PERSECUTION OF BAHA'IS IN IRAN: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND CONTEMPORARY INSIGHTS

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

PERSECUTION OF BAHA'IS IN IRAN: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND CONTEMPORARY INSIGHTS

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This thesis analyzes the persecution of Baha'is in Iran within its historical and contemporary background. The thesis will give examples from the other minority groups in Iran and through this, the grounds behind the persecution of Baha'is in Iran will be more elaborated in the light of state-religion, state-minority relations and also it will analyze the "persecution" phenomena in identity formation of Baha'is.

Keywords: persecution, Baha'is, Iran

ÖZ

İRAN'DAKİ BAHAİLER'E YÖNELİK ZULÜM: TARİHSEL BİR BAKIŞ VE GÜNCEL İÇERİKLER

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Bu çalışma, İran'daki Bahailer'in uğradığı zulümü tarihsel ve güncel arka planı dahilinde incelemektedir. Bu tez, İran'daki diğer azınlık gruplarına dair örnekler verecek ve böylece İran'daki Bahailer'e yönelik zulümun ardındaki temeller, devlet-din, devlet-azınlık ilişkileri ışığında detaylı bir şekilde ele alınacaktır. Tez ayrıca Baha'i kimliği oluşum sürecinde zulüm kavramını da inceleyecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: zulüm, Bahailer, Iran

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 To studying Baha'is

I have always been attracted by religion in sociological framework. At the very beginning of my graduate program, I declared that I would write my thesis within religion studies, particularly Islam and the impact of geography on its emergence.

However, when I started to search resources regarding the topic, I realized that I would experience resource shortfall. It was a deterrent factor for me as the enormity of that problem was not in my range to overcome. Therefore, I switched my thesis subject and decided to write on a more fertile area, namely Baha'is.

Nevertheless, then appeared another problem: Yes, there were plenty of resources but most of them were either written by Baha'i scholars *per se* or the publishers were supported by Baha'is. Therefore, losing the sense of objectivity was too likely to happen. As I was trapped in that question, I came across the article of Denis MacEoin who had an influence on my ideas elaborated in this thesis. In his article called The Crisis in Babi and Baha'i Studies: Part of a Wider Crisis in Academic Freedom? he writes as follows[1]:

> *The biggest problem with Babi/Baha'i studies at the moment is that the entire field is dominated by practising adherents of the Baha'i movement. All the big names-Momen, Smith, Amanat, Cole, Lambden-are Baha'is of long standing.*

[1] Denis MacEoin, "The Crisis in Babi and Baha'i Studies: Part of a Wider Crisis in Academic Freedom?", *British Soceity for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin*, Vol.17, No.1(1990), pp.55-61.

> *Not that that is a bad thing in itself: the work of all these individuals is, broadly speaking, of a very high standard. Where the problem comes in is that, myself excepted, there are no non-Baha'is writing seriously on the subject.*

MacEoin continues fiercly criticizing the scholars in the field with those phrases below[2]:

> *This means that there are few balances or objective criteria operating within the field. More narrowly, it means that there is no-one out there capable of making intelligent and informed estimates of the accuracy, originality, controversiality, or significance of the work that is being produced. Unconscious (and conscious) distortions, diplomatic silences, woolly generalizations, plain exaggerations, misstatements of fact, significant omissions-all can (and often do) pass unobserved and uncommented.*

The aggression in his language may emanate from his previous bad memories in his research area but when considering my adolescence in the field; my stance is not as fierce as his. My insouciance of „objectivity' which may be another thesis problematic, also paved my way to coclude this work.

I would like to quotate MacEoin once more and finalize this section with a few comments on his writings which have provided a sort of freedom of movement to me since the day I read this article.

> *If there were dozens of non-Baha'is working in the field, some sort of broad consensus would no doubt emerge. But, as a solitary worker, I cannot create a consensus of one. My fellow-workers in the field-the Baha'is, that is-by*

[2] *Idem.*

virtue of their allegiance to a single ideology, have their own ways of arriving at a consensus. And it takes little imagination to see what sort of problems that may lead to. [3]

With my limited academic anticipation, I noticed that a variety of resources in the field was monolingual and after having MacEoin's article read, I decided to look between the lines in order to extract some clues which might be helpful in construction of the thesis. Therefore, rather than relying on the resources I found, I tried to put a distance between us and not surprisingly it was a really challenging job for me.

To sum up this section, I am not that much pessimistic as MacEoin but I would also say that the Baha'i studies field requires more attention of non-Baha'i scholars and a new literatue created by diversive ideas would be in favor of academic freedom.

1.2 Theoretical Approaches to the Problem Area

Middle East is a geography which is the host of religious diversity. The three major religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are interconnected and each originated within this geography. Islam in its many forms is by far the most heavily represented religion in the region though many branches and sects diversify and segment it. In addition to the widely acknowledged religions, smaller, minority religions such as Baha'i, Druze, Yazidi, Mandean, Gnosticism, Yarsanism, Shabakism, and Zoroastrianism are also prevalent throughout the Middle East.

This diversity which has never been regarded as an asset and richness of the region by certain state formations; rather each state sought ways to disregard those minority religions or tried to develop counterparts of them while creating a state-identity, must

[3] *Idem.*

be properly appreciated if we are to understand Middle Eastern society. “Human mosaic” is a common metaphor used to mention about this diversitiy but it has not been an appropriate usage considering the state formations within the region. It is elaborated by Bates and Rassam as such:[4]

> *This diversity has been likened to a "human mosaic" in which the members of each identifiable group emphasize their common and special identity through some configuration of symbols. These symbols may be material--in the form of dress, dwelling styles, or language or dialect; of even greater significance, however, are the underlying patterns of behavior, values, and systems of belief. The recognition and acceptance of ethnic or communal differences have historically been a fundamental principle of Middle Eastern social organization. The metaphor of a human mosaic, however, has its limits. Although it may describe contemporary patterns, it offers little insight into the many processes that underlie the formation of group identities, how these changes over time, and, more important, how people use them to gain access to resources and power.*

Each country and region of the Middle East contains local groupings or populations that are distinct from the society as a whole and are recognized as such by themselves and others. That is to say, people recognize themselves as belonging to some unique grouping within a larger population. The elements used to signal the identity of ethnic groups include religious affiliation, language or dialect, tribal membership or shared descent, and regional or local customs.

Because the nature of religious distinctions in the Middle East and the development of specific confessional communities are rooted in the formative period of Islam, the

[4] Daniel G. Bates and Amal Rassam, “Communal Identities and Ethnic Groups”, available at http://www.teachmideast.org/essays/36-people/46-communal-identities-and-ethnic-groups.

tenacity of sectarianism in the political and social arenas can only be understood when considered within the historical context.

From its inception, Islam as a faith was explicitly the basis for political action; even within the lifetime of its founder it became the vehicle for the formation and organization of a new polity. The boundaries of the political community were not simply territorial but coincided with those of the religious one, or umma. Both the legitimacy of the ruler and the rights and responsibilities of the members derived from their common membership in the religious community; it followed that to be a full citizen was also to be a Muslim. Although over the centuries there have been many Muslim states, and although many Muslim groups have been encapsulated within non-Muslim polities, recognition of common membership in one umma, or Muslim community, remains a potent ideological force.

The Prophet Muhammad regarded the Christians and Jews as "People of the Book," the recipients of a valid but incomplete, and hence imperfect. Members of both communities were allowed to practice their religion and keep their institutions and property, but on the condition that they pay a special poll tax. They were not allowed to serve in the army or assume direct authority over Muslims. As a consequence, Christians and Jews assumed a status of Ahl al-dhimmi, that is, tolerated clients of the Muslim community-clients who suffered certain sociopolitical liabilities in exchange for protection and the right to retain their distinctive religious identities and communal organization.

While the significant distinction is between Muslim and non-Muslim, the underlying principle is more widely employed. Religious identity, even as narrowly defined by the sects that rapidly arose within Islam itself, assumes political significance. The systematic merging of social and religious identity persists and has become even

further institutionalized with time, as we see, for instance, in the Coptic-Muslim social cleavage in Egypt[5].

Of course, this was not the case for only Middle Eastern countries but for the whole world. Perhaps Nazi Germany's Jewish politics were the most tragic example among other formulations of state and minority relations and reciprocal identity formation.

Iran, as a state in the Middle East is not excludable from the above mentioned aspects of minority-state, state-religion or identity formation formulas and Baha'is, as the counterpart of Iran by being a minority vis-à-vis state, are also an element of those formulas.

