period separating one manifestation from another; and the realm of the divine is not, as some imagine, the summit of all heavens, but the actual place of the manifestation. In the Bāb's words, to quote Browne's translation, "*barzakh* is meant the period between two manifestations. For none knoweth except God, what shall befall men after Death. Blessed in he who sees nothing without discerning therein the Manifestation of His Lord."⁵⁶

In addition, the Bāb seems to have developed a doctrinal system based on the concept of unity of the divine. On this point, the Bāb was to a large extent inspired by Shaykhī doctrines.⁵⁷ The Bāb believed that there is only one eternal God who is pure Essence. Since God's essence cannot be known, it manifested itself throughout the history of mankind in the persons of various prophets. The creation of the universe and human beings was for the sake of these prophets as the manifestation of the divine.⁵⁸ In other words, "through this Divine Will all things were created, and towards this Will all

⁵⁶The Persian *Bayān* unit 2 chapter 8. See Browne, "A Summary of the Persian Bayān," *Selections*, 331.

⁵⁷ See Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 70-71, 89.

⁵⁸See Todd Lawson, "The Structure of Existence in the Bab's Tafsir and the Perfect Man Motif," in *Studia Iranica Cahier 11: Recurrent Patterns in Iranian Religions From Mazdaism to Sufism*. Proceedings of the Round Table held in Bamberg (30th September-4th October 1991). Association pour l'avancement des études Iraniennes, 1992, 87-89.

return; and to contemplate the Manifestation is to contemplate the divine will, because the former reflects the latter like the mirror that reflects the sun."⁵⁹

As a result, it can be said that according to the Bāb's doctrine, all prophets constitute manifestations of the Primal Will. In this respect, all prophets are apostles of God, however, all their revelations cannot be regarded as the same. Regarding his "prophetic mission" the Bāb asserts that "what God had revealed to him of verses and words is greater and higher than what God revealed aforesaid."⁶⁰ The Bāb claimed that he was more excellent than Jesus, and therefore his *Bayān*, which includes all of his works, was superior to the Gospel.⁶¹ The Bāb, following Rashī, seemed to have argued that the human race continues to progress and develop to maturity. Making an analogy to a child who is taught more fully and instructed in more difficult subjects by his teacher as his understanding develops, the Bāb maintained that the Primal Will, i.e., the Instructor (*murabbī*) of mankind, also communicates in each successive manifestation with a more elaborate articulation.⁶²

⁵⁹Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 101. Browne, *Selections*, 341. See *Bayān 'Arabī* in al-Ḥasanī, *al-Bābiyyūn wa al-Bahā'īyyūn*, 86. MacEoin states that "the Bāb's doctrine of theophany is expressed chiefly through the Arabic root *zhr* (to become visible, manifest), which appears in a number of related technical terms. *Zuhūr* (manifestation) is the self-revelation of God to his creation and also the period during which he is thus manifest." Denis MacEoin, "Hierarchy, Authority and Eschatology in Early Bābī Thought," in *Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History*, ed. Peter Smith (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1986), vol.3, 100.

⁶⁰The Persian *Bayān* unit 3 chapter 4. See Browne, "A Summary of the Persian Bayān," in *Selections*, 340.

⁶¹Browne, "A Summary of the Persian Bayan," in *Selections*, 340.

⁶²Browne, "The Babis of Persia II: Their Literature and Doctrines," 924. See also the Persian *Bayān* unit 6 chapter 13. Browne, "A Summary of the Persian Bayān, in *Selections*, 383.

Some scholars, like Bayat, also observe the similarity between the Ismāʿīlīs and the Bāb's idea of continuous divine manifestation, that "divine manifestation has no end."⁶³ This idea was contrary to orthodox Muslim belief. The Bāb maintains that God is eternal. God creates manifestations in order to be known and to reveal divine knowledge. As a result, creation has no beginning and no end. Moreover, based on the belief that God and God's Will have no beginning and no end, the Bāb asserted that God's manifestation through the prophets has no end either. The Bāb reaffirms this concept of cyclical pattern of the appearance of the Prophet in the Persian *Bayān* in the following words:

It is clear and evident that the object of all preceding dispensations has been to pave the way for the advent of Muhammad, the Apostle of God. These, including the Muḥammad dispensation, have had, in their turn, as their objective the revelation proclaimed by the Qā'im. The purpose underlying this revelation, as well as those that preceded it, has in like manner, been to announce the advent of the Faith of Him Whom God will make manifest. And this faith -the faith of Him whom God will make manifest, in its turn, together with all the revelation gone before it, have as their object the Manifestation destined to succeed it. And the latter, no less than all the revelations preceding it, prepare the way for the revelation which is yet to follow. The process of the rise and setting of the Sun of Truth will thus indefinitely continue - a process that had no beginning and will have no end.⁶⁴

In the Bāb's view, the sun of prophecy rises and sets in eternity, as God reveals the new law whenever the need arises. In this case, we can also observe the affinity of the Bāb's idea with Mullā Ṣadrā's view of "essential motion."⁶⁵ The Bāb even asserts that,

⁶³Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 102.

⁶⁴Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shīʿī Islam," 201.

⁶⁵See Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*, 11-12. See Chapter One of this thesis.

within the eternal divine unity, there is a continuous renewal, i.e., new conditions, new creations, and new order, approaching perfection.⁶⁶

Another doctrine taught by the Bāb is that of the fourth support (*al-rukn al-rābi'*). Originally, the Bāb himself appears to have taught a version of this doctrine similar to that developed by Karīm Khān Kirmānī. In his earliest works, *Risāla fī al-suluk*, as MacEoin observes, the Bāb states that religion stands on four pillars: *tawhīd*, *nubuwwa*, *walāya*, and *Shī'a*.⁶⁷ In the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Baqara*, he also states that the Shī'a are the *al-rukn al-rābi'*, and in this regard cites a *ḥadīth*, in which Imām Mūsā states that the 'greatest name' (*al-ism al-a'zam*) consists of four letters: "the first is the statement 'there is no god but God'; the second Muḥammad is the Prophet of God"; the third is us (Imams); and the fourth our Shī'a."⁶⁸

MacEoin also points out that the doctrine of *al-rukn al-rābi'* is also discussed in *tafsīr sūrat al-Kawthar*, written for Sayyid Yaḥyā Darabī, under the title "the hidden support" (*al-rukn al-makhzūn*).⁶⁹ In *Ṣaḥīfa 'Adliya*, written in 1846 when he was under house arrest in Shiraz, the Bāb drew a hierarchical sketch on the example of the Shī'ite prophecies. The Bāb spoke of the leaders (*nuqaba'*) and the nobles (*nujaba'*), and put them successively below the position of the Imam. In the Bāb's view, the *nuqaba'* are

⁶⁶MacEoin, "Hierarchy, Authority and Eschatology in Early Bābī Thought," 153, n.190.

⁶⁷MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 170. See also Todd Lawson, "The Bāb's 'Journey towards God' (*Risala fī's-Suluk*): Translation and Text," *Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts*, vol.2, no.1 (1998).

⁶⁸MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 170.

⁶⁹MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 170, referring to the *Tafsīr sūrat al-Kawthar* exists in Cambridge, Browne Or. Ms., F.10, ff.4b, 7b.

those who have the closest relation to the Imam. One of their responsibilities is to appoint their successors, namely the *nujaba*⁷⁰. Unlike the *nuqaba*⁷⁰ who are unknowable to people, the *nujaba*⁷⁰ can be recognized although they are hidden from public, and their identities are disclosed in order to avoid the hostility of devils.⁷⁰

The doctrine of *al-rukn al-rābi*' is also developed in relation to the Bāb by Qurrat al-'Ayn, the only woman amongst the Letters of the Living. She describes Muḥammad and the Imams as the signs (*āyāt*) and proofs (*ḥujaj*) of God's knowledge to His creation. She also indicates that they have appeared in every age in different forms and clothing and that men have been and shall be tested until the day of resurrection.⁷¹ She asserts that after the disappearance of the Imams, the one to be the sign and proof on behalf of the Imam to all men is Shaykh Aḥmad. On his death, she says, God appointed Sayyid Kāzīm Rashṭī, and after Rashṭī, Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad was made the *bāb* and *ḥujja*. The Bāb himself will be followed in his turn by the open appearance of the Imam in person.⁷²

From this viewpoint, it seems that the important factor that led to Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad being accepted by his followers as the *bāb* was the recognition of Aḥsā'ī and Rashṭī as the *shaykh* and *bāb*, and the *sayyid* and *bāb*, or as the first *bāb*, and the second *bāb*. The Bāb even regarded them as two mighty gates. He also often referred to them as two gates of God, and stated that his mission was to confirm the mission of his

⁷⁰Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 189-190.

⁷¹MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 171.

⁷²MacEoin, "Hierarchy, Authority and Eschatology in Early Bābī Thought," 115-116, referring to Qurrat al-'Ayn, *Risāla*, in Gulpāyḡānī, *Kashf al-Ghita*⁷⁰, appendix, 3-8; 11-14, 15.

predecessors.⁷³ According to the Bāb, the *ḥāmīl amr Allāh* (the bearer of God's order) must always exist in every age, because he constitutes the gate to divine knowledge, and because the earth cannot be empty of the proof (*ḥujja*) of God,⁷⁴ a view which is basically Shī'ī.

The Bāb also gave much attention to laws. In his early mission, Bābī laws were not quite different from those of Islam.⁷⁵ But, with the proclamation of the abrogation of the Qur'anic *sharī'a*, most of the Bābī laws formulated in the *Bayān* were substantially different. With regard to the requirements of *'ibāda*, the Bāb gave a description of Bābī forms of ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), fasting (*ṣawm*), pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) and holy war (*jihād*).⁷⁶ Pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) was not to be made to Mecca, but to the Bāb's house in Shiraz instead.⁷⁷ The Bāb also considered the requirements of ritual purity, which are so important in

⁷³MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 172.

⁷⁴MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 172, basing on some passages in the Bāb's *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Kawthar*.

⁷⁵The Bāb states that "God has made the laws of Muhammad and his saints [*awliya'*, i.e. the Imams] binding in every book until the resurrection." MacEoin, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Nineteenth Century Shi'ism," 328, quoting *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*, Cambridge University Library, Browne Or. Ms., f.11, f.185b. The Bāb also states that "since no change may be decreed for [the faith of God], this blessed law (*sharī'a*) shall never be abrogated. Nay, what Muhammad declared lawful (*ḥalāl*) shall remain lawful to the day of resurrection, and what he has declared unlawful (*ḥarām*) shall remain unlawful until the day of resurrection." MacEoin, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Nineteenth Century Shi'ism," 328, quoting *Ṣaḥīfa Adliya* (n.p., n.d.), 5-6.

⁷⁶Denis MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Bahaism* (London and New York: British Academy Press, 1994), 6-36.

⁷⁷Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 34. See *Bayān 'Arabī* in al-Ḥasanī, *al-Bābīyūn wa al-Bahā'īyūn*, 88, 92.