In this introductory part, a theoretical approach is essential to maintain in order to comprehend the position of Baha'is and the Iranian state in above mentioned formulas. For this reason, I attribute importance to religion and state relations in a theoretical framework before going into details of the core subject.

Religion and state relations have been undertaken with modernization-secularization paradigm since 1980s. The events occurring since 1970s, Iranian Revolution, clashes between Muslim and non-Muslim groups in Bosnia, India, Nigeria etc., have called attention to religion's ongoing effect on society and politics. However, this increasing awareness of the power of religion is not limited to Muslim world. The ascent of Christian fundamentalism with Ronald Reagan's rise to presidency in the USA may be a good example of power of religion in state politics. There have been also examples of ethnoreligious clashes that involve groups in Sri Lanka, Tibet, and Sikh-Hindu tensions in India. Also historically, religion has been an intrinsic component of all major civilizations. It has had its merits but it changed facets in the time-being.

[5] *Idem.*

Modernization has allowed both the state and religious institutions to increase their spheres of influence. As citated in Fox's *Religion's Role in Politics and Society*[6] Mark Juergensmeyer argues that the resurgence of religion is due to failure of modern secular ideologies like liberalism, communism, socialism and fascism.

In the second chapter, this theme is elaborated under Coversions section. It is argued that the modernization and its socio-economical consequences created a need to a cohesion ideology, which at that time happened to be Bahaism for many Jews and of one of the approaches in which persecution of Baha'is can be explained.

The state of Iran and its relation with religion is a clear example of above mentioned approach. The Twelver Shia doctrine, systematized in a form that was to become definitive by the end of the fourteenth century, was propagated in Iran from 1501 onwards[7] and became the official religion of Islamic Republic of Iran.

A second approach by which Baha'i Faith can be explained is the state-minority formula. State-minority relations and the sociological framework behind is itself a major thesis subject; therefore it is out of this work's capacity to go into theoretical details. But in order to situate the persecution to which Baha'is were exposed, an overview is essential in the particularity of Iran and the changes between Pahlavi era and Islamic Republic.

Seeing the end of Shah regime, most Iranians were with the expectation of greater individual and collective freedom, among them there were a number of minority groups who expected greater cultural and political autonomy. At the very beginning, the new regime seemed sympathetic to such expectations until the summer of 1979 when violent conflicts emerged between the central government and several tribal,

[6] Jonathan Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State*, USA, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 22.

[7] Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p.105.

regional and ethnic minority groups. Such expectations were viewed as a threat to consolidation of new regime and to its stability. At that point, Patricia Higgins suggests two dimensions to be analyzed while investigating the changes in minority-state relations:[8] the ideological dimension, which concerns individual identification with the state and/or other social groups of lesser inclusiveness; and the materialistic dimension, which concerns the degree and mode of individual or group access to the economic and political resources of the state. Higgins further states that state, which by definition has the greater power, sets the structural framework which bounds both ideological and materialistic dimensions for minority-state relations. There emerge various responses by minority groups within those dimensions; Baha'i response is here the case of this study.

This analysis of Higgins reveals that the dramatic and significant shift in emphasis from the secular, language-based, Persian nationalism of the Pahlavi state to the Shia Islamic religious focus of the Islamic Republic has been accompanied by relatively little change in other aspects of state organization relevant to minority-state relationships.

In state-minority formulation, the secular tone of the Pahlavi state and its efforts to contain the power of the religious leaders generally made the incorporation of the Baha'is into the state and the society as a whole relatively smooth.[9] On the whole, the Pahlavi government protected the rights of Baha'is as citizens and the Baha'is in accordance with their policy of nonparticipation in political affairs.

In the Pahlavi state, Baha'is could be seen as particularly good citizens. Their beliefs in universal education, sexual equality and service to humanity correspond to

[8] Patricia J. Higgins, "Minority-State Relations in Contemporary Iran", in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds.), *The State, Religion and Ethnic Politics*, USA, Syracuse University Press, p.168.

[9] I*bid.,* p.182.

policies supported by the Pahlavis in their efforts to modernize Iran.[10] However, it was also during the modernization policies of Pahlavi state that the Baha'i schools were closed down while the all educational instiutions were being centralized.[11]

The analysis may be taken further but at that point another problem area, minority rights come to surface and it takes the analysis to the middle of debates like humanitarian intervention. And these debates increasingly have an international dimension as well. International organizations can strongly influence the way state – minority relations are framed and resolved, endorsing some models of accommodation while discouraging others.[12] In many cases, the UN has intervened actively to support the minorities, as in Cyprus, Sudan, Iraq, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Burma. Analogous situations have arisen in Europe, in this context it has been European organizations that usually have taken the lead role in conflict resolution. The scope of those interventions and its legal frameworks are beyond the limits of this study but minority rights vis-à-vis state is another formula which the Baha'is question of Iran may be analyzed.

Another but not less important formula in which Baha'i question may be situated is the identity formation processes for the state and the community, group etc. Religion, in this study, is the core component of identity and even it is regarded as the most important source of personal and group identity-and, by extension, social divisions. Religion in its many sectarian expressions sets some of the most important limits to interpersonal bonds.

This is not to say that religious ties or bonds inevitably supersede all others. In fact, class differences, tribal and ethnic divisions, and the like often take precedence over any claims of religion as people organize themselves in groups for common action.

[10] *Ibid*, 183.

[11] Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran, Between two Revolutions*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1982, *passim.*

[12] Will Kymlicka, "The Internalization of Minority Rights", *ICON,* Volume 6, Number 1(2008), pp. 1-32.

Religion is more a determinant of maximal boundaries or inclusiveness, less commonly the basis for local organization.[13]

For most states in the Middle East, it is difficult to deny religion a place in national identity and difficult to define what a national church would be.[14] And Iran is not excludable from that generalization.

For example, Pahlavi state was trying to create a secular and modern identity and the religious minorities were loosing its significance in that identity, although local populace was not so eager to change, whereas the Islamic Republic created an identity on state Shiism.[15] Here, it is important to note that these identities are subject to distinctive reactions as a significant example may be the persecution of Shiites in Bahrain whereas in Iran, it is in the superior position. In Bahrain, Shiites face fast-tracked martial courts, continued detention of hundreds, demolition of mosques and arbitrary dismissal of employees in the Sunni-ruled kingdom, which is the same story for the Baha'is under Shiite-ruled Republic.

From the perspective of Shi'ite clergy and many Iranian Muslims, Baha'is Faith is considered not a religion but as Islamic heresy or a British and/or Zionist backed political movement. Because Baha'is have not been a recognized religious minority in either the Pahlavi or the Islamic State, facts and figures concerning Iranian Baha'is are particularly scarce.

The Baha'is who by virtue of their beliefs and practices could be respected and even prominent citizens in the secular Pahlavi state, were pressured to change their religious identification as the minimal price for citizenship in the Islamic Republic.

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[13] Bates and Rassam, *op.cit.*

[14] Robert D. Lee,, *Religion and Politics in the Middle East,* USA, Westview Press, 2010, p.15.

[15] For further arguments on state Shiism, Lee, *passim.*

The history of persecution and the shared sense of precaution as an unrecognized minority were the elements of common faith of Baha'is which were in an essential position in Baha'i identity.

At that point, "persecution" as the determinant of Baha'i identity is important to investigate. A discursive approach might have been applied to "persecution" in order to decompose to its elements in the Baha'i case. Persecution motif may lead the discussion to the discourse of victimization which is also the case for Shiites (event of Kerbala). Persecution in the form of discourse of victimization may be an internal cohesion ideology. That analysis might have applied to understand if the persecution motif is a shortcut to flee West and a tool to legitimize the mass migration of Baha'is to the West through international organizations, among the others UN. It is also well-known that this discourse is historical and has self-expalanatory examples even in the Iranian history, such as Zoroastrians who were in the majority and most probably in the persecutor position for years.

However, in this study I do not apply a discursive analysis but bearing in mind that persecution is an integral part of Baha'i identity formation process. I am also aware that the common sense of a traumatic past and even today plays a significant role in the creation of a collective identity. As indicated in the previous section regarding the limitations of studying Baha'is, the persecution motif also encompasses the endeavor to create a public awareness about the situation of Baha'is in Iran. As international community and international law put emphasis on minority rights, communities including Baha'is attribute more attention to their traumatic persecution experiences. An analogous example can be the relationship between the diasporic and local Armenian communities: a traumatic past experience decorated with persecution motifs.

To sum up, Baha'i question of Iran has many dimensions and can be analyzed in the light of more than one approaches, none of which is attributed more significance in

this study. I tried to employ each chapter to have a general insight on each approaches and formulas mentioned above and to come up with ideas as a result.