Shi'ism, to be insignificant; rather he emphasized much more the ideas of physical cleanliness and spiritual purity.⁷⁸

It is also important to look at the Bāb's doctrine of *jihād*, which might have been the basis for the Bābī uprisings against the state in the 1850s. Although the Bāb did not write a specific work elaborating this doctrine, his thought on *jihād* can be found in his various works. MacEoin notes that in *Risāla Furū' al-'Adlīya*, written in late 1261/1845, while he was living in Shiraz after his return from the pilgrimage to Mecca, the Bāb devoted the sixth chapter of this work to discussing the concept of *jihād*. In this work he states that *jihād* is one of the branches (*furū'*) of religion and that it resembles formal prayer (*ṣalāt*). The Bāb even explicitly considered *jihād* as the sixth pillar of the religion. In his teaching, it is only the Imām who has the right to permit the *jihād*.⁷⁹ The decree of the Imam is binding upon all, and once the Imam has decreed the *jihād*, all believers must obey, and whoever repudiates the decree is regarded as an unbeliever. In the Bāb's teaching, *jihād* could be raised against the unbelievers, namely those who did not believe in the *Bayān*. The Bāb even viewed the non-Bābī provinces as the world of unbelief. Because the Shi'is of Iran did not believe in the *Bayān*, they were regarded as living in the area of unbelief, and therefore liable to the decree of *jihād* (holy war).⁸⁰ This notion is

⁷⁸See MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Bahaism*, 6-36.

⁷⁹Denis MacEoin, "The Babi Concept of Holy War," *Religion* 12 (1982), 106-107. The manuscript of *Risāla Furū' al-'Adlīya* exists in Tehran, INBA 5010C, 82-166.

⁸⁰MacEoin, "The Babi Concept of Holy War," 109. For a response to this article see Muhammad Afnan and William S. Hatcher, "Western Islamic Scholarship and Baha'i Origins," *Religion* 15 (1985): 29-51.

reminiscent of the division between *dār al-Islām* and *dār al-ḥarb* which developed in the early period of Islam.

The Bāb also explicitly states in the Persian and Arabic *Bayān* that God has prohibited non-Bābīs from residing in the five provinces of Iran.⁸¹ The Bāb seems to regard these regions as holy lands from which the Bābī doctrine was disseminated. As a consequence, the non-Bābī inhabitants should be forced to leave the lands or be converted to the Bābī faith. Moreover, in the Bāb's view, *jihād* was an uninterrupted process. The final goal of *jihād* is to abolish infidelity from the Bābī holy lands, and to institute an independent state.⁸² This concept of *jihād* entails the idea that although inspired by religious motives to spread the doctrines and eliminate infidelity (*kufr*), the Bābī movement, as often described by scholars, aimed at establishing an independent political order. However, as will be seen later, the political aims appear to have been secondary to or a subset of the religious ones.

Having discussed some of the Bābī doctrines, it is necessary then to throw light on the relationship between Babism and Shaykhism, particularly between the Bāb's thought and that of Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī. Lawson states that there are at least three aspects which constitute the most important element in the Babism-Shaykhism relationship: namely, "the doctrine of the Perfect Shī'ī, the extreme veneration of the holy family, and

⁸¹These five regions include Fars, Mazandaran, Khurasan, Adharbayjan, and Iraq. See Browne, *Selections*, 376-77. In the Arabic *Bayān* unit six chapter three, the Bāb writes, "*falā yaskun fī arḍ al-khams illā 'ibādī al-muttaqīn*" (No one is permitted to live in the five regions except my pious servants (believers)). See *Bayān 'Arabī* in al-Ḥasanī, *al-Babīyūn wa al-Bahā'īyūn*, 91.

⁸²MacEoin, "The Babi Concept of Holy War," 109.

the denial of bodily resurrection.”⁸³ However, there are still many other Shaykhī ideas which had an impact upon the Bāb’s thought in particular, and the Bābī doctrine in general. Rafati states that “there is no doubt that the Bābī doctrines have closer ties to Shaykhī thought than to any other branch of Islamic belief.”⁸⁴

It is clear that the Shaykhī school provided the background for the Bābī movement, and that its doctrine paved the way for the formulation of Bābī teachings. No one can dispute the strong intellectual and social relationship between the Shaykhī school and the Bābī movement. The Bāb himself was a student of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī in Karbalā’, despite the dispute regarding the length of his stay in the ‘Atabāt. Most of the earliest and important disciples of the Bāb were also Shaykhīs, as has been mentioned earlier.⁸⁵ In addition, the recognition of the Bāb by his followers was connected to Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī’s prophecy. The recognition of the Bāb was also initiated by the doctrines espoused by Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāẓim concerning the concept of finality and the Day of Judgment. Nevertheless, what led to the conversion of many Shaykhīs to the Bāb’s cause was not only these elements, but also the spiritual qualities, writings and charismatic leadership of the Bāb, all of which seem to have convinced the Bābīs to believe in his “prophetic mission.”

⁸³Lawson, “The Qur’ān Commentary of Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb,” 38.

⁸⁴Rafati, “The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī‘ī Islam,” 167.

⁸⁵However, the case of Vaḥīd’s and Ḥujjat’s conversion is special, in that they were not Shaykhīs. The former was a notable, while the latter was an influential Akhbārī scholar. For further discussion, see Smith and Momen, “The Babi Movement: A Resource Mobilization Perspective,” 59-62. See also Rafati, “The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī‘ī Islam,” 167.

As mentioned above, one of the important areas in which the Bāb had strong ties with the Shaykhī school was the attitude toward the imams and the holy family. Both the Bāb and Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī highly venerated the Imams. Shaykh Aḥmad believed in the preeminent role of the imams in the religious life of the believers. Their behavior toward the Imams was different from the general view of the Shī'a who regarded the *mujtahids* ('ulama) as intermediaries between the Shī'a and the Imams during the period of occultation. It can be said that "the complete elimination of the clergy in the Bābī religious system"⁸⁶ was also an apparent result of the Bāb's acceptance of the Shaykh's attitude. The necessity of the existence of the Perfect Shī'ī in every age was a doctrine which the Bāb and Shaykh Aḥmad shared. The existence of the Perfect Shī'ī, under whatever name used (*al-rukn al-rābi'*, for example), would necessarily serve as a sign (*āya*) or a proof (*ḥujja*) of God's knowledge.

The resemblance between Shaykh Aḥmad's ideas and Bābī doctrine can also be observed in their attitude toward the Ṣūfīs, theologians and philosophers. Both of them regard the ideas of these groups as contradicting the Imams' view, and therefore misleading the people.⁸⁷ The Bāb even went so far as to accuse those Ṣūfīs, theologians and philosophers of "preventing people from recognizing the truth."⁸⁸ He even prohibited

⁸⁶Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 198-9.

⁸⁷Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 199.

⁸⁸Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 199, referring to the Persian *Bayān* unit 4 chapter 10.

the study of logic, jurisprudence and philosophy,⁸⁹ and spoke of the superiority of the *Bayān* since it had already covered all that exists in the macrocosms.⁹⁰

In addition, we can also observe the similarity of the Bāb's thought to that of Shaykh Aḥmad in the concept of resurrection and finality of the prophet. Shaykh Aḥmad believed that a cyclical pattern applies in the theory of the appearance of prophets.⁹¹ With regard to resurrection Shaykh Aḥmad held that it is the day of the advent of the Qā'im. Similarly, the Bāb believed in the progressive nature of revelation, asserting that future prophets would perfect the teachings of the previous ones. In connection with this, the coming of a new prophet marks the day of resurrection. This thought radically contradicted the literal understanding of the Shī'a. The Bāb asserts that "from the time of the appearance of Him Who is the Tree of divine Reality, at whatever period and under whatever name, is the Day of Resurrection."⁹²

Although no one can deny the fact that the Shaykhī school did influence the Bāb, we cannot simply regard Bābī doctrines as an interpretation or extension of Shaykhī doctrines. There are a number of differences between the two, despite the deep roots of Bābism in Shaykhism. In Rafati's words, "Shaykh Aḥmad never claimed to be a prophet, as the Bāb did. Shaykh Aḥmad never claimed to have received revelation or a revealed

⁸⁹The Persian *Bayān* unit 4 chapter 10. See Browne, "A Summary of the Persian Bayān," in *Selections*, 354.

⁹⁰The Persian *Bayān* unit 3 chapter 8. See Browne, "A Summary of the Persian Bayān," in *Selections*, 341.

⁹¹Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 169.

⁹²Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 204, referring to the Persian *Bayān*.

book from God, as the Bāb did. Shaykh Aḥmad never claimed to have brought a Qur'ān, as the Bāb did."⁹³

In accord with Rafati, Nikki Keddie enumerates four points upon which Babism differed from Shaykhism. The first is the Bāb's claim to a prophetic status, and that the Qur'ān was superseded. The second is the introduction of the Bābī law which thus abrogated Islamic law (*sharī'a*), rather than being just the application of allegorical interpretation. The third is the millenarian expectation which the Bāb aroused, and the fourth is his belief in the progressive nature of revelation.⁹⁴ Keddie, however, is not quite correct with regard to the last two mentioned, since both are basically Shaykhī ideas. In addition, the Bābī movement, compared to Shaykhism, was much more aggressive and far-reaching in its social and political implications. This can be seen from the efforts made by the Bāb and his followers in spreading their doctrines.

C. Bābī Religious Dissent

Religious dissent can be meant as an opposition to the established doctrines held by the religious authorities. It also entails political implications. In most cases, certain thoughts are considered as dissenting because they differ from, and even challenge, the established doctrines held by the religious as well as political authorities of the time.

In this connection, the dispute concerning orthodoxy and heterodoxy or heresy arises. It is important to raise questions such as who has the right to determine that certain

⁹³Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 197.

⁹⁴Nikki R. Keddie, "Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4 (1962): 268.

thoughts and movements are orthodox or heretical. Generally speaking, the phenomena of orthodoxy and heterodoxy cannot be separated from the religious and political establishment. But when there is a change in politics, what is considered dissenting and heterodox might become orthodox. However, the question still remains whether a certain doctrine is orthodox or heterodox due to its intrinsic nature or due to the political situation surrounding it.

It is generally agreed that the conflict between “orthodoxy” and “heresy”, or “church” and “sect”, colors the history of religions and becomes one of its major themes.⁹⁵ To a certain extent, this is also the case with the rise of deviant movements in Islamic history, even though to describe the divisions in Islam using terms such as ‘sect’ and ‘schism’, ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heterodoxy’ or ‘heresy’ is to a certain degree misleading, though common.⁹⁶ As Bernard Lewis suggests, such a designation is inappropriate since it is typically Christian. Islam, unlike Christianity, does not have institutions like churches or councils to define orthodoxy or heterodoxy.⁹⁷ If Christian experiences can be used as an example, however, the rise of heretical tendencies could result from many inter-related factors, such as social problems, political causes, cultural factors and the figure of a charismatic leader.⁹⁸

⁹⁵Kurt Rudolph, “Heresy: an Overview,” *ER* 6, 273.

⁹⁶Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 155-156. However, it would be helpful, to some extent, to observe the phenomena of Islam by employing such an approach with some religio-political considerations.

⁹⁷Lewis, *Islam and the West*, 156.

⁹⁸Kurt Rudolph, “Heresy: an Overview,” 273.

In spite of the importance of social, political and cultural factors, charismatic leaders in fact play a significant role in forming heretical movements and their later development. In Islam, charismatic leadership can take the form of the imams, or those who assume a status close to the imāmate. This type of leader can even rise from merely being the founder of a new sect, to become the founder of a new religion. In the case of Bābism, which is generally considered heretical by its orthodox opponents, its rise and development cannot be separated from the life of Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb, as its charismatic founder and leader. Charismatic leadership continued to center on him, even during his arrest and confinement. His charisma along with his doctrines undoubtedly became a source of inspiration for the Bābīs in their revolts against the state.

Seen from its history and doctrines, Babism appears as a dissenting movement, which deviates from mainstream Shī‘ī doctrines, as Bayat notes. She argues that the Bābī movement represented a continuation of the tradition of dissent in Islam, particularly amongst the Shī‘a.⁹⁹ MacEoin, however, maintains that Bābī doctrines, from the early period up to 1264/1848, can be regarded as essentially those of orthodox Shī‘ism. Babism, in this period, was characterized by its pious “observance of Shī‘ī Islamic Law and custom, to the extent that the movement may be defined in this period as an extreme example of Shī‘ī pietism.”¹⁰⁰ In his early works, such as the *Qayyūm al-Asmā’* and *Ṣaḥīfa*

⁹⁹Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 87.

¹⁰⁰MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Bahaism*, 6. According to MacEoin, it is this emphasis on observance of Islamic law and his references to his station as being below that of the Imām that “attracted much of that section of the Shaykhī community which sought for a formal continuation of the leadership provided by Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā’i and Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī in the context of a rigid adherence to Islamic practice and veneration for the Imām.” MacEoin, “From Shaykhism to Babism,” 201. In a similar manner, Smith also maintains that, in the early period of his mission, the Bāb regarded the Qur’anic *sharī‘a* as valid, and was

'*Adliyya*, the Bāb still acknowledged the prevalence of Islamic teachings as binding until the day of resurrection,¹⁰¹ although there were some differences in certain aspects of doctrine. From 1848 onward, however, following the Bāb's claim to the Qā'imīyya or even prophethood, his declaration of the new scripture, and the abrogation of Qur'anic laws, the Bābī movement entered a very distinct phase of its development. The distinctive nature of this movement was also advanced by various upheavals, while the Bāb was in prison, which were led by the most prominent Bābīs.

From the beginning, the Bāb's claim in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* to be the gate (*bāb*) to the Hidden Imam entailed a challenge to the function of the *mujtahid* as *na'ib 'āmm* (general representative). The use of this title was intended to demonstrate that the gate to divine knowledge had always been open.¹⁰² This idea was in contrast to the belief held by the orthodox 'ulama that throughout the period of occultation the living *mujtahids* served as intermediaries between the believers and the Imam. The Bāb's claim to be the Qā'im (or the Hidden Imam in person) also threatened the influence of the *mujtahids*, who along with their claims to vicegerency (*niyāba*) practically "remained the government's tactical allies in maintaining a religio-political sway over the populace."¹⁰³ Moreover, with these incremental claims (to being the *bāb* and then the Hidden Imam in person or the Qā'im),

committed to Shī'ī legal observance, although the Bābīs, like the Shaykhīs, put strong emphasis on the esoteric aspects of Islam, and pietism. Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 33.

¹⁰¹See above.

¹⁰²MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 172, basing on the Bāb's *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Kawthar*.

¹⁰³*Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal*, 407.

the Bāb undoubtedly aroused and encouraged “messianic sentiments” among his disciples.

Bābī dissenting thought can be discerned in several of its doctrines, among others, the doctrine of “progressive revelation, conditional recognition of temporal authority, and this-worldliness of human salvation,”¹⁰⁴ as Amanat concludes. The Bāb believed in the progressive evolution of the human race, thus confirming progressive revelation. In his view, the message and teachings brought by prophets are in accordance with the level of maturity of their communities. This implies that a new prophet along with his message is superior to, thus replacing, the previous one.

Accordingly, the *Bayān* not only interpreted the Qur’ān, but superseded it, while maintaining the essence of its message. The teachings of previous prophets are prevalent only during their prophetic cycles, and are no longer valid with the coming of new prophets. This doctrine was regarded by the *mujtahids* as serious heretical deviation from Islam. This deviation from mainstream Shī‘ī Islam reached its climax, as with Nizārī Isma‘ilism, in the proclamation of the *qiyāma*. The Bāb’s idea of *qiyāma* did not stand alone, but was in harmony with the entire body of Bābī thought and behavior, as has been discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

It is apparent that the Bāb’s claim to be the Mahdī formed an explicit menace to the existing religious and political establishment. The attempt by the Bāb’s followers to establish what Smith calls a “theocracy” was therefore not only religious but political as well.¹⁰⁵ It is not surprising that Babism has come to be described by some scholars as the

¹⁰⁴Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 408.

¹⁰⁵Smith, *The Babi and Baha’i Religions*, 51.

movement of revolts, through which the Bābīs attempted to achieve their religious and political goals: spreading their doctrines and instituting an independent political power; a view that is subject to further examination.

The phenomenon of Bābī dissent can also be viewed from this perspective. It might be that the initial aim of the Bāb was to purify Shi'ism of the innovations resulting from the theological and philosophical activities of Shī'īs. It is probable that the Bāb was thinking in terms of "orthodoxy", as was Shaykh Aḥmad in an attempt to return the Shi'ism of his time to the purest teachings of the Imams. But, in reality this search for "orthodoxy" by the Bāb proved incapable of convincing the majority of the Shī'īs of his time. The Bāb's attempt, on the contrary, resulted in severe tensions between himself and the 'ulama, and in the exclusion of Babism from orthodoxy.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, it is likely that social and political factors played a role in this case. And as MacEoin suggests, once the Bābī movement emerged as a separate and distinct sect, it would have generated distinct norms and thought which were considered heretical by the "orthodoxy" that gave birth to it.¹⁰⁷

Since the Bāb's thoughts were controversial and considered by the 'ulama to be deviant from the mainstream body of Shī'ī and Shaykhī doctrines, it is no surprise that strong reactions and opposition arose. The most important reaction to the Bāb's claims and doctrines came from the Shaykhīs of Kirmān and Tabrīz. According to Rafati, however, their reactions towards the Bāb were different, since these two groups of Shaykhīs had different interpretations of Shaykhī teachings. On the one hand, the Kirmānī

¹⁰⁶MacEoin, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Nineteenth-Century Shi'ism" 324.

¹⁰⁷MacEoin, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Nineteenth-Century Shi'ism," 324.

Shaykhīs, under the leadership of Karīm Khān, opposed the Bāb on an intellectual level. They composed books and treatises, which show the deviation of the Bāb's doctrine from the mainstream of Shaykhism and Islam. On the other hand, Tabrīzī Shaykhīs opposed and persecuted the Bāb and his followers in cooperation with the political elite.¹⁰⁸

Karīm Khān strongly rejected the Bāb's claims and teachings. He identified the Bāb as a heretic. He based his accusation on ten points in the Bāb's doctrines which he considered contradictory to Shī'ī Islam. In *Risāla dar raddi-i bāb* Karīm Khān mentioned the ten ideas of the Bāb which he regarded as deviating from the Shaykhī doctrines:

[1] The claim to a new revelation (*wahy*) after that of Muḥammad; [2] the claim to bring a new book after the Qur'ān; [3] legitimization of jihad which is illegitimate in the time of the Imam's concealment; [4] the prohibition on writing his books in black ink, and the requirement to write them in colored ink; [5] the promulgation of claims which are the prerogatives of the Prophet and the Imams; [6] the decree that his name be mentioned in the *adhān*; [7] the claim to "special vicegerency" of the Imam (*niyāba khāṣṣa*); [8] the decree that all must obey him, and that whoever refuses to do so is an infidel (*kaḥfīr*); [9] the claim that all must worship him, and regard him as the point of adoration (*qibla*) and mosque (*masjid*); [10] deceits relating to the twelfth Imam (apparently in respect of prophecies relating to the coming of the Imam).¹⁰⁹

Along with his accusations against the Bāb, Karīm Khān endeavored to lay emphasis on the validity of the Shaykhī school that he led. He even made efforts to make the Shaykhī teachings close to the framework of orthodox Twelver Shi'ism. This attempt

¹⁰⁸Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam," 152. As is perceived, the early history of Babism was colored by the tension between Shaykhīs and Bābīs with regard to the Bāb's claim. The division of Shaykhīs into a group of people that supported the Bāb and other groups that followed Karīm Khān and other Shaykhī leaders was particularly facilitated by not only differences in religious doctrine, but also to some extent by political interest, i.e., motive to the leadership of community. See MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 201. It is important to restate that Karīm Khān was a relative of the Qajars.

¹⁰⁹MacEoin, "Early Shaykhī Reactions to the Bāb and His Claims," 33-34.

eventually resulted in ending the Bāb's followers being identified as Shaykhīs.¹¹⁰ In his *Risāla dar radd-i bāb*, Karīm Khān also shows certain passages of the Bāb's works which indicate that latter had deviated from the true Shaykhī teachings established by Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāzīm Rashī.¹¹¹

Based on these facts, it might be reasonable to assume that Bābī dissent was religious in nature. The Bāb and his followers must have been aware that their claims had political implications, especially in a society that considered religion and politics as interrelated. However, as Smith holds, "the Bābīs may still be seen primarily as religious zealots. Only in the context of interaction with the political environment did Bābism assume a revolutionary stance."¹¹²

Concluding Note

The discussion above chronicles the gradual development of the Bāb's ideas in particular and the Bābī movement in general. In the early stages, the Bāb laid emphasis on the symbolic or allegorical interpretation of Islamic doctrines, which eventually constituted a distinctive body of thought, different from the common belief held by the 'ulama and the Shī'īs at that time. During their development, the doctrines set forth by the Bāb showed radical tendencies. Babism was not only regarded by the 'ulama as deviating from mainstream Shi'ism, but also by the Shaykhīs as dissenting from the teachings of Shaykh Aḥmad. Of course, the accusation of being deviant was leveled not merely in

¹¹⁰MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 216.

¹¹¹MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," 216.

¹¹²Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 51.

response to Bābī doctrines, but more importantly in light of the danger resulting from the Bāb's claims and preaching, as perceived by the 'ulama, the Shaykhīs and the state authorities. Therefore, the Bāb's religious claims eventually provoked a severe reaction and opposition from the Shī'ī 'ulama, and especially from the Shaykhī leaders. Since the movement not only challenged the 'ulama, who represented the religious establishment, but also the existing political authorities, it subsequently faced the suppression of the state. This is what may be understood as the political implications of the Bāb's religious dissent. This fact eventually brought about the Bābī revolts, which were political in form, but seem to have been driven by religious inspiration.

Chapter Three

THE BĀBĪ REVOLTS AND THEIR RELIGIOUS BASIS

A. Radicalization of the Bābī Movement

As was shown earlier, the Bābī movement underwent a gradual yet radical shift when the Bāb finally completed the Persian *Bayān*, thereby abrogating the Qur'anic *sharī'a*. This development cannot be separated from an important episode in the history of the Bābī movement, namely the gathering at Badasht¹ of some leading Bābīs during the interval between Rajab and mid-Sha'bān 1264/June-July 1848. This gathering coincided with the Bāb's removal from the castle of Chihriq to Tabriz for his public examination. This episode may therefore be seen as marking the rise of a radical tendency in the Bābī movement.²

The gathering was attended by about eighty Bābīs, including some leading figures such as Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Bārforūshī, known as Quddūs (d.1265/1849), Qurrat al-'Ayn (d.1268/1852) and Mirzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī, the future Bahā'ullāh (d.1309/1892).³

¹Badasht is located near the Shahrud river, between Khurasan and Mazandaran.

²What is meant by "radicalization" here is a process through which the movement shows its tendency to make extreme changes in views and institutions, and to show a considerable departure from the traditional belief, thus leading to the break from the entire religious and political establishment. See *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1872.

³For an account of Quddūs, see D. M. MacEoin, "Bārforūshī, Mollā Moḥammad 'Alī, *Elr* 3, 794. Qurrat al-'Ayn (d.1852) early studied the works of Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī. After corresponding with Aḥsā'ī's disciple, Sayyid Kāzīm Rashī, she joined his circle in Karbalā. During her three years' stay in Karbalā', she preached the Bābī doctrine, and later became one of *Ḥurūf-i Ḥayy* or sometimes *Ḥurūfāt-i Ḥayy* (the Letters of the Living), although she never met the Bāb in person. For further discussion on Qurrat al-'Ayn, her role and theological position, see Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 299-331.