1.3 General Statement of Problem Area

Within the Middle East, Baha'i Faith has noteworthy representation in Iran, United Arab Emirates, Israel, and Turkey. Founded in Iran in 1863, the Baha'i Faith is one of the youngest religions. According to most encyclopedias, in the early 21st century there are estimated between 5 and 6 million Baha'is across the globe. Second to only Christianity, the Baha'i Faith is considered one of the most geographically diverse religions spreading across the globe to every country except North Korea and Vatican City.

In spite of the geographical diversity of Baha'is, Iran has been chosen as the sample. The reason behind this choise is that Iran is the origin of the Faith and its founders were Persian. Therefore, the Faith has historical ties with Iran.

The Iranian Baha'i community emerged in the 1860s and 1870s out of the Babi movement. From the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, it expanded significantly in size and influence. A number of factors have contributed to this growth. Written correspondence and personal contact with the founder of the Baha'i Faith, Bahaullah and Abdul-Baha provided encouragement to Iran's Baha'is and coordination of the community's activities.

Both in the thousand of letters Bahaullah wrote to individual Baha'is in Iran and in his conversations with the many Iranian Baha'i pilgrims that visited him in his successive exiles to Baghdad, Istanbul, Edirne and later Akka, Bahaullah urged his followers to follow his path.

The Iranian Baha'i community of the late nineteenth century was not only drawn from the remaining Babi Faith. Bahaullah encouraged his followers to travel to parts of the country where there were no Baha'is in order to establish new local communities, so the Baha'i Faith experienced a great expansion during the lifetime of Bahaullah.

The Baha'i community of Iran grew steadily until the 1920s and by the late nineteenth/early twentieth century the Baha'is had embarked upon a number of education and health initiatives.

In numerical terms, it is estimated that there were at least 100.000 Baha'is in the 1880s, which represented 1-2 percent of Iranian population. As the twentieth century unfolded, the proportion of Baha'is in the population grew gradually smaller, especially after 1979 as many Baha'is emigrated to the West to escape persecution. It is estimated that there remain at least 300.000 Baha'is in Iran today, equating to around 0.5 percent of the population.

1.3.1 Research Question

Baha'i Faith which emerged as a religion in 1860s, is relatively a new social formation in the history of Iran. As a religion which succeded Islam, it was a controversial phenomena before the Islamic Revolution in 1979 but after the Revolution, the persecution which the community was exposed to, gained its sharpest form.

There are, of course, many reasons which have been proclaimed by the religious authorities of the Islamic State but not all of them satisfy the question, also the research problematic of this thesis: Why Baha'is are exposed to persecution whereas the minority groups enjoy a series of rights?

There is no exact answer of that question and since it is an academical work, there is no expaction in that respect. But the probable answers will be focused around a more socio-economic sphere rather than repeated claims of the Iranian authorities and scholars in this field.

1.3.2 Literature review

As already mentioned in the foremost introduction, studying Baha'is as a research subject has its own counterchecks. But still, there have been many inspiring resources while I was trying to gather data in every step.

In order to conclude "objective" results, I tried to find some non-Baha'i researches at the very beginning of my studies. But as expressed above, it was the most challenging part of this work. Therefore, I gave of that effort and switched to an approach to gathering all available resources and then concluding my own analysis and create a self-explanatory objectivity.

In this approach, I came across a variety of resources in the internet, a bulk of which have already been covered by Baha'i domains. But the benefit of such domains is undeniable for this thesis. It would be much more time-taking if a collection of essays of field scholars was not reachable on those web-pages. Among those, baha'i-library.org was indispensable.

Beside the e-resources, several libraries' databases were a flowing spring while collecting various articles, reports and essays.

Of course, books of the outstanding scholars were the most eye-opening resources while concluding this thesis. For futher references in the field of Baha'i studies, a few scholars should be mentioned in this introductory chapter.

In the first chapter, while historical background of the Baha'i Faith was elaborated, I tried to comprehend the chronology in my mind first of all and at that point Moojan Momen's A Short Introduction to Baha'i Faith was very helpful. For someone who is not really familiar with the subject in concern, a categorized introduction like Momen's is considerably eligible to start. Peter Smith's An Introduction to to the Baha'i Faith should also be reckoned at that point. As well as Neyir Özşuca and Süleyman Özkaya should be named in this phase with their contribution to my initial comprehension of the subject as their Turkish resources speeded up that lap due to being in my mother tongue.

In the following chapter, the definition of persecution and its formative elements were concluded from Scott Rempel's citated aticle and some previous international law information was used. The persecution in particularity of Baha'is was detailed for a section long with the help of a variety of internet resources and as well as articles, eagerly written or published by Baha'is themselves. But the verification of them is easy to obtain through a simple media research.

While trying to create a review for other minorities' conditions in Iran, Eliz Sansarian's book Religious Minorities in Iran was invaluable in the peculiarity of this thesis. In order to have an overall picture of the minority religions in Iran, Aptin Khanbaghi's The Fire, the Star and the Cross was also very useful.

In the last section of the third chapter where the primary plea of this thesis was revealed, Denis MacEoin and Juan Cole were among the others as scholars who shaped my ideas in total. Especially, MacEoin's a bit aggressive tone eased my efforts while conducting at least „something'. Despite Juan Cole can be seen as the counterpart of MacEoin, they both carried me to the same conclusion while their interntions were not so.

Further references which cannot be named here have been written at the end of the thesis.

Yet, another point which can be raised under this title may be the significance of this research as it is supposed to add „something' new to the literature. Namely, the scope of Baha'i studies are mainly descriptive and in tendency to create awareness about the community. Therefore, many of them are focused on the historical roots of persecution of Baha'is whereas my humble effort was to put forward some more economical grounds. In this concern, I tried to extract clues from the above mentioned literature and hence draw a slightly different point of view in this study field.

1.3.3 Organization of Chapters

The introductory chapter depicts the general statement of problem area and as well as an additional initial section which is devoted to Baha'i studies' peculiarity. The research question, literature review, significance of the research and methodology utilized in the current study are also presented.

The second chapter gives the historical background of the Baha'i Faith in sections of Emerging as a Religion and Conversions. There is a detailed chronology of Faith's existence and the conversion patterns of Jews and Zoroastrians to the Baha'i Faith.

The third chapter is an explanatory part which the definition of persecution in international law is presented and its factors are elaborated. Beside this theoretical section, the concrete persecution of Baha'is in various forms are depicted. By this way, it is aimed to create a nexus between definition of persecution in international law and its daily practices on Baha'is.

The forth chapter is at the aim of maintaining a brief overview and contemporary insight about other religious minority groups in Iran in order to back-up the

comprehension of the situation of Baha'is in Iran. In this chapter, brief historical backgrounds of Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians in Iran are presented. This background information may seem irrelevant at first instance but in order to create a broder vision of persecution of Baha'is throughout their history, it was essential to go through the histories of those minorities in Iran. In the last section of that chapter, main arguments of this thesis are elaborated in the light of previous chapters.

The last chapter of the study offers a brief conclusion which wraps up the all data given in the thesis and tries to present an individual understanding of the research question. Also, implications and recommendations for future research are presented.

1.3.4 Notes on Transliteration, Dates and Names

I tried to standardize the transliteration throughout the thesis but in direct quotations, the original styles were preserved.

Dates are only given in CE form, unless the Islamic lunar or solar date is deemed absolutely necessary.

If place names have a commonly-used Latinized form (e.g. Tehran), it is this which is used.

I have used shortcut method for frequently used words/names such as „Báb' and preferred not to use the sign on „a' and the word seemed like „Bab'; the same shortcut was also used for frequent names with Arabic suffixes such as Baha-ullah and the appearences of those names were as such: Bahaullah, rather than Baha-ullah; Abdul-Baha, rather than Abd-ul-Baha/Abd-al-Baha and Nasriddin, rather than Nasr-al-Din. The original versions have been preserved in direct quotations.

As a last point, I used „Baha'i Faith' more frequently than Baha'ism as this is the more commonly used named for the religion founded by Bahaullah and by Baha'is themselves.

CHAPTER 2

BAHA'IS IN THE HISTORY OF IRAN

2.1 Emerging as a Religion

The Baha'i Faith developed out of the earlier Babi religion, and Babism in turn emerged as a movement within Shi'i Islam, particularly as it had developed in Iran. Of crucial importance for the future emergence of Babism was the development of the Shaykhi school of Shi'a. The Shayhkis followed the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad Al Ahsa'i (1753-1836), who gained a reputation for piety and learning as well as a large and influential following amongst both Arab and Iranian Shi'is and also some powerful opponents who accused him of deviating from Islamic orthodoxy. His immediate successor, the Iranian Sayyid Kazim Rashti (c. 1790-1843) consolidated his master's movement into a distinctive Shi'i sect centered in Karbala in what by then was Ottoman territory.