Mullā Ḥusayn, the first to believe in the Bāb, was not present at this gathering. He could not reach Badasht because he had been arrested by Ḥamza Mirzā, one of the uncles of the Shāh, but later successfully escaped.⁴ It is difficult however to determine the exact purpose of the gathering. Some scholars argue that the gathering was aimed at disclosing some of the main non-Islamic or even anti-Islamic aspects of the Bābī doctrine, such as declaring the abrogation of the Qur'ānic *sharī'a*. The Bābīs also determined plans for future action, including the possibility of helping the Bāb escape from prison.⁵ However, Balyuzi rejects this explanation. According to him, the meeting's purpose was to find an answer to the most crucial issue of the day, i.e., whether the Bāb's mission constituted merely a continuation of Islam or a break from it, or in Balyuzi's words, "was this persuasion of theirs just an offshoot of Islam, or was it an independent faith?"⁶

In the three-week gathering there emerged different opinions amongst leading Bābīs, with each giving different arguments and counter-arguments, notably between Quddūs and Qurrat al-'Ayn. The latter insisted that a new era had come and that it was necessary to proclaim the Bābī movement as an independent faith distinct from Islam and Shi'ism. And, according to Balyuzi, with the intervention of the future Bahā'ullāh, they

⁴E.G. Browne, "Babism," in his *Selections*, 413. See also Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, 168; Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 324-325. In his *al-Bābīyūn wa al-Bahā'īyūn*, 20, al-Ḥasanī maintains that Mullā Ḥusayn was present at this gathering. However, this view seems to have no support since the fact indicates that Mullā Ḥusayn was under house arrest. See Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 290-293.

⁵Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 113. al-Ḥasanī also maintains that there were two important points discussed in the gathering. First was to help rescue the Bāb from imprisonment and remove him to a secure place, and second was the establishment of Babism as distinct from Islam. Al-Ḥasanī, *al-Bābīyūn wa al-Bahā'īyūn*, 20.

⁶Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, 167-68.

proclaimed the coming of a new dispensation.⁷ This episode clearly shows that radical tendencies had emerged particularly among the leading Bābī figures. Not surprisingly, many orthodox Muslims accused the Bābīs of being sinful and deviating from Islam.

Undoubtedly, the gathering had a great impact on the development of the Bābī movement. Further, it is indisputable that Qurrat al-'Ayn played a significant role in this gathering and in the entire process of radicalization. It is reported that she urged her fellow Bābīs to lift the veil of concealment. She also insisted on the break from any connection with Islam and Shi'ism, thus proclaiming the new religious era. This also shows how influential Qurrat al-'Ayn was, for she had successfully persuaded the Bābīs to accept her views.⁸ Although Qurrat al-'Ayn never met the Bāb in person, the latter often sent her letters and messages, charging her with specific tasks. From this, we might speculate that there was continuous contact between the Bāb in prison and the leading Bābīs, such as Qurrat al-'Ayn and Mullā Ḥusayn. In view of this fact, it may not have been accidental that almost at the same time on the announcement of the new religious era, the Bāb proclaimed himself before the orthodox 'ulama as the returned Hidden Imam, thus implying that no religious or political elite could claim authority over the believers.

⁷Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, 167-68. Balyuzi's view on this point seems to have represented the Bahā'ī position. He maintains that the Bābīs' attempt was primarily to establish a new religious order. He also emphasize the dominant role of the future Bahā'ullāh, who is believed to be the one "whom God shall make manifest", as implied by the Bāb's allusion in his writings.

⁸Amanat calls Qurrat al-'Ayn "the remover of the Veil." He also argues that Qurrat al-'Ayn's visions had in many ways led, in addition to the independence of Bābī religion, to Bābī political revolts. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 295, 324. See also William McElwee Miller, *The Baha'i Faith: Its History and Teachings* (South Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1974), 32.

In addition to the Badasht gathering and the Bāb's claim to being the Mahdī, the end of 1848 also witnessed another significant event, namely the march of over two hundred Bābīs under Mullā Ḥusayn from Khurasan to Mazandaran, and the raising of the messianic symbol of the Black Standard.⁹ This march was perhaps intended to effect the Bāb's release from prison. In the end, the march constituted the beginning of what was later to be known as the Bābī revolt at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī in Mazandaran.

However, it is important to bear in mind that this process of radicalization in the Bābī movement was reinforced by the doctrines espoused by the Bāb and some of his leading disciples, as well as the charismatic personality of the Bāb. More significantly, the readiness of people to believe in the messianic advent of the Mahdī formed the basis on which the movement achieved much of its popularity.¹⁰ This was so because messianic belief was and is central in Shi'ism, and there were a number of messianic claims prior to the Bāb's proclamation, as previously discussed. As a matter of fact, in the early phase of his mission, the Bāb's claim to charismatic authority was derived from the charismatic image of the Imam. However, in the later phase the Bāb appears to have assumed an independent authority that accordingly abrogated all previous notions of charismatic authority. In MacEoin's view, the Bāb's authority had been transformed into "original, prophetic charisma."¹¹

⁹Browne, "Babism," in his *Selections*, 413; Smith, "Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha'i Religions," 243.

¹⁰Arjomand, "Millennial Beliefs, Hierocratic Authority, and Revolution in Shi'ite Iran," 224.

¹¹Denis MacEoin, "Changes in Charismatic Authority in Qajar Shi'ism," in *Qajar Iran: Political, Social, and Cultural Change 1800-1925*, ed. Edmund Bosworth and Carole Hillenbrand (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 1992), 167.

The effect of the Bāb's higher claim coupled with the gathering of the Bābīs at Badasht was quite clear. Both events paved the way for the further radicalization of the Bāb's followers. Smith maintains that although the Bāb's claim to being the Mahdī caused some Bābīs to keep their distance from the movement, perhaps out of fear of suppression by state authorities, most of the Bābīs responded positively and gave further support to the Bāb's cause. It is likely that those who left the movement, or at least took the way of dissimulation (*taqīya*) were the Bābīs who took a conservative position. In contrast, the Bāb's higher claim was welcomed by the more radical Bābīs as providing the momentum to make more radical interpretations with respect to the nature of the Bāb's teachings and mission, thus furnishing the basis for the rise of a new religion.¹² Furthermore, one may argue that Qurrat al-'Ayn, who was one of the most radical disciples of the Bāb, displayed her radicalism and militant spirit not only on questions of doctrine, but also on issues in the social and political spheres. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to assert that Qurrat al-'Ayn played a decisive role in influencing the Bābī movement to adopt a radical millenarian belief.¹³

The growth of political militancy and even armed violence at the grass roots level began with the assassination of Mullā Muḥammad Taqī Baraghānī, Qurrat al-'Ayn's uncle, who was an influential orthodox *'alim*. This event was then followed by armed confrontations in the following years. In this context, one can also observe the interaction and inter-connection between the rise of Bābī religious radicalism and the increase of

¹²Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 25.

¹³See Arjomand, "Millennial Beliefs, Hierocratic Authority, and Revolution in Shi'ite Iran," 225.

political militancy. These two notions have become interrelated themes throughout the course of Bābī history. In cities where clerical and state opposition against the Bābīs grew significantly, many Bābīs increasingly became religiously radical and politically militant. As Momen and Smith note, in several towns Bābīs also began to carry weapons openly. In Qazvīn, for example, they began to manufacture swords. As such, in a situation that was deteriorating, fierce confrontations could be provoked even by minor incidents.¹⁴

With the rise of radicalism and militancy violent conflicts occurred. Thus the tension between the Bābīs and the state authorities intensified considerably, and once such tensions increased, the government leaders had a justification to get involved, thus making their intervention practically inevitable. As a result of this tension, state authorities considered the Bābīs as active insurrectionaries, whereas the Bābīs perceived the government leaders as ungodly enemies.¹⁵

It is also noteworthy that, despite its radical tendencies, in the period between the Bāb's first confinement and his execution in 1850, the Bābī movement may be seen as having been far from a homogeneous or uniform movement in terms of its doctrinal views and political tendencies.¹⁶ The Bābīs, of course, still regarded the Bāb as their supreme "religious and political" leader. Nevertheless, they also held in considerable

¹⁴Smith and Momen, "The Bābī Movement: A Resource Mobilization Perspective," 43.

¹⁵Smith and Momen, "The Bābī Movement: A Resource Mobilization Perspective," 44.

¹⁶From the very beginning, the Bāb seems to have been more deliberate than his radical disciples. He espoused his claims gradually, thus seemingly demonstrating that he sought not to shock the Shī'īs with his claims. Although claiming to be the gate and remembrance in 1844, the Bāb recommended dissimulation (*taqīya*) to his followers. See MacEoin, "The Babi Concept of Holy War," 114. Amanat elaborates a variety of tendencies amongst the Bābīs, from those who were moderate to those who were radical in their views. Qurrat al-'Ayn represented the radical camp, while the Bāb himself was more moderate. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 306-308.

esteem such other Bābī leaders as Mullā Ḥusayn, Quddūs, Qurrat al-‘Ayn, and Ḥujjat. These persons were even regarded by many Bābīs as returned Imams or as representing other sacred figures of Shī‘ī hagiography.¹⁷

Accordingly, charismatic authority and leadership had in the meantime been dispersed among the leading Bābīs. This was natural since the Bābīs were in need of leaders who could direct them confidently in their religious and temporal lives. The Bāb’s prominent disciples came increasingly to enjoy independent authority. They were highly respected by their fellow Bābīs. In the presence of the Bāb, the leading disciples had exercised an authority derived from the Bāb. While the Bāb was increasingly held by his followers to be the Mahdī, and even the manifestation of the divine, in the meantime his leading disciples came to claim charismatic authority on their own behalf.¹⁸

As such, the response of the Bābīs and the Qajars towards each other appears to have been reciprocal. On the one hand, when the Bābīs tended to be increasingly radical, the Qajars reacted to them with predictable hostility. On the other hand, with the more hostile treatment by the Qajars of the Bābīs, the latter became more assertive in their struggle. It can easily be understood therefore why tensions between these two groups increased significantly, leading to open and bloody confrontations.

B. The Bābī Revolts: Causes and Aftermath

In the period between 1848 and 1853, there were at least four important revolts involving the Bābīs: the revolts at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī in Mazandaran (October

¹⁷MacEoin, “From Shaykhism to Babism,” 115.

¹⁸Smith, *The Babi and Baha’i Religions*, 24.

1848-May 1849), in Nayrīz (May-June 1850; and October-December 1853), and in Zanjan (May 1850-January 1851). There was also another important episode, i.e., the attempt by the Bābīs on the life of Naṣīr al-Dīn Shāh (August 15, 1852) which was followed by the arrest and execution of a large number of Bābīs a few months later.¹⁹

The emergence of the Bābī movement can be explained in light of the existence of a common Shī'ī millenarian belief and the charismatic qualities of the leading Bābīs. In some cases social discontent also provided a background for the Bābī movement and its revolt.²⁰ However, our discussion will be concerned primarily with three important revolts: Mazandaran, Nayrīz and Zanjan. It will observe a brief chronology of the events

¹⁹Sources regarding the Bābī revolts include, among others, Mīrzā Ḥusayn Hamadānī, *The New History (Tārīkh-i-Jadīd) of Mīrzā 'Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb*, trans. E. G. Browne (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1893; reprint, 1975; and Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*. Nabil's narrative is partly based on *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*. From a historiographical point of view, Nabil's narrative is problematic. Scholars such as Amanat and Walbridge maintain that the original Persian text is not available. The edition and translation of the work by Shoghi Effendi into English may have included omission of some aspects of the narrative. Moreover, Shoghi Effendi's edition was largely intended to shape the theological foundation for the Bahā'īs regarding the 'history of their religion.' In addition, the narrative was written at the request and supervision of Bahā'ullāh about three decades after the Bābī events from 1844 to 1853. It may have contained inaccuracies regarding the date of the events. More importantly, one of the major purposes of Nabil's narrative is to show the high status and central role of Bahā'ullāh in the movement. Despite this theological leaning, however, Nabil's narrative serves as a useful source concerning the detailed account of the Bābī movement. See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 425; John Walbridge, "Document and Narrative Sources for the History of the Battle of Zanjan," *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Bahai Studies*, vol.2, no. 4 (May 1998); available on the World Wide Web at <http://h-net2.msu.edu/~bahai/bhpapers.htm>. Quoted with permission from the author. See also Moojan Momen, ed., *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), xvii.