As indicated in Onder Cetin's article[16]:

> *It was mainly the Shayki movement that the Babi movement had its origins. With its philosophical and mystical views, especially with its that many of the concepts within teological framework that were understood as literally true should in fact be understood as metaphorically as spiritual truths. This was the main tendency that directed the methodology in Babi scriptures.*

[16] Önder Çetin, "Recognition and Identity: the case of the Bahâ'î Faith", *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations,* Vol.1, No.1, (Spring 2002), p. 10.

The Babi movement emerged in the immediate context of the Shaykhi succession crisis which followed the death of Sayyid Kazim (around 1 Jan 1844). With no appointed successor, a leadership struggle developed between rival Shaykhi clerics in different cities, all of whom came in time to present a more conservative image of their master's teachings, deemphasizing the more radical aspects which had brought opprobrium upon the movement. By contrast, the growing number of Shaykhis who became Babis had a more radical vision in which millenarian expectation and the immediacy of divine guidance were paramount.[17]

Baha'i history can conveniently be broken up into five periods which can be elaborated as follows:

2.1.1 The Period of the Bab (1844-1852)

The origins of the Baha'i Faith go back to a religious movement founded in AD 1844 by a young Iranian merchant, Sayyid Ali Muhammed Shirazi (1819-1850), who took the title of the *Bab* (the gate). Ali Muhammed was initially claiming to be, it is clear that a major and distinctive claim to authority was made and that this was widely understood to be that of being Bab to the Hıdden Imam. His followers were therefore called Babis. Ali Muhammed completed an Arabic text over forty days and it was extensively copied and widely distributed by his disciples. The book, called *Qayyumu'l-asma* mirrored the style of Qur'an and was regarded as the Qur'an of the Babis.[18]

In 1844, in Shiraz in the south of Iran, the Bab gathered around himself a group of eighteen disciples whom he named the "Letters of the Living". The Bab dispersed the Letters of the Living throughout Iran and surrounding countries to spread his

[17] Peter Smith, *An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.5.

[18] *Ibid*, p.7.

message, while he himself set off towards the end of 1844 on the pilgrimage to Mecca.[19]

In Mecca, the Bab announced his message, but was generally ignored. His plans for proceeding from Mecca to Karbala, a holy city in the south of Iraq, also came to nothing owing to the fierce opposition which one of his disciples had encountered there. The Bab returned to Shiraz and was detained and placed under house arrest by the governor of that city.

Despite these early setbacks, the message of the Bab spread throughout Iran. Many thousands of people became his followers including many religious scholars of Islam. The governor of Shiraz, fearing the growth of the movement, decided to arrest the Bab again in 1846. His officials carried out the arrest but the sudden appearance of cholera in the city threw everything into confusion and the Bab was allowed to leave the city. He journeyed to the city of Isfahan in central Iran. The governor of Isfahan was a Georgian Christian who had converted to Islam and risen to his present high position. He asked the leading Shi`i religious official in the city to accommodate the Bab.

Isfahan was then the leading centre of Shi`i Islam in Iran. Here the Bab wrote several of his most important works and discussed these with the religious scholars and students gathered there. His teachings convinced many including the governor of Isfahan. The latter offered to put his personal fortune at the disposal of the Bab and to arrange a personal interview with the Shah.

Reports from Isfahan and all over Iran were arriving at the capital about the new religious movement. They alarmed the Prime Minister, who sent orders to Isfahan for the arrest of the Bab. The governor of Isfahan hid the Bab for a time in one of his

[19] Moojan Momen, *The Baha'i Faith: A Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oneworld Publications, 1999.

palaces, but in February 1847, this governor died. His successor had the Bab sent under guard towards Tehran.

The Prime Minister, whose own position was dependant on the religious influence that he wielded over the Shah, feared that the results of any meeting between the Bab and the Shah would lead to the loss of his own position. He, therefore, halted the progress of the Bab's escort outside Tehran and diverted them to Maku in the extreme north-west of Iran. Here in a remote corner of the country and imprisoned among a hostile people, the Prime Minister hoped that the Bab would be isolated and his movement would gradually die away. The Prime Minister's hopes were not, however, fulfilled. The Bab won over his prison warder in Maku and his teachings continued to spread through the towns and villages of Iran.

In 1848, several significant events occurred. Early in this year, the Prime Minister changed the place of imprisonment of the Bab from Maku to Chihriq in the hope of making him more isolated. Also in this year, the Bab issued the *Bayán*, his principal book of laws and teachings. This book made it clear that he was in fact inaugurating a new religious dispensation that abrogated the dispensation of Islam. This fact was then proclaimed in a conference of his followers held in the summer of that year in a village called Badasht on the road between Tehran and the North-East. At about the same time, the Prime Minister had the Bab brought from his imprisonment to Tabriz, the provincial capital of the north-west. There a mock trial was held before the crown-prince and an assembly of religious notables in the hope that the Bab would be humiliated. The Bab, however, conducted himself with a dignity that won him even more supporters. The trial also gave the Bab an opportunity to announce publicly his claim to be the Mahdi of Islam.

Between 1848 and 1850 there were several episodes in which the religious leaders in various localities around Iran stirred up the people against the Bab and his follower;. When this resulted in civil unrest, the local authorities called upon the Shah's army to

attack the Bab's followers. These episodes culminated in several massacres of Bab's followers in different parts of Iran.

In the middle of the year 1850, the new Shah and his Prime Minister decided that the only way of stopping this religious movement would be to execute the founder. They therefore had the Bab brought to Tabriz again and suspended in a public square in front of a firing squad consisting of a regiment of soldiers. There then occurred what Baha'is consider to have been a miracle. All of the shots missed and the Bab seemed to have disappeared. He was eventually found dictating his last words to his secretary. The Bab was then brought back to the square, suspended again, and a new regiment was lined up (the first regiment having refused to carry out a further attempt). This time the shots succeeded and the Bab was killed. His body was rescued by some of his followers. After being hid in various places for fifty years, it was eventually interred in a shrine on the side of Mount Carmel in the city of Haifa.

The persecutions of the Babis continued over the next few years. Eventually in the summer of 1852, a small group of Babis decided to obtain revenge on the Shah by assassinating him. Their plans were, however, poorly made and the plot was a failure. Although most of Babis had not been involved in the plot, this event triggered an intense persecution that resulted in the execution of almost all of the remaining leading Babis. Among those executed was Táhirih, the female member of the Letters of the Living.[20]

The execution of the Bab and the death of so many of their leaders caused some Babis to doubt their Faith, whilst others despaired or dreamed of revenge. The movement began to break apart, as new leaders emerged to replace those who had been killed, and various local groups formed and developed different plans for action.

[20] Momen, *op.cit.*

The most prominent of the new leaders was initially Mulla Shaykh Ali Turshizi, better known as *Azim.* Also of importance in the capital were two of the sons of Mirza Abbas Nuri; Mirza Huseyn Ali, known as *Baha* (later Bahaullah [the Glory of God] and his young half brother Mirza Yahya, *Azal*.

Amongst the Tehran Babis, the group headed by Azim and supported by Azal began to plot revenge against the state, a policy opposed by Baha. The radicals committed an assassination to Nasriddin Shah in 1852 and the Shah, lightly wounded, embarked on a ruthless campaign of repression. Those linked to the conspiracy, including Azim, were quickly rounded up and executed but at the Shah's insistence, a general pogrom was also mounted against the Babis as a collectivity. Many were killed despite their innocence of any involvement with the plotters. Azal escaped and went into hiding. Baha was also arrested and thrown to an underground pit called Siyah Chal.

After August 1852, apart from renewed conflict in Nayriz in March 1853, which was again bloodily suppressed, the Babis were silent: the government's Babi „problem' seemed to have been resolved.[21]

2.1.2 The Ministry of Bahaullah (1852-1892)

Although most of the Babi prisoners in the Siyah Chal were executed, Baha's life was spared because of his high social position and the affiliation with the Russian minister in Tehran (Bahaullah's sister was married to an official of the Russian legation). Bahaullah was released from imprisonment on the condition that he go into exile. Although the Russian Minister offered him the choice of proceeding to Russian territory, Bahaullah prefered to g oto Baghdad.

In Baghdad, Bahaullah proceeded to revitalize the Babi community. For two years in

[21] Smith, *op.cit.,* p. 14-15.

1854-1856, he resided in the mountains of Kurdistan. For part of this time he lived alone; the rest of the time he was a guest in a Sufi retreat in the town of Sulaymaniyah. Here he expounded on mystical themes and attracted many people to himself. When he returned to Baghdad at the end of this time, he kept his contacts with some of those Sufis. Of the substantive themes in Bahaullah's writings at this time, three were particularly prominent[22]: the spiritual mystical path; the ethical demands of belief; and certain doctrinal concerns. His two main mystical works, the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys, were written to two Sufi leaders at this time. While in Baghdad, Bahaullah wrote several other important works. These included the Hidden Words, a series of aphorisms on spiritual and ethical themes, and the Book of Certitude (Kitáb-i-Íqán), which deals with the nature of religion and explains the fulfilment in the present day of the prophecies of the holy books of the past.

The Iranian authorities made representations to the Ottoman government about the presence and increasing influence of Bahaullah in Baghdad, close to the Iranian border. Just before his departure from Baghdad to Istanbul, as ordered by the Ottman government, in April 1863, Bahaullah announced to a group of his Babi companions that he was indeed the promised one foretold by the Bab (this event is commemorated by Baha'is each year in the holy days of Ridvan).

Bahaullah remained in Istanbul for only three months before being sent to Edirne in Turkey. Here Bahaullah openly announced his claim to be the one foretold by the Bab and the inaugurator of a new religious dispensation. He sent his emissaries to Iran to publicize this claim among the Babis, almost all of whom now became Baha'is. While in Edirne, Bahaullah wrote a series of letters that he sent to the leading monarchs of his time. He invited them to turn to his teachings, to abandon warfare, and become reconciled among themselves. He also wrote to the Muslim and Christian religious leaders, informing them of his claim to be the one promised in their scriptures.

[22] *Ibid*, p.20.

In Edirne, Bahaullah experienced opposition from his half-brother, Azal who sent inflammatory reports to the Ottoman authorities, the result of which was exile for both himself and Bahaullah. Bahaullah then secluded himself in one of the Babi houses in the city and instructed the Babis to choose between himself and Azal. This „most great separation' continued for two months, during which most of the Edirne Babis identified themselves as Baha'is. An active minority rejected Bahaullah's claims in favor of Azal's and in some instances, there were confrontations between the two factions.[23]

In 1867, Bahaullah and his companions were ordered to leave Edirne. Without knowing where they were going, they were forced to sell their possessions and leave. They were taken to Gallipoli and put aboard a ship. Eventually they arrived in the prison-city of Akka in Palestine (Azal was sent to Cyprus where he remained until his death)[24].

In Akka, Bahaullah was at first imprisoned in the citadel for two years. Soldiers guarded the city gate with strict instructions not to let Bahaullah or his companions out and not to let any of his followers that came to meet him in to the city. It was in these circumstances that Bahaullah wrote his most important book, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (the Most Holy Book), in which he outlined his main religious laws. This was followed in the next two decades by a series of writings (tablets as they are called by Baha'is) in which he gave the distinctive teachings of his religious dispensation.

The last years of Bahaullah's life were spent in writing and dictating numerous works; receiving the pilgrims that came in increasing numbers; and directing the affairs of his religion. The religion itself was now gradually spreading into Egypt, Anatolia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and India. Even in Iran, despite episodes of

[23] *Ibid*, p.24.

[24] Denis MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Babism*, Netherlands, Koninklijke Brill, 2008, p.592.

persecution from time to time, the religion was spreading among all classes and in all parts of the country.

One of the most important themes of Bahaullah's writings in Akka period was his continuing proclamation to the world leaders. His letters rot he European monarchs (including Napoleon III of France) proclaimed his mission and summoned them to God. He also wrote to several Iranian clerics, castigating several for their tyranny and injustice in persecuting and cauisng the killing of Baha'is; accusing them of having subverted Islam; and comparing at least one of them to those Jewish leaders who had been responsible for the crucifixation of Christ.[25]

A second theme in Bahaullah's writings at this time was divine law, most particularly the composition of his own book of holy law, the *Kitab-i Aqdas*. The third major theme was his vision of of the future and his delineation of the elements of social reconstruction that were needed to accomplish it. He stated that his message was for the whole human race, and his teachings were intended to guide the reconstruction of the world and promote the advancement of humanity as a whole.[26]

Bahaullah passed away on 29 May 1892 in the mansion of Bahjí and was buried in a nearby house. His shrine is regarded by Baha'is as the holiest place on earth.

2.1.3 The Ministry of Abdul-Baha (1892-1921)

Immediately following his father's death, Abbas Abdul-Baha assumed leadership of the Baha'i religion. Abdul-Baha's succession elicited no surprise and was readily accepted by almost all Baha'is. Not only was it a written and unambiguous appointment, but it followed traditional custom in favouring the eldest son and

[25] Smith, *op.cit.*, p.31.

[26] *Ibid*., p.32.

reflected a widespread perception of Abdul-Baha as a worthy successor who had already proved himself as a devoted and capable assistant to his father[27].

Nevertheless, from the earliest years of his ministry, Abdul-Baha was opposed by his half-brother, Mirza Muhammed Ali. The latter claimed that Abdul-Baha was exceeding his authority. At first, Mirza Muhammed Ali succeeded in obtaining the support of several influential Baha'is. In the end, however, his opposition faded away and the overwhelming majority of Baha'is supported Abdul-Baha [28] .

The main result of the opposition of Abdul-Baha's half-brother was the re-imposition of the strict terms of the original government orders of exile. This confined to the city of Akka for some five years. Eventually, as a result of the Young Turks Revolution in 1908, Abdul-Baha was freed. One of his first actions when freed was to complete the shrine of the Bab on Mount Carmel and to place the remains of the Bab there.

During the early years of Abdul-Baha's ministry, the Baha'i Faith was taken to North America. By the turn of the twentieth century, there was a community of several thousand Baha'is in North America. Some small groups also arose in Europe. This was a very significant turning-point in the development of the Baha'i Faith. It demonstrated that the Baha'i Faith was capable of appealing to people outside the cultural world of the Middle East to which it had been confined up to that point in time. After he was freed in 1908, Abdul-Baha moved to Egypt for a while before setting off on the first of two journeys to the West. In the first journey in 1911, Abdul-Baha visited France and England. Then in 1912-13, he visited North America, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Hungary. In all these places he spoke at public meetings, in churches and before a wide variety of associations. He spoke on many of the issues of that time: peace, women's rights, racial equality, labour relations, etc. He met many prominent politicians, philosophers, artists, scientists, and leaders of

[27] *Ibid*, p.55.

[28] Moojan Momen and Peter Smith, *Baha'i History* available at www.baha'i.library.org

thought and was the centre of a great deal of attention from newspapers and magazines.

Abdul-Baha returned to Haifa in 1913 and the following year the First World War broke out cutting off communications with the outside world. During these war years, Abdul-Baha wrote the Tablets of the Divine Plan, laying down his instructions for the world-wide of the Baha'i Faith.

His writings also dealt with wide range of topics which reached the worldwide followers. It is phrased in Sansarian's study as such[29]:

> *...while Baha'Allah's writings dealt with a limited range of topics, his son "plays variations" on many of his themes. Influenced by his travels and contacts with Americans and Europeans, Abd al-Baha either introduces new concepts or, at least, gives prominence to ideas which had been mentioned only in passing by his father...*

At the end of the war, the Haifa-Akka area fell to the British army and Palestine came under the British mandate. Abdul-Baha was much respected by the British authorities and he was eventually knighted for his services. Abdul-Baha passed away on 28 November 1921 and is buried in one of the rooms of the shrine of the Bab.

2.1.4 The Period of the Guardianship (Shoghi Effendi, 1921-1963)

During the early years of Shoghi Effendi's ministry there were several episodes of persecution of Baha'i communities. In Iran in 1926-1927, there were several outbursts in which Baha'is were killed, and again in 1934, wide-ranging official measures were taken against the Baha'is. From 1926 onwards, the Soviet authorities

[29] Eliz Sansarian, "Babi-Baha'is, Christians, and Jews in Iran", *Iranian Studies,* volume 31, numbers *2>-A, (*Summer/Fall 1998).

increasingly persecuted the Baha'i communities in the Caucasus and Central Asia. In 1928, they expropriated the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár that the Baha'is had built in Ashkhabad. In 1922, the house that Bahaullah had occupied and was a site of pilgrimage for Baha'is in Baghdad, was taken over. Despite winning their case before the League of Nations in 1928, the Baha'is were never able to regain possession of it.