²⁰Social problems that arouse in early nineteenth century Iran include, for example, the recurrence of epidemics of cholera from 1821 onward, the defeat of Iranian armies at the hands of Russians (1813, 1828) and English (1839), and the intervention of the West in Iranian politics. In addition, economic discrepancy was also one of the factors that dominated the Iranian life. See Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 55.

and some features relevant to the purpose of the present study, which is to demonstrate that these revolts contain religious elements.

The Revolt at the Shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī (Mazandaran)

The Bābī revolt which occurred at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī²¹ in Mazandaran was unequivocally the first and most important revolt in Bābī history. This episode involved the two leading disciples of the Bāb, Mullā Ḥusayn, Mullā Muḥammad ‘Alī Bārfurūshī (Quddūs), and a total of nine of the eighteen letters of the living.²²

Prior to the revolt at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī, the Bāb instructed Mullā Ḥusayn to raise the Black Standard in Khurasan and to journey westward. Moreover, he issued a general call to his disciples to gather around the Black Standard. When Mullā Ḥusayn intended to return to Mashhad, and go on to Karbalā’, he received a message from the Bāb through his emissary. The Bāb sent a green turban, and asked Mullā Ḥusayn to wear. The Bāb also instructed him to help Quddūs with the Black Standard raised.²³

²¹Shaykh Ṭabarsī or Abū ‘Alī Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī or al-Ṭabrisī (d.548/1154) was one of the most famous Shī‘ī scholars. He authored one of the most important Shī‘ī commentaries on the Qur’ān, the *Majma’ al-Bayān*. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam*, 89.

²²Moojan Momen, “The Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals in Iran (1848-1853): A Preliminary Analysis,” *IJMES* 15 (1983): 160.

²³MacEoin, “The Babi Concept of Holy War,” 116; Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 324. The Prophet is reported to have said about this standard: “Should your eyes behold the black standard proceeding from Khurasan, hasten ye towards them, even though ye should have to crawl over the snow, inasmuch as they proclaim the advent of the promised Mahdi, the vicegerent of God.” Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 351. This tradition can be found in al-Ḥākīm al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak* 4, 464; and Ibn Māja, *Sunan Ibn Māja*, ed. Muḥammad Fu’ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiya, 1953), 1366.

In July 1848, the Bābīs dispersed to various locations throughout Iran because the Muslim population of the village of Niyāla had become hostile to them. The future Bahā'ullāh, made his way to his district, Nūr in Mazandaran. Quddūs, on the other hand, was arrested and brought to the village of Sārī in Mazandaran, where he lived under arrest at the house of one of the leading figures of the town, Mirzā Muḥammad Taqī. In the same month, several hundred Bābīs marched from Khurasan under the leadership of Mullā Ḥusayn. They intended to go westward, and when they approached the town of Sārī, the Bābīs camped near the village of Bārfurūsh. In this village the Bābīs faced severe opposition from the Muslim population. The leading 'alim of Bārfurūsh, Mullā Sa'īd Bārfurūshī (d.1270/1853), known as Sa'īd al-'Ulamā' provoked the agitation against the Bābīs. He provided a great number of weapons, guns and ammunition, and mobilized the people against the Bābīs. Although the Bābīs were armed only with swords, they succeeded in defending themselves and in countering the attack of the population. Having failed to expel the Bābīs from the town, the Muslim population asked for a cease-fire. They also asked Mullā Ḥusayn and his fellow Bābīs to depart from the town in order to avoid further opposition and conflict.²⁴

The leader of the Muslim population also offered to guide the Bābīs through the forest of Mazandaran. They promised that they would not mistreat the Bābīs. In reality, however, their guide, Khusraw Qāḍī Kalā'ī, under orders from Sa'īd al-'Ulamā', led the

²⁴See Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 329, 336.

Bābīs into an ambush as they approached the forest. There was a battle and counter-attack from both sides, but in the end the local population were still unable to crush the Bābīs.²⁵

The Bābīs were to experience other such incidents before finally arriving at Shaykh Ṭabarsī located in the forest of Mazandaran. On the order of Mullā Ḥusayn, the Bābīs began constructing fortifications and storing food. As the news of the Bābī gathering around the shrine spread, Bābīs from the neighboring villages came to join them. They included a large number of artisans, tailors, sword-makers, masons and peasants. Accordingly, the Bābī forces became strong enough to gain control over the shrine. The Bābīs from other villages also brought livestock, thus providing their fellow Bābīs with material as well as moral support. This eventually resulted in the formation of a Bābī community whose members came from many different regions and diverse occupations.²⁶

In the course of this gathering, Mullā Ḥusayn ordered the Bābīs to collect all the property they brought. He also bade them to discard all their possessions. As Nabil relates, Mullā Ḥusayn addressed the Bābīs with the following words:

Leave behind all your belongings, and content yourself only with your steeds and swords, that all may witness your renunciation of all earthly things, and may realize that this little band of God's chosen companions has

²⁵Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 340. See Afnan and Hatcher, "Western Islamic Scholarship and Bahā'ī Origins," 42-43.

²⁶Accounts of the total number of Bābīs at Shaykh Ṭabarsī differ widely. Initially there were no more than 300 men who followed Mullā Ḥusayn on arrival at Shaykh Ṭabarsī. However, after the news of this event spread, the Bābīs of the neighboring villages joined. The probable total number of Bābīs who participated here, as estimated by Momen, was 537 Bābīs. The government assumed that the total number of Bābīs was 1500 men, so they had justification to suppress the movement. See Momen, "The Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals in Iran (1848-1853)," 163-64. See also Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 119.

no desire to safeguard its own property, much less to covet the property of others.²⁷

Mullā Ḥusayn's statement and the practices prevailing at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī have been interpreted by some scholars as propagating the foundation of a society based on a "common ownership of property."²⁸ The Bābīs were even rumored to have established a "socialist" or "communist" society.²⁹ This conclusion is to a large extent an exaggeration in the sense that this analysis is founded only on economic basis. It seems to disregard the spirit apparently embedded in Mullā Ḥusayn's statement. The statement was perhaps intended by Mullā Ḥusayn to encourage the commitment of the Bābīs in defending their faith.

With the gathering of such a large number of Bābīs around the shrine, the local Muslim population felt insecure and threatened. They attacked the Bābīs and tried to drive them away. When the Bābīs wanted to counter-attack, Mullā Ḥusayn forbade them. From the beginning Mullā Ḥusayn had prohibited the Bābīs from initiating an offensive strike against their attackers.³⁰ In short, the Bābīs seem to have adopted a defensive strategy in their encounter with the local population.

In addition to Mullā Ḥusayn, Quddūs played an important role in this Bābī revolt. Quddūs appears to have become a key figure providing guidance to the Bābīs. Before he joined the Bābīs at the shrine, he was under arrest by Mirzā Muḥammad Taqī, but then

²⁷Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 329.

²⁸Ivanov, "Babi Uprisings," 521.

²⁹Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 119. See Momen (ed.), *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 5

³⁰See Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 330.

was released on the insistence of the Bābīs. The Bābīs at the fort became increasingly strong. Both religious and political authorities viewed the gathering as a serious threat.³¹

On hearing that government troops were approaching the fort, Quddūs is reported to have said:

Never since our occupation of this fort have we under any circumstances attempted to direct offensive against our opponent. Not until they unchained their attack upon us did we arise to defend our lives. Had we cherished the ambition of waging holy war against them, had we harbored the least intention of achieving ascendancy through the power of our arms over the unbelievers, we should not, until this day, have remained besieged within these walls.³²

Quddūs is also reported to have addressed his companions with such words as:

You should show forth-exemplary renunciation, for such behavior on your part will exalt our Cause and redound to its glory. Anything short of complete detachment will but serve to tarnish the purity of its name and to obscure its splendor. Pray the Almighty to grant that even to your last hour He may graciously assist you to contribute your share to the exaltation of His Faith.³³

³¹Sa'īd al-'Ulamā' is reported to have sent a letter to Naṣīr al-Dīn Shāh, informing him that "the standard of revolt has been raised by the contemptible sect of the Bābīs." He also asked the Shāh to take definite actions and send government troops to put down this movement as it threatened the sovereignty of the dynasty and the influence of the 'ulama. See Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 358-359.

³²Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 396. The quotation of speeches and the use of rhetorical devices in Nabil's narrative are problematic. Nabil does not provide the exact chains of authorities through which he received these speeches. The exact wordings can also be doubted. It seems that the speeches quoted by Nabil may have not been those of Mullā Ḥusayn or Quddūs. Rather, these speeches seem to have represented what Nabil wishes to say in order to show the genuine attitude of the Bābīs towards the government and the 'ulama. Moreover, this implies that these rhetorical devices are used to defend the Bābīs against the accusation of being hostile, revolutionaries, and fanatics. See Walbridge, "Document and Narrative Sources."

³³Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 410.

The defensive nature of the Bābī revolt in Mazandaran may be justified by the fact that the Bābīs were far from any village. Their number was also too small when compared to the many government troops sent by the Shāh. The troops were equipped with heavy weapons and artillery, while the Bābīs were armed primarily with swords. The government did not hesitate to send wave after wave of well trained soldiers to eliminate the Bābīs.³⁴

However, the government troops did not find it an easy task to crush the Bābīs. The conflict, which lasted for seven months (October 1848-May 1849), only ended with an offer from the leader of the government troops to make a peace agreement. Swearing on the Qur'ān, the government forces promised not to molest or harm the Bābīs if they wished to suspend their resistance. The Bābīs suspected that this offer was really a government tactic to defeat them. They also suspected the integrity of the government's pledge. However, the Bābīs accepted the pledge in order to exhibit their good faith and to not initiate a war.

Once the Bābīs acceded the government's request, the soldiers began to attack them, breaking their promise at a time when the Bābīs were not prepared to react. In this incident alone, about one hundred and seventy three Bābīs were killed, including the leading Bābīs such Mullā Ḥusayn and Quddūs, and some other Letters of the Living.³⁵

³⁴As far as Bābī sources indicate, the Bābīs appear to have never initiated a war against the government. This position is also justified by the fact that they did not formulate overall or 'national' strategy to conduct an offensive war. However, the government considered the Bābī resistance and provocation (e.g. constructing fortification and making swords) as acts of initiating a war and threatening the political establishment.

³⁵Nabil gives a list of one hundred and seventy three Bābīs killed in this revolt. The list also names the martyrs who came from various villages. Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 414-426. See also Afnan and Hatcher, "Western Islamic Scholarship and Bahā'ī Origins," 42-43.