Shoghi Effendi spent the first fifteen years of his ministry establishing and assuring the properfunctioning of the Baha'i administrative structure. He then began to use this administration in a series of plans to extend the geographical range of the Baha'i Faith. In 1937, he gave the American Baha'is the task of taking the Baha'i Faith to several countries in Central and Southern America. Over the next few years he gave plans to various national Baha'i communities. He gave the Iranian and Egyptian Baha'is the task of spreading the Baha'i Faith to the Arab countries, the Indian Baha'is to South-East Asia; the British Baha'is to Africa; and he gave the American Baha'is a further plan involving Latin America and Europe.[30] The culmination of all this was a Ten-Year World Crusade (1953-1963) which was to open many of the remaining countries of the world to the Baha'i Faith.

During the Ten-Year Crusade, a development occurred which was eventually to change the face of the Baha'i Faith. In widely separate corners of the world such as Uganda, Bolivia, Indonesia and India, large numbers of poor, illiterate villagers and tribal peoples began to enrol in the Baha'i community.

Shoghi Effendi passed away in 1957 during a stay in London. He is buried in north London. The Baha'i world continued to be administered until the end of the Ten-Year World Crusade in 1963 by a group of individuals whom Shoghi Effendi had designated "Hands of the Cause of God" and whom he had called the "chief stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth."[31] In 1963, the Universal House

[30] Momen and Smith, *op.cit.*

[31] *Idem.*

of Justice, a body which was ordained in Bahaullah's writings, was established by election.

2.1.5 The Universal House of Justice (1963-)

Since its establishment in 1963, the Universal House of Justice has been the highest authority in the Baha'i world. It directs the affairs of the Baha'i Faith at the international level and provides guidance and co-ordination for the activities of the various National Spiritual Assemblies.

The Universal House of Justice has launched successive plans for the spread and consolidation of Baha'i communities around the world. These plans have been: the Nine Year Plan (1964-73); the Five Year Plan (1973-79); the Seven Year Plan (1979-86); the Six Year Plan (1986-92); the Three Year Plan (1993-96); and the Four Year Plan (1996-2000). In broad outline these plans have included the tasks of[32]:

- spreading the Baha'i Faith to all parts of the globe and increasing the number of its adherents;
- establishing and improving the functioning of the Baha'i administrative order in all parts of the world and accelerating the maturation of the national and local Baha'i communities so that they take on more of the functions envisaged for them in the Baha'i teachings;
- encouraging the individual spiritual development of all Baha'is as well as their universal participation in all aspects of Baha'i community life
- improving the qualitative aspects of Baha'i community and family life, especially through a wider extension of Baha'i education;

[32] *Idem.*

- promoting the greater involvement of the Baha'is in the life of human society, and in particular the pursuit of projects of social and economic development in well-established Baha'i communities;
- increasing worldwide the translation, production, distribution and use of Baha'i literature;
- proclaiming the message of Bahaullah to all strata of society and minority groups;
- developing the Baha'i world centre as the spiritual and administrative focus of the world Baha'i community;
- collecting, classifying and making available the writings of the central figures of the Baha'i Faith;
- erecting, as resources allow, further Baha'i Houses of Worship, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs;
- extending the relationships of the International Baha'i Community with international organizations such as the United Nations and its subsidiary organs.

A notable feature of the most recent plans has been the increasing extent to which responsibility for drawing up and monitoring the plans has been devolved away from the Baha'i World Centre towards the national and local Baha'i communities.

2.2 Conversions

2.2.1 Jews

During the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, a substantial number of Iranian Jews converted to newly founded Baha'i Faith. The Jewish conversion movement began in Hamadan around 1877, and by 1884. From there, the

Baha'i Faith spread to the Jewish communities of other Iranian cities, including Kashan, Tehran, Isfahan, Bukhara, and Gulpaygan.

Although a reliable statistics are hard to locate, a number of foreign observers have made estimates about the number of Jewish Baha'i converts. Ephraim Neumark, a Jewish traveler, gives the exaggerated estimate of two million[33] and Lord Curzon's estimates were 50, 100 and 150 families in Kashan, Hamadan and Tehran respectively. The huge difference between those estimated figures emanates from the lack of record at that time and as well as the variety of definition of conversion from sympathizers to propagators.

Various scholars have suggested reasons why the Iranian Jews might have been attracted to the Baha'i Faith. We might see how many of these can be shown to apply both to Jewish and Zoroastrian converts.

> *Habib Levy suggests that the poor economic and social conditions under which Jews lived induced many of them to convert (Tarikh-i-Yahud-i-Iran 781-82). If this were the case, we might expect the conversions to occur mostly among the poorer classes of Jews and in areas where the Jewish community was the most depressed. This does not seem to have been the case. Bahá'í biographies indicate that the Jews who first converted were often doctors or educated artisans. Poorer Jews seem to have converted somewhat later.*[34]

At the time Jewish conversions began in 1877 in Hamadan, the economic position of the Jews there had improved considerably due to a shift in trade routes. In 1862, the

[33] Mehrdad Amanat, "Messianic Expectation and Evolving Identities" in Dominic Parvaz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (ed.), *The Baha'is of Iran*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p.7.

[34]Susan Maneck, *Conversion of Religious Minorities to the Bahá'í Faith in Iran: Some Preliminary Observations* available at www.baha'i-library.com.

British established regular steamer service between Basrah and Baghdad. This placed Hamadan on the major artery linking Baghdad and Europe with Tehran. Jews were prominent in the trade of cotton textiles from England that were transported on this route. By the end of the century, eighty percent of that trade was in their hands. The Jews of Yazd, however, were dependent on the declining silk trade and experienced the greatest economic deprivation during this period. Yet, Yazd did not experience a significant number of Jewish conversions to the Baha'i religion at that time.

Habib Levy also suggests that Jews sometimes converted to the Baha'i Faith to obtain relief from persecution[35]. Evidence does not support this view. Baha'is lacked even the secondary legal status accorded to other religious minorities within the Islamic state as "People of the Book." Attacks against Baha'is were usually the more virulent, and they could hardly offer anyone else protection. Converts to the Baha'i Faith remained within their ancestral community as long as they were tolerated there and could avoid persecution by doing so. In the event of expulsion, they found themselves in the precarious position of belonging to no recognized religious community.

In Hamadan, many Jewish Baha'is pretended to convert to Protestantism in order to obtain the protection of the Presbyterian missionaries. In Yazd, Zoroastrian Baha'is had better success maintaining their position within the Zoroastrian community and thereby remained relatively immune to the persecutions that afflicted Baha'is of Muslim background.

Walter Fischel, another historian of Middle Eastern Jewry, sees the general ignorance that existed among the Jews of Iran regarding the basic tenets of their religion as a primary determinant of the conversions[36]:

[35] *Idem.*

[36] *Idem.*

> *Had Persian Jews possessed the spiritual leaders of a high cultural standing in the last century, had the rabbis and the schools taught and asserted a Judaism free from superstitious notions, empty formalism and medieval prejudices, had they shown a true sense for Judaism and its ethics, the conception of God, its ideas of the messiah, its national aspirations, its contributions to world culture, Bahá'ísm would hardly have won any Jewish hearts. (Fischel, "Jews in Persia" 156)*

Several other factors seem to have encouraged conversion. Fischel notes that the universality displayed by the Bahá'ís in contrast to the insularity of the Jewish community also provided a strong inducement to conversion. Levy also noted the profound impression Bahá'ís made upon the Jews by their kindness and tolerance[37]:

> *The Jews observed that the very Muslims [Baha'is] who yesterday had regarded Jews as unclean and infidels and who tormented them even unto death, today, with the utmost affection, showed respect to them. If a Jew went to a Bahá'ís' place of worship there was no danger, the Bahá'í would even invite him and regard him as having the same rank as hirmself; for the leader of the new religion [Bahá'u'lláh] had said that all humanity are the servants of God and there is no difference between them. (Levy, Tarikh-i-Yahud-i-lran 627)*

Given several reasons enumerated above, it is still prone to discussion why Jews chose to convert to Baha'i Faith which was much more exposed to humiliation but not to Islam, to its safer realm.

The answer may be sought in economical developments in Iran in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth century, Iran became more dependent on global trends led by regional and global factors. These developments caused further

[37] *Idem.*

deterioration in the condition of the Jew communities like the ones in Kashan. Besides, at a time when Iran was deeply affected by war, famine and epidemics, political uncertainities and weakening central authority, Faith was one of the few anchors of personal stability and community support.[38]

In addition of that negative compelling element of conversions, some positivie dimensions were also present in the happening of conversions. An expansion of domestic markets leading to the emergence of a national economy by the twentieth century was partly fuelled by new trade routes and an increased European demand for Iran's products, such as carpets. Some groups of Jews especially those in Hamadan experienced rapid economic development and consequent socio-cultural developments such as establishment of a number of European-style schools. Many younger Jewish migrates into those developing areas had to cope with new work environment and faced new challenges to their conventional beliefs whereas they had no family ties and community support.

At that point, Baha'i Faith constituted a gateaway for those and enabled to create new identities which were more affiliated with the evolving European-like environment and had close ties with West and its trade modes.

Baha'i Faith, in this respect, tolerated fluid or flexible religious identities and the adoption of Baha'i identity did not necessitate abandoning deep-rooted social ties involving many kinship, marriage and business relationship.[39] Therefore, the Faith eased the lives of the ones both affected negatively and positively by the new developments in the economy of Iran and it became a tool of identity estsablishment in such facets.

[38] Amanat, *op.cit*. p.9.

[39] *Ibid*., p.14.

2.2.2 Zoroastrians

Another major community which converted to Baha'i Faith in masses was Zoroastrians of especially Yazd, Kirman, Kashan and Tehran. The number of converts between the early 1880s and 1920s is controversial but as an estimated number it is up to 4.000 Zoroastrians in Iran and 1.000 in India.

The reasons of conversions were argued among scholars but contrary to the popular beleief that the conversions were a means of securing the prosperity and safety, the reverse was likely to be truer.

Fereydun Vahman argues that the reasons lying beneath the conversions were perhaps the search for modernity and the need to come to terms with the new age demand for change[40] which was felt in Iran mentioned in the previous pages.[41]

The messianic expectations which was also the case for Jewish conversions, created one of the utmost elements of conversion pattern of Zoroastrians who found the new religion in harmony with their own beliefs, fulfilling the dreams of the coming of Saoshyant.[42]

Vahman, appreciating the above mentioned aspect, summarizes the reasons of conversion into the following main themes:[43]

[40]Fereydun Vahman, "Conversions of Zoroastrians to the Baha'i Faith" in Dominic Parvaz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (ed.), *The Baha'is of Iran*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p.34.

[41] *Supra.*

[42] One of three sons of Zarahustra; through his coming, sickness, old age and death will disappear from the world as will greed, tyranny, heresy and related evil.

[43] Vahman, *op.cit.,* p.34.

1. the impact of the suffering and persecution of the Baha'is
2. the fulfillment of prophecies
3. Baha'i universalism and ethics
4. Iranian elements in the Baha'i teachings
5. Bahaullah's and Abdul-Baha's letters to Zoroastrians

The author argues that the suffering and exposal to persecution situates on the legitimacy search of Zoroastrians and also Jews and in this perspective Baha'i Faith seemed the most legitimate and for the second theme, he mentions the huge apocalyptic literature in Zoroastrianism. He makes an important point about Baha'i interpretations of prophecies:

> *Bahaullah's fulfillment of Zoroastrian prophecy was never meant to bear the test of textual and hermeneutical scrunity. The new revelation was the new divine standard, the fresh locus of authority, the touchstone of truth, past and present. The fulfillment motif provided the esthaological climax at the crescendo of salvation history. The old prophecies served as bridges into the Baha'i era, and the dawn of a new chiliasm or esthatological millennium. The old, mantic and vatic texts had served their purpose in the eyes of Zoroastrian Baha'is. Prophecies, in the post-conversion experience, were only referentially meaningful. At first, Bahaullah was validated by the prophecies, when Zoroastrians embraced Bahaullah as the promise Shah Bahram. After becoming Baha'is, the reverse was true: It was Bahaullah who validated the prophecies concerning Shah Bahram. In effect, Bahaullah redefined the role of Shah Bahram (Buck 1998).*[44]

For further validation of Vahman's third theme regarding Baha'is' universalism, it is obvious that Baha'i Faith shared many similarities but also widened the Zoroastrian

[44] *Ibid.*, p.37.

worldview which consists of motifs such as lack of prejudice, love of humankind, kindness to animals and respect for nature.

Zoroastrianism is an ancient religion in claim of being the ancestors of Persian culture and identity and a closer study of Baha'i scriptures reveals many elements which reflect ancient Iranian religious motifs. At that point, Vahman gives an example from *Bayan* that requires Babis to go outside each Friday and welcome the sun by chanting a special verse in praise of light which is also present in early Zoroastrianism.[45]

The author further finds evidence in letters which was sent to Zoroasters by Bahaullah and Abdul-Baha. The letters were even sent to simple people who used to suffer from invasion of Iran by Arabs. The tone of them was very sympathetic and the language used was very simple and pure Persian which the author attributed great importance in attracting Zoroasters to Baha'ism.

Another scholar of Baha'i studies Eliz Sansarian points out that Zoroastrian conversion to Baha'ism may have been prompted by the need to be part of a progressive group, and many did not abandon their Zoroastrian roots or community rituals.[46]

As a conclusion, without disregarding the reasons which were mentioned above and other works, the main reason of Zoroastian conversions to Baha'i Faith may be addressed in the parallel lines as in the Jewish case. It was the end of nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century and Iran had recently started to engage in economical activities of West and consequently its values through a series of reforms in economical and socio-cultural arena. Seeing their dream of redemption coming true with these reforms, and with more contact with the West and modern ideologies,

[45] *Ibid*., p.38.

[46]Sansarian, *op.cit*.

many Zoroastrians, in particular those residing in Tehran and larger urban areas, adopted more liberal lifestyles and loosened their ties with traditional society and it happened through conversion to Baha'i Faith.

CHAPTER 3

PERSECUTION OF BAHA'IS IN IRAN

3.1 Persecution in international law

"Persecution" is one of the core concepts of international law, particularly international refugee law. Persecution is the systematic mistreatment of an individual or group by another group. The most common forms are religious persecution, ethnic persecution, caste system and political persecution, though there is naturally some overlap between these terms. The inflicting of suffering, harassment, isolation, imprisonment, fear, or pain are all factors that may establish persecution. Even so, not all suffering will necessarily establish persecution. The suffering experienced by the victim must be sufficiently severe. The threshold level of severity has been a source of much debate.

In international law, the essential element of definition of persecution is „harm'. While making persecution analysis, the extent to which harm exists, the forms of it and the perpetrator are the key factors. Therefore, slightly detailed information about harm may be useful for further understanding of the persecution applied on Baha'is.

3.1.1 Physical Harm

Physical harms represent one of the central types of persecution. It may include beatings, sexual abuse, and mutilation. Any conduct causing bodily injury or physical pain, however slight, is sufficient to be included under this form of harm. The inclusion of physical harms as a basis for establishing persecution is noncontentious and universally accepted. Despite its universal acceptance, the

relevance and importance of particular physical harms to a persecution assessment have, at times, not been expressed and analyzed with sufficient clarity. Discussions of physical harm should be limited to the expression of specific conduct rather than abstract concepts or terms with particular legal significance[47].

3.1.2 Restraints and Deprivations of Privacy

There are many harms deemed relevant to a persecution analysis that can collectively be described as restraints and deprivations of privacy. Restraints include arrests, interrogations, imprisonment, and other means of detention.

Slavery would also fall under this category, as would indentured servitude and any physical or psychological barrier that prevents a person from leaving a physical location or otherwise impedes his or her movement[48].

3.1.3 Resource and Opportunity Limitation

The third category concerns economic harms. Economic harms include the direct confiscation of money, such as theft by private actors or a government's decision to impose a monetary fine under the color of State authority, but also the destruction or confiscation of real property and other tangible possessions. Economic harms also encompass the rescission of government services that lead to the loss of a benefit the applicant does not have the means to pay for otherwise; health benefits and food rations would be examples. The loss of employment is another frequently analyzed economic harm, along with related actions that negatively impact victims' future earning capacity, by way of lost job opportunities or akin means.

[47] Scott Rempell, "Defining Persecution", Utah Law Review, Vol. 2013, No.1(2013).

[48] *Idem.*

Victims of economic harms are usually subjected to multiple economic consequences that manifest concurrently or sequentially. If a government fires someone and prohibits the individual's future employment elsewhere in the government, such conduct can impact both the individual's current paycheck and future opportunities, particularly if the individual possesses a skill set uniquely suited for government work, or where job prospects in the private sector are bleak[49].