The Revolt in Nayrīz

The revolt at Nayrīz took place during the months of May and June, 1850. The figure who played the key role in it was Sayyid Yaḥyā Darabī, who upon his conversion in 1845 was given the title Vahīd by the Bāb.³⁶ While in Tehran in 1265/1849, he heard news of the conflict between the Bābīs and the government troops at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī. He intended to go to Mazandaran, but was informed by the future Bahā'ullāh that the road to the town was blocked by government troops. Instead, Vahīd went to visit Qum, Kashan, Isfahan and Yazd. In these towns, he successfully converted a number of prominent notables and 'ulama. His activities and sermons however were opposed by some 'ulama as well as by the governor at that time, Agā Khān Irāvānī.³⁷

In May 1850, Vahīd returned to Nayrīz, arriving there by the end of the month. All of his friends and relatives greeted and honored him.³⁸ From the pulpit of the mosque he delivered a speech in which he said:

My sole purpose in coming to Nayrīz in to proclaim the Cause of God. I thank and glorify Him for having enabled me to touch your hearts with His Message. No need for me to tarry any longer in your midst, for if I prolong my stay, I fear that the governor will ill-treat you because of me. He may

³⁶Sayyid Yaḥyā Darabī was the son of one of the most famous 'ulama of the time, Sayyid Ja'far Darabī, known as Kashfī. Sayyid Yaḥyā Darabī studied theology, but he was not a Shaykhī before his conversion to Babism. In 1845, he was sent by the Shāh to investigate the validity of the Bāb's claim. However, his encounter and interview with the Bāb eventually led him to pay allegiance to the Bāb. See Moojan Momen, "Darabī, Seyyed Yaḥyā," *Elr* vii, 10.

³⁷See Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 465-70; Momen, "Darabī, Seyyed Yaḥyā," 10. The sources for the revolt at Nayrīz are rare. Although containing inaccuracies in date of events, Nabil's narrative provides a somewhat detailed information with regard to the chronology of the event in Nayrīz.

³⁸There were about a thousand persons gathering and listening to Vahīd's preaching. Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 478.

seek reinforcement from Shiraz and destroy your homes and subject you to untold indignities.³⁹

In this city, Vaḥīd gained much popularity, and had a large following. Upon his arrival, there was tension between Vaḥīd and the governor, Zayn al-'Abidīn Khān. The governor asked him to leave the city, but the Bābīs did not allow him to go and gave him their support. The Bābīs assured Vaḥīd that they would face whatever hardships was awaiting them.

The governor then planned to arrest Vaḥīd. In order to achieve his goal, he recruited a thousand well-trained soldiers, consisting of both cavalry and infantry. They were equipped with a large number of munitions. When Vaḥīd learned of the plans of the governor, he ordered the Bābīs to occupy the fort of Khāja. This fort is situated in the vicinity of the Chinar-Sukhti quarter, outside Nayrīz. Vaḥīd also asked Shaykh Hādī to command their forces, and ordered the Bābīs to further fortify their strongholds. They also strengthened their defenses and built a water-cistern.⁴⁰

The Bābīs were soon besieged by government forces. When the army launched its attacks, some Bābīs chose to abandon Vaḥīd, and join the government forces, fearing for their own lives. Under the command of 'Alī Asghar Khān, the brother of the governor, the troops once more attacked the defenders of the fort. There were at least three Bābīs killed in this conflict. However, the superior government force was unable to defeat the small number of Bābīs who were, as in Mazandaran, armed primarily with swords. Not

³⁹See Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 479-80; Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, 179.

⁴⁰Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 481.

only did the attack prove unsuccessful in eliminating the Bābī forces, ‘Alī Asghar Khān was himself killed in this incident.⁴¹

Having failed to crush the Bābīs at Nayrīz, the governor suspended his attacks and sent a message to Vaḥīd. The leader of the government forces offered a cease-fire in order to persuade Vaḥīd to leave the fort and to meet with him.⁴² Vaḥīd was well aware of the deviousness of this offering. However, he walked out in person with five companions into the camp of his enemies, where he was received for three days with great ceremony. But it was with such tactics as these that the government planned to eliminate the Bābīs who were occupying the fort. The government pressed and tried to compel Vaḥīd to write a message to his followers, and to assure them that they should leave the fortress and return to their homes. Vaḥīd attempted to incite his companions against the government troops in a second letter, but this letter was never delivered to his fellow Bābīs. Thus, within a month, the Bābīs at Nayrīz who defended the fort of Khāja were to experience the same fate as those at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī.

A few days later, Vaḥīd and his companions were killed. Vaḥīd was molested in the streets of Nayrīz, and subjected to indignities at the hands of government troops. When the government soldiers went back to Shiraz, they brought with them women and children as prisoners, raising the heads of the murdered Bābīs on their bayonets.⁴³

⁴¹Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 482-83.

⁴²Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, Afnan and Hatcher, "Western Islamic Scholarship and Bahā'ī Origins," 43.

⁴³Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, 181-82.

Three years later, i.e. in December 1853, there was another battle in Nayrīz. This time the main fighting occurred in the hills outside Nayrīz, where the Bābīs took up positions and defended themselves against the troops. At the end of this conflict there was another general massacre, and the heads of some 200 Bābīs were sent to Shiraz, as well as several hundred Bābī women and children and about 80 Bābī male prisoners.⁴⁴

The Revolt in Zanjan

The Bābī revolt in Zanjan occurred between May 1850 and January 1851. Zanjan is not a very large city, but it is situated in a rich agricultural region and on the main road from Tabriz to Tehran, nearer the former.⁴⁵ At Zanjan, a large proportion of the population had become followers of the Bāb, primarily through the efforts of Mullā Muḥammad ‘Alī Zanjānī, known as Ḥujjat. He was an influential *akhbārī* ‘ālim of that town.⁴⁶

The Zanjan revolt was spurred by the oppressive policies of the governor of Zanjan, Amīr Aslān Khān Majd al-Dawla. He was among those who had attended the trial of the Bāb in Tabriz. From the beginning of the formation of the Bābī community in Zanjan, the governor had aimed at suppressing it in order to eliminate disturbances, such as what happened in Mazandaran. Conflict was also caused by the agitation of the ‘ulama

⁴⁴Momen, "The Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals in Iran (1848-1853)," 167.

⁴⁵Peter Avery, *Modern Iran*, 58.

⁴⁶Mullā Muḥammad ‘Alī Zanjānī, was already an "outspoken and controversial member of the ulama before his conversion, and whose own special regard for the poor and for strict observance of Islamic law suggest a strong commitment to reform." Smith, "Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha'i Religions," 247.

of Zanjan against Ḥujjat.⁴⁷ The conflict was then exacerbated by the governor's policy of dividing the town into two distinct quarters, Bābīs on the one hand and non-Bābīs on the other. Every single member of the city had to decide to which group he belonged. After this division, the Bābī quarter under the leadership of Ḥujjat was filled with about three thousand men, women, and children.⁴⁸ The aim behind this division was clear: to make it easy for the governor to identify the Bābīs and to eventually destroy them.⁴⁹

In the meantime, Ḥujjat issued an order to the Bābīs to take control of the fort of 'Alī Mardān Khān. The Bābīs then began to collect a large stock of ammunition and weapons. Finding that the Bābīs had become stronger and were ready to strike, the government began sending troops at the request of the Muslim population. The first attack by government troops against the Bābīs occurred on July 1, 1850. From this time onward, the government continuously sent wave after wave of armies to attack the Bābīs who effectively defended themselves within the fort.⁵⁰

While this conflict between the Bābīs and the government troops got underway in Zanjan, the Bābīs heard that the Bāb had been executed in Tabriz on orders from Amīr

⁴⁷John Walbridge, "The Babi Uprising in Zanjan: Causes and Issues," *IS* 29:3-4 (1996): 353. Some of the important sources for the Bābī revolt in Zanjan include Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 527-581, on pages 580-581 of which Nabil mentions the authorities through which he obtained information; 'Abd al-Aḥad Zanjānī, "Personal Reminiscences of the Babi Insurrection in Zanjan in 1850," 761-827; and Mīrzā Ḥusayn-i-Zanjānī's *Tārīkh-i-Vaqāyī'-i-Zanjān*, the manuscript of which exists in Tehran, INBA 2046E. I do not have access to the last mentioned.

⁴⁸Smith, "Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha'i Religion," 247. See also Afnan and Hatcher, "Western Islamic Scholarship and Baha'i Origins," 43-44.

⁴⁹Walbridge, "The Babi Uprising in Zanjan," 353. Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 543-44; 'Abd al-Aḥad Zanjānī, "Personal Reminiscences of the Babi Insurrection in Zanjan in 1850," 787.

⁵⁰Walbridge, "The Babi Uprising in Zanjan," 354-355.

Kabīr, the prime minister.⁵¹ This news seems to have added fuel to the Bābī spirit in their defense against the government's attacks. But as heavier guns were brought in, the Bābīs were eventually driven back.⁵²

Although the Bābīs were still able to resist, they gradually lost strength and eventually resistance declined. However, the government troops proved unsuccessful in defeating them.⁵³ Therefore, their leader decided to follow the same tactics used at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī and Nayrīz. He offered a proposal for peace, and swore on the Qur'ān that the Shāh would forgive them. He guaranteed the safety and life of those who would leave the fort. Although Ḥujjat suspected the government's words, he sent a delegation consisting of nine young children and men over eighty to the camp of the commander.⁵⁴

At this point, the government troops attacked and captured the male Bābīs, and arrested the children and women at the house of Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim, the leading *mujtahid* of the town. They were either put to death, or brought to Tehran, except those prisoners who were regarded as persons of no importance.⁵⁵

⁵¹Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 396.

⁵²Walbridge, "The Babi Uprising in Zanjan," 354-355.

⁵³Walbridge, "The Babi Uprising in Zanjan," 356.

⁵⁴Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, 186. Walbridge, "The Babi Uprising in Zanjan," 352. Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 554-55; 'Abd al-Aḥad Zanjānī, "Personal Reminiscences of the Bābī Insurrection in Zanjan in 1850," 809-11.

⁵⁵Walbridge, "The Babi Uprising in Zanjan," 356-57.

C. The Religious Basis of the Bābī Revolts

The Bābī revolts embodied many interrelated dimensions. It is important to discuss the revolts in light of the millenarianist perspective, religious motives, and the paradigm of Karbalā'. These three dimension were inherent in the Bābī movement, particularly its revolts, and were strongly connected with each other.

From the point of view of its doctrine, Bābism may be regarded as a millenarian movement, and the revolts launched by the Bābīs therefore may be seen as millenarian revolts. From a theoretical perspective, millenarian revolts can occur when one or more of the following situations prevail. The first is when there is a situation of distress or disorientation in a society, and when such a situation develops and increases from time to time. The second is when a society in which such as movement exists is deeply committed to its religious world-view, and when the religious ideas held by that society provide millenarian themes. The third is when an individual or group of individuals, obsessed with "salvationist fantasies", succeeds in establishing charismatic leadership over a social movement.⁵⁶ To put it in another way, millenarian movements and revolts have arisen only in countries or among groups in which religion determines and dominates the total world outlook, and in periods when the political and religious aspects of society remain undifferentiated.

The Shī'ī community of Iran in the nineteenth century can be regarded as a traditional society in the sense that it had not yet been affected by what came to be known as "modern" or "Western" ideas, which proposed a complete separation of religion and

⁵⁶Guenter Lewy, "Revolution," *ER* 12: 376. For further discussion, see Guenter Lewy, *Religion and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 246.

politics. In the same sense, the members of that society were deeply committed to religious doctrines, namely Shi'ism. In such a society, religion is relatively difficult to differentiate from other dimensions of social life, such as politics. Therefore, any movement, which is inspired by religious beliefs and contains a millenarian leaning often has political significance. The Bābī movement at the time undoubtedly contained millenarian elements, thus threatening the established religious and political authorities. At this point, conflict between the Bābīs and the state became inevitable, since the former to a certain extent adopted political goals, although not openly, while the latter always perceived the movement as a threat to their own authority.⁵⁷

In most cases, and as a general rule, the leader of a millenarian movement or revolt is the bearer of a chiliastic prophecy, and is therefore a prophet, or at least the one who claims prophecy. The prophet normally seeks and attracts a following because of his ethical and religious teachings. With respect to the Bābī movement, one cannot dispute that the Bāb himself was a charismatic individual who in 1848 claimed for himself, and was believed by his followers, to be the bearer of prophetic revelation, a claim which had been preceded a few years earlier by his assertion that he was the gate to the Hidden Imam. And in each case, it is important to emphasize, the Bāb laid claim to absolute religious authority.

In all his complexity, the Bāb served as a "symbolic figurehead" to the Bābī movement, a symbol which was wielded by his disciples in his absence. This was also the case with other Bābī leaders, whose charismatic quality was derived from their piety and sanctity. Smith has suggested that the charismatic authority of the leader lay generally in a

⁵⁷See Smith, "Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha'i Religions," 232-233.

“claim to messianic or prophetic status, and this claim may be made personally by the leader or ascribed to him by others.”⁵⁸

Therefore, inherent in the millenarian themes of the Bābī movement was Bābī charismatic leadership. The Bābī leaders played a considerable role particularly in determining the “political posture and orientation” of the movement. We can discern this in the Bābī revolt at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī, for example, where Mullā Ḥusayn as well as Quddūs played salient roles as the directing minds formulating Bābī strategy in defence against government troops. It can be said that their leadership in the movements was in all practical terms charismatic. The authority of these charismatic leaders was accepted because their followers believed in their extraordinary quality. Therefore, because their followers perceived and valued them in such a way, these leaders were “set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.”⁵⁹

Another aspect embodied in the millenarian Bābī revolt was religious symbols employed by its leaders mostly as a means to simplify the nature and orientation of the movement. In religiously inspired millenarian revolts, the role of religious symbols is particularly important. They can provide a blueprint of identity, inspiration and mode of conduct. In this respect, Arjomand has noted that “religious symbolism can significantly affect both the causes and the consequences of revolutions: they can provide motives for revolutionary action, as well as the actors’ idiom for understanding their own action, and

⁵⁸Smith, “Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha’i Religions,” 234-235.

⁵⁹Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parson (New York, 1964), 358-359.

can provide the repertory of the value-ideas that are selectively institutionalized by revolutions."⁶⁰ As can be seen in the Mazandaran revolt, for example, the employment of such symbols was quite clear. The use of a green turban by Mullā Ḥusayn and the raising of the Black Standard in the Bābī march from Khurasan to Mazandaran point to the significance of religious symbols. These symbols also served to provide motive, a fighting spirit, and to some extent, religious and political justification for the revolts. As will be seen later, another symbolic motif employed by the Bābī leaders was the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn.

In addition to millenarianism, the religious basis of Babism can clearly be observed in the way the movement was disseminated throughout Iran and in the course of the Bābī revolts. First of all, the role of the Bābī "religious class" was important in the early phase of development. As is generally known, the early disciples of the Bāb (the eighteen Letters of the Living) were mostly 'ulama or seminarians who had been the students of Sayyid Kāzīm Rashū, the Shaykhī leader. The Letters of the Living and other followers of the Bāb zealously spread the doctrine from town to town and from village to village.

Although they often faced severe opposition from the orthodox 'ulama and the government, they seem to have been successful in converting a number of persons to Babism, including 'ulama and other notables. According to Momen, "those converted to Babism were drawn from all social classes with a preponderance from the 'ulama, who

⁶⁰Arjomand, "Millennial Beliefs, Hierocratic Authority, and Revolution in Shi'ite Iran," 219.

also provided the leadership of the movement.”⁶¹ This was also evident in the case of Ḥujjat’s conversion, which was followed by that of a large number of his own followers, thus leading to the formation of the Bābī community in Zanjan. He himself was a leading ‘ālim of his town. Similarly, the religious preaching of Vaḥīd, who also came from a religious family and background, also shows that this movement attracted many followers and converts on the basis of its religious teachings.

In short, it can therefore be said that the most important factor that led to the conversion of many to Babism seems to have been the belief in the Bāb’s claims and teachings, which they believed to be revelation from God. If there is evidence that social, economic and political motives played a role in this conversion, these can be said to be secondary to the religious motives.⁶²

Browne observes that a significant religious motivation was embodied in the Bābī revolts, and argues that the Bābīs who actively battled against the government troops at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī, Zanjan, Nayrīz and elsewhere were struggling to establish what is called a “Bābī theocracy and a reign of the saints on earth.”⁶³ Whatever the exact political goals of the Bābīs in their revolts might have been, one cannot deny the significance of religious feeling in the hearts of the Bābīs. From the religio-psychological

⁶¹Momen, “The Social Basis of the Babi Upeavals in Iran (1848-1853),” 179.

⁶²As Momen points out, the majority of Bābīs, particularly the Bāb himself and other leading figures of the Bābī movement, had a strong religious commitment. Momen, “The Social Basis of the Babi Upeavals in Iran (1848-1853),” 180. According to Amanat, the merchants and artisans converted to Babism form only a small minority. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 360.

⁶³E. G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), xv.

viewpoint, the Bābīs seem to have felt that they were obliged by their faith to defend their belief. Browne admits that the interest of the Bābīs was for the most part “the triumph of their faith, not in any projects of social or political reform.”⁶⁴

While Browne seems to have emphasized the importance of the religious impulse underlying the Bābī revolts, M. S. Ivanov perceives the revolts from another perspective. Ivanov maintains that there was a social and economic basis which underpinned the religious format of the Bābī movement and revolts. The basis of his analysis seems to have been the fact that “the moving forces behind the Bābī uprisings were the peasants, artisan, urban poor, and small trades-people.”⁶⁵

According to Ivanov, the Bābī revolts seem to have been predominantly characterized by an economic motif. Ivanov lays stress on the anti-feudal attitude of the Bābīs, the struggle against exploitation, and demands for the abolition of private property, the equality of all people, and a common ownership of property in the realm of the Bābī state.⁶⁶ These features seem to have existed in the Bābī movement, particularly in the revolt at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī. Indeed, Ivanov seems to derive his conclusion from the stances of the Bābīs in the fort of Mazandaran, as explained earlier. However, one may argue that these features were secondary to the fact that the Bābīs in Mazandaran, under the leadership of Mullā Ḥusayn and Quddūs, were living in severe isolation and were oppressed by government troops. The order of Mullā Ḥusayn to Bābīs to collect their property does not necessarily indicate that he intended to establish what

⁶⁴Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion*, xv.

⁶⁵Ivanov, “Babi Uprisings,” 521.

⁶⁶Ivanov, “Babi Uprisings,” 521. See also McElwee, *The Baha’i Faith*, 34.

some scholars call a “socialist” or even “communist” society. In short, it may be said that these terms are anachronistic and were far from the Bābīs’ thinking.

MacEoin also sees the predominance of religious motives at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī as well as elsewhere. He even argues that there was an element of *jihād* underlying the Bābīs’ spirit in their revolts. However, it is important to note that the Bābī leaders at Shaykh Ṭabarsī did not instruct the Bābīs to initiate an offensive war against the troops or the population. The Bābī attacks were basically in the form of a “defensive *jihād*.”⁶⁷ In view of this, the Bābīs seem to have been well aware of their small numbers compared to that of the government troops. They had no other choice than to fight as martyrs. Their desire to be martyrs, as defenders of the true faith, was also motivated by the role of martyrdom as an important element in Shī‘ī piety. Therefore they wished to die in a holy defeat.

Parallel and inherent in this religious motive is the ethos of social justice. As previously mentioned, the Bāb basically recognized the temporal rulers as legitimate as long as the latter obeyed the laws ordained by the Bāb, and submitted to the cause of the Bāb. The Bābī acceptance of the legitimacy of temporal rulers was also on the condition that the latter would not act oppressively towards the population. This shows, as Amanat points out, that “at the heart of the Bābī ethos was a spirit of rebellion against social injustice and moral mischief, for which the Bābīs held both the ruler and the ‘ulama responsible.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷MacEoin, “The Babi Concept of Holy War,” 117.

⁶⁸Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 407.

It is also interesting to observe the religious element in the Nayrīz and Zanjan revolts. Scholars such as Momen and Smith share the same opinion with respect to the nature and situation of Nayrīz and Zanjan. They maintain that there was a certain resemblance between the two in terms of the extent of religious conversion to Babism prior to the revolts.⁶⁹ Conversion was caused by the influence of Vaḥīd on Nayrīz and Ḥujjat on Zanjan, who enjoyed popularity and great respect from the population. It is not surprising that their conversion to Babism contributed to the rapid expansion of the movement and to the formation of a Bābī community in each town.

Another resemblance may be found in the nature of the revolts in these towns. Momen points out that the Zanjan and Nayrīz incidents were “localized urban upheavals centered on one charismatic personality who had been converted to Babism and succeeded in attracting a large portion of the populace of the town to a new movement”⁷⁰ with no support from the neighboring peasantry or from the Bābīs of other regions. The urban nature of the revolt in Zanjan is also demonstrated by the large number of “the poor, the traders of the bazaar, the sadat, and the students,” who participated there.⁷¹ However, it is to be noted that the leaders of the revolts were still “Bābī ‘ulama.”

Both Momen and Walbridge distinguish these two revolts from the one at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī. The Bābīs in the latter case were not a “pre-existent group but were an ad hoc band of religious enthusiasts gathered around the charismatic leadership

⁶⁹See Momen, “The Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals in Iran (1848-1853),” 179; Smith, “Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha’i Religions,” 246. See also Smith and Momen, “The Bābī Movement: A Resource Mobilization Perspective.” 61.

⁷⁰Momen, “The Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals in Iran (1848-1853),” 173.

⁷¹Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 358.

of Mullā Ḥusayn and Quddūs.”⁷² Momen states that the revolt at the shrine constituted a “definite challenge to the existing order,” involving active, large scale Bābī participation from all parts of Iran, its participants representing all different rural and urban groupings in the country.”⁷³ With this comparison, Momen seems to imply that the revolt at Shaykh Ṭabarsī displayed pure religious motives,⁷⁴ and was marked by the fact that the participants of the Bābī uprising there included Bābīs of a variety of occupation, but mostly ‘ulama.⁷⁵ Walbridge argues that the Bābīs at Shaykh Ṭabarsī “were united only by religion, and their fighting had a much more symbolic character.”⁷⁶ Smith also elaborates on how different the situations were at Nayrīz and Zanjan from that at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī. In the first two, as Smith notes, the Bābīs’ concentration was high; they also tended to show their distinctive identity as Bābīs openly; the leaders of the movement in these towns were prominent personalities; and the local tensions had existed before the Bābī revolts, due to the antagonism of the local ‘ulama and the corruption of local governors.⁷⁷

Despite some different features, the revolts at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī, Nayrīz and Zanjan can be perceived from the perspective of the advent of the Mahdī. The

⁷²Walbridge, “The Babi Uprising in Zanjan,” 361; Momen, “The Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals in Iran,” 173.

⁷³Momen, “The Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals in Iran (1848-1853),” 173

⁷⁴Momen, “The Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals in Iran (1848-1853),” 173

⁷⁵See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 358.

⁷⁶Walbridge, “The Babi Uprising in Zanjan,” 361.

⁷⁷Smith, “Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha’i Religions,” 247-8.

Bābīs, whose beliefs originated in Shī‘ism, believed that the Mahdī would come to liberate the earth from injustice and corruption. These revolts were also used by the Bābīs “as measures of self-defense against the attacks of their enemies, but only to a very minor extent as a means of bringing about political or social reform.”⁷⁸

This defensive attitude was therefore another aspect of the Bābī revolts. It seems clear that there was no obvious intention on the part of the Bābīs to take power from the ruling authorities.⁷⁹ This can be seen from the fact that there was no overall strategy to organize Bābī revolts at the national level. Rather, the revolts were relatively local in scale and defensive in nature. The defensive nature of the Bābī revolts was also determined by the absence of clear instructions from the Bāb himself or the Bābī leaders. Although the wearing of a green turban and the raising of the Black Standard might have symbolically represented the propagation of war, it is evident however that the Bābīs’ aim in their march westward was probably to help the Bāb escape from prison. Had they not been regarded as a threat to the political authority, and thus been suppressed, the Bābīs would never have mounted their revolts in Mazandaran, Nayrīz or Zanjan.

From this perspective, one may question Bayat’s argument that the Bābīs showed hostility towards the established religious and political order. As far as the sources indicate, it seems that “hostility” came rather from those of the ‘ulama and state who collaborated in reacting against the Bābīs, as previously shown. It is probable that some Bābīs envisaged the possibility of establishing some kind of independent Bābī kingdom

⁷⁸Momen, “The Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals in Iran (1848-1853),” 180.

⁷⁹Walbridge, “The Babi Uprising in Zanjan,” 352. Nabīl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 546, 553. ‘Abd al-Aḥad Zanjānī, “Personal Reminiscences of the Bābī Insurrection in Zanjan in 1850,” 791, 810-811.

or state. However, it cannot be denied that the Bāb himself never once seems to have instructed the Bābīs to wage an offensive *jihād* against the government, although some Bābīs might have been hoping for such instructions from the Bāb while he was in prison. As Smith points out, in the absence of the Bāb's order, the Bābīs who fought at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī, Nayrīz and Zanjan seem to have regarded themselves as "re-experiencing the heroic sacrifice of Karbalā'; dying as martyrs heralding the new age of the Mahdī."⁸⁰

As such, the episode of Karbalā', the battle at which Imām Ḥusayn together with a small band of his followers, died fighting the forces of the corrupt Umayyad regime, constitutes an important paradigmatic element of the spirit behind the Bābī revolts. In addition, the Bābī spirit was also stirred by the news of the Bāb's execution. As is generally held, the killing of a prominent leader can cause, and even intensify fighting. Therefore, the murder of the Bāb by the government army in fact added impetus to the on-going revolts in Zanjan.

In addition, the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn served as a model for the behavior of believers. The Bābīs portrayed Imam Ḥusayn as having rejected temporal authority in favor of political revolt. Thus, his movement was a religiously motivated rebellion, that was necessitated by the ethical and religious corruption of the Umayyads. His action, therefore, provided a model of political dissent that must be followed when similar circumstances arise.

In this regard, it is important to discern how the Shī'īs, and the Bābīs in particular, perceived history. They seem to have regarded history not as events of the past, but as

⁸⁰Smith, "Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha'i Religions," 248.

something alive and ever present. Human history is pictured by the Shī'īs generally as a continuous struggle between the forces of evil and the forces of good. Moreover, as Lawson argues, the Bāb, as a Shī'ī Muslim, perceived the history of the Muslim community as symbolic.⁸¹ The events of the past symbolized certain moral messages that were inherent and alive in every Bābī. They had their own part to play in Shī'ī memory. In view of this, the Bābīs who struggled at Mazandaran, Nayrīz, Zanjan and elsewhere perceived the tragedy of Karbalā' and the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn as a symbol of the struggle of an oppressed community against a corrupt ruler. The Imam Ḥusayn himself was regarded by the Shī'īs as a religio-political symbol in their every-day lives. Moreover, the example of the martyrs of Karbalā', particularly the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn "would have shaped the Bābīs' attitudes towards the fighting, giving it a deeply symbolic quality, and steeled them for death and inevitable but holy defeat."⁸²

⁸¹Todd Lawson, "The Structure of Existence in the Bab's Tafsir and the Perfect Man Motif," 88; Heinz Halm, *Shi'a Islam: From Religion to Revolution*, 16. See also Mary Hegland, "Two Images of Husayn: Accommodation and Revolution in an Iranian Village," in *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shiism from Quietism to Revolution*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie, 225-226; Azim Nanji, "The Imam Ḥusayn: His Role as Paradigm," *al-Serāt* 12 (1986): 188-194; Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, "The Eternal Meaning of the Imam Ḥusayn's Martyrdom," *al-Serāt* 12 (1986): 195-206.

⁸²Walbridge, "The Babi Uprising in Zanjan," 359. See also Smith and Momen, "The Babi movement: A Resource Mobilization Perspective," 69. Amir-Moezzi notes that, "in al-Ḥusayn's seal, the third, was written: 'Do battle, kill and be killed! Rise up in a group for martyrdom, for they will know martyrdom only with you.' These words give a view of the matter that is far from that of a revolt concerning political or social demands. Even up to the present day militant Shī'ism has continued to justify its activities religiously by the case of Imām Ḥusayn and the battle of Karbalā' with out-of-context use, as ideological necessities suggest, of some of Imām Ḥusayn's words and actions." Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, 67.

Concluding Note

We have seen that the conflicts between the Bābīs and the government troops inevitably occurred because each side acted on the basis of its own perspective. The government attempted to eliminate the danger of the Bābī doctrine and movement. They saw the movement as threatening the stability of the state. On the part of the Bābīs, they had no choice other than to defend themselves and to fight in the name of their faith. They had an excellent model in the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn. Despite the fact that the Bāb had proclaimed a new dispensation, and the ‘ulama condemned the Bāb and the Bābīs as apostates from Islam, the Bābīs still regarded Imam Ḥusayn as an archetype worthy of emulation. That is the Bābīs saw themselves as the true Muslims. The nature of the conflict was defensive on the part of the Bābīs, and aggressive on that of the government. Although social discontent prevailing at that time might have contributed to the conflicts between the Bābīs and the state, the religious basis as well as the paradigm of Karbalā’ can best explain the motives underlying the Bābī revolts. In view of this, religious symbolism played an important role in the Bābī movement, just as at the same time the Bābīs viewed their struggle as a reenactment of the tragedy of Karbalā’.

Conclusion

The rise of the Bābī movement (1260/1844) coincided with the thousandth anniversary of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam in 260/873-4. The rapid growth of the movement was fueled primarily by the Shī'ī messianic belief in the advent of the Hidden Imam, the Bāb's religious teachings, and the charismatic leadership heading up the movement. Its growing popularity was also encouraged by the social, economic and political discontent prevailing in early nineteenth-century Iran. These factors together provided the basis for the acceptance and expansion of the Bābī movement.

Although Amanat and Arjomand place emphasis on messianic belief as having been the most important factor in the growth of the movement, one cannot ignore the role of charismatic leaders in disseminating its doctrines and in directing its political orientation. The role of early disciples of the Bāb, such as Mullā Ḥusayn, Quddūs and Qurrat al-'Ayn, as well as of other Bābī leaders such Vaḥīd and Ḥujjat was quite significant. It was their efforts which laid the foundation of the Bābī community in different cities throughout Iran. It was also they who were responsible for providing leadership to the movement, while the Bāb was in prison, particularly during the Bābī revolts against the state.

The Bābī movement was greatly influenced by the doctrines of the Shaykhī school, and the Bāb himself was convinced by the prophecies of Sayyid Kāzīm Rashī with regard to the appearance of a messianic figure after the latter's death. The Bāb's interpretation of several religious doctrines, particularly those concerning eschatological

problems such as resurrection, and his idea of the progressive nature of revelation, likewise have their roots in Shaykhī teachings. As we have seen, the Bāb interpreted the doctrine of resurrection differently from the orthodox theologians, saying in fact that resurrection is marked by the appearance of a new manifestation, a new prophet and a new religion. This doctrine implied that divine revelation is endless, and will continue to advance in accordance with human progress towards maturity. This view of resurrection constituted one of the Bāb's principal dissenting thoughts from mainstream Shi'ism. Bābī dissent from Shi'ism culminated in the Bāb's claim to being the Mahdī, which entailed the abrogation of the Islamic *sharī'a* and the proclamation of a new scripture and a new religion.

In a sense, the Bāb seemed to see himself as undertaking to return Shi'ism to the original teaching of the Imams, as Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī had attempted to do. The Bāb may have seen the doctrines held by the 'ulama of that time as deviating from the true Shī'ī faith. It is in this sense that the Bāb may have thought of himself as a defender of "orthodoxy." However, fearing the threat of the Bābī movement, the 'ulama and government officials condemned and persecuted the Bābīs on religious grounds as well as for political reasons. The Bābī movement was seen as religiously deviant, and politically hazardous to both religious and political authorities.

The accusation was not surprising since the Bāb's claim to mahdihood in effect challenged the legitimacy of the 'ulama and the state to rule over believers. For in the presence of the Mahdī, no religious or temporal authorities could ever claim power or authority (*walāya*), because all Shī'īs must submit to the Imam in all matters of their

religious, political, spiritual and temporal lives. At this point, the Bābī movement had changed from being merely a “sectarian development within Shi‘ism” into a “revolutionary movement.”¹ This development led to severe conflict in the form of armed revolt between the Bābīs on the one hand and the state’s troops on the other.

However, as we have seen, the insurrections that took place at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī, at Nayrīz and at Zanjan were largely defensive in nature. Although in some passages of his works the Bāb addressed the doctrine of *jihād*, in reality there is no clear evidence to support the view that the Bābī revolts were ever inspired by the Bāb’s writings on this topic. Rather, the primary aims of the Bābīs in rebelling against the government seem to have been to defend their religious beliefs, and at the same time to emulate the example shown by Imam Ḥusayn at Karbalā’. Although social and political discontent may have been a factor in these revolts, it was religious motives that primarily underpinned them, with the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn serving as a paradigm in their encounter with the religious and political authorities.

In addition, despite the fact that some scholars discern political goals behind these revolts, the absence of the Bāb’s specific instruction and the lack of general strategy on the part of the Bābīs, for example, serve as proofs that the Bābīs seem to have simply defended their faith and their lives on the basis of religious concerns. This is also apparent in the use of religious symbols by the charismatic Bābī leaders, particularly in the course of the Bābī revolts. The political aims, if there were any, were secondary. Therefore, the phenomenon of Babism cannot be viewed simply, as Bayat refers to, as the

¹Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 25.

“politicization of dissent in Shī‘a thought.”² As we have seen, the Bābī movement in fact represented a system of religious and political interconnections. Bābī religious dissent entailed political implications, and Bābī political revolts contained religious elements, thus demonstrating that religion and politics had become fused in the Bābī movement.

However, apart from the religious dimensions in the Bābī movement and in particular its revolts, the significance of the Bābī movement for the later development of Iran, as Keddie notes, was much more political than religious. The Bābī movement perhaps did not contribute much to religious or moral reform of the country. However, after the collapse of the movement in 1853 and its split into two groups, Azālīs and Bahā‘īs, the existing Bābīs continued to attract converts and admiration. Conversions were partly the result of the open hostility that the government and the orthodox clerical authorities displayed towards the Bābīs. Although few in number, the Bābīs remained important much more as “symbols and unrecognized leaders in reform than as a mass religion.”³ This was to be proved later on in the early twentieth century, when the leading figures to pave the way for the constitutional revolution of 1905 in Iran were figures with religious affiliations to Babism. Many Azālīs even held government positions in early twentieth century Iran.⁴

²See Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 87.

³Keddie, “Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism,” 273.

⁴See Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 190. For further discussion on the Constitutional Revolution of 1905, see Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*.

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Appendix: Map



Iran in the nineteenth century*

* Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).