3.1.4 Psychological Harm

The harms discussed in the previous three categories all involve actions and consequences that are comprehensively tangible and lucid. Psychological harms are much harder to assess in this respect. The consequences are largely internal, and thus less subject to verification. Perhaps the opaque nature of mental states accounts for the failure of the Board and federal circuit courts to engage in a systematic effort to develop a framework for analyzing psychological harm. But psychological harms are undoubtedly an important ingredient in the persecution lexicon.

Two points show why psychological harms *should* be recognized as a distinct component of a persecution analysis as Rempell indicates[50]:

First, recognizing such harm is consistent with a central purpose behind refugee protection, namely to protect individuals compelled to flee a constant and unrelenting feeling of hopelessness for their safety, deprived of any ability to seek recourse from the State. It is this fear for safety that makes psychological harms so poignant because the attendant deprivation of emotional tranquility can be continuous. Second, psychological harms are a frequent byproduct of other types of harms. Discounting the accompanying mental suffering would skew the true breadth of the harm a victim actually experiences.82 The consequences of physical harms can heal

[49] *Idem.*

[50] *Idem.*

over a period of time, but the psychological repercussions might not mend so quickly, if at all.

Nearly all the triggers of psychological harm can be broken down into three categories: threats, harms to self, and harms to third parties. A government's participation in persecutory conduct, or failure to control the harmful actions of private actors, represents a quasi-fourth category.

3.1.5 Deprivations of Human Rights

Persecution encompasses harms other than human rights abuses, but a primary grounding of refugee law is to protect individuals and groups from human rights abuses that represent "a breakdown in the relationship between a person and his or her state."

Thus, it is important to assess how these rights fit into an understanding of the persecution definition. In particular, should the human rights grounding of the harms in question be considered expressly in persecution assessments, or is it sufficient to discuss the specific forms of harm falling into one of the four above-mentioned categories without reference to any human rights that the harm might violate? Ultimately, the human rights underpinnings of many forms of harm should play a role in the persecution analysis when it helps to identify harm and subsequently gauge the severity of harm.

3.2 The roots of discrimination and persecution faced by religious minorities in Iran

In order to fully understand the roots of the severe discriminations faced by religious minorities in Iran, it is important to be acquainted with the basic founding principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran.[51]

The first principle is that divine law is the unique source of legitimacy and political authority.

The second one is that, while waiting for the reappearance of the Twelfth Imam, the depository and unique interpreter of divine law is the Spiritual Leader. Together, these two principles form what is known as the concept of "Velayate Faghih" or "spiritual leadership" - the cornerstone of the Islamic Republic of Iran - according to which religious jurisprudence, best expressed through the Spiritual Leader, is given control over all aspects of civil and political society. The peculiarity of the Islamic Republic of Iran is not the mere fact that Islam is the religion of the State (other States share the same feature) but rather the fact that the State itself is conceived as an institution and instrument of the divine will. In this system, which can best be described as a clerical oligarchy, there is an identification between divine truth and clerical authority.

Article 110 of the Constitution lists all the powers granted to the Spiritual Leader, appointed by his peers for an unlimited duration. Among others, the Spiritual Leader exercises his control over the judiciary, the army, the police, the radio, the television, but also over the President and the Parliament, institutions elected by the people. Article 91 of the Constitution establishes a body known as the "Guardian Council" whose function is to examine the compatibility of all legislation enacted by the

[51] *Discrimination Against Religious Minorities in Iran*, report presented by FIDH and the Ligue de Défense des Droits de l'Homme en Iran, August 2003.

Islamic Consultative Assembly with "the criteria of Islam and the Constitution" and who can therefore veto any and all legislation. Half of the members of the Guardian Council are appointed by the Spiritual Leader and the other half are elected by the Islamic Consultative Assembly from among the Muslim jurists nominated by the Head of the Judicial Power (who is, himself, appointed by the Spiritual Leader). The Guardian council exercise a double control of any draft legislation, with two different procedures[52]:

- conformity with the Constitution: all 12 elected members vote, a simple majority recognizes the constitutionality

- conformity with Islam: only the six religious leaders elected personally by the Spiritual leader vote, and a simple majority is required to declare the compatibility of a draft legislation with Islam.

Consequently, four religious leaders may block all draft legislation enacted by the Parliament. The Guardian Council and the Supreme Leader therefore and in practice centralize all powers in Iran.

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Article 12 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran states:

> *The official religion of Iran is Islam and the Twelver Ja'fari school, and this remains eternally immutable. Other Islamic schools are to be accorded full respect, and their followers are free to act in accordance with their own jurisprudence in performing their religious rites.*

Although Sunni Muslims are accorded full respect by the Constitution, some Sunni groups have reported to be discriminated against by the government. Of particular

[52] *Idem.*

concern is the refusal of the authorities to allow the construction of a mosque in Tehran for the Sunni Muslim community.[53]

Article 13 of the Constitution gives a special status to three religious minorities named "recognized religious minorities":

> *Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education.*

Despite the existence of a specific status in the Constitution, these three recognized religious minorities face severe discrimination. First of all, they are being discriminated against by a number of legal provisions, which discriminate *per se* against all non-Muslims.

Secondly, since Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians are only free to perform their religion "within the limits of the law", the authorities have imposed in practice important limits to their right to exercise their religion, a right that is being continuously restricted and interfered with. Conversion from Islam to one of the three recognized religions (apostasy) may still be punishable by death. The government has been particularly vigilant in recent years in curbing proselytising activities by evangelical Christians, whose services are conducted in Persian. Moreover, all three minorities complain of discrimination in the field of employment, report clear limitations imposed upon their upward mobility and complain of being treated like "second-class citizens".[54]

[53] *Idem.*

[54] *Idem.*

As a consequence of Articles 12 and 13 of the Constitution, citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran are officially divided into four categories: Muslims, Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians. Therefore, despite the fact that they constitute the largest religious minority in Iran, the Baha'is are a "non-recognized" religious minority without any legal existence, classified as "unprotected infidels" by the authorities. They are not even granted the theoretical right to perform their religion and are subject to systematic discrimination on the basis of their religious beliefs.

In the same manner, atheists do not have any recognized status. They must declare their Faith in one of the four officially recognized religions in order to be able to claim a number of legal rights, such as the possibility to apply for the general examination to enter any university in Iran.

In light of constitutional articles 13 and 26, recognized religious minorities are allowed to assemble and manage their own, smaller courts for addressing family matters, personal disputes, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. However, the Islamic regime maintains its hegemony in this sphere of civil life as well. These courts and their rulings are subject to supervision and final approval by the Islamic state authorities.[55]

3.3 The Case of Baha'is

Counting approximately 300,000 members, the Baha'is represent the largest religious minority in Iran. Nevertheless, they have been deliberately omitted from the list of the three recognized religious minorities mentioned in the Constitution and classified as "unprotected infidels" and "heretics" by the Islamic regime and former regimes.

[55]Sarah Oliai, "Religious Minorities in Iran: Baha'is, Jews, and the Islamic State", *A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics, np.*

The Baha'is have been persecuted throughout the history of their Faith in Iran. Early followers faced violent opposition from both religious authorities and governing dynasties in Persia; some 20.000 perished in pogroms during 19th century.[56] However, following the Islamic Revolution in 1979 there was a sharp increase in the systematic, government-supported programme to eliminate the Baha'i community. Since the early 1980s, over 200 have been executed, murdered, thousands arrested, detained, interrogated, and tens of thousands deprived of jobs, pensions and educational opportunities. The community's holy places, cemeteries and property have been confiscated, vandalized or destroyed, and discrimination against members of this religion is official policy as will be explained in the following pages. But beforehand, a brief history of persecution of Baha'is will be elaborated below.

3.3.1 Persecution History of Baha'is in Iran

As mentioned above, since the rise of the Babi movement in Iran in the 1840s, and later as it evolved into the Baha'i Faith in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century, Babis and Baha'is were subjects of waves of persecution and discrimination in their homeland. And persecution constitutes an outstanding part of their social and religious identity. It has already been explained that the aim of this study is not to maintain a discursive approach to the "persecution" acclaimed by the Baha'is and it is taken for granted as there are various tools to verify the below given data.

As a note at that point, Abbas Amanat's clarification regarding the nature of the persecution which Baha'is have been exposed to may be remarkable[57]:

[56] *Nature of the Persecution against the Baha'is in Iran*, background document published by The Baha'i International Community's United Nations Office, January 2011 edition, p.2.

[57] Abbas Amanat, "The Historical Roots of The Persecution of Babis and Baha'is in Iran" in Dominic Parvaz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (ed.), *The Baha'is of Iran*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p.170.

It is true that Iranians never committed an act of genocide against the Babis/or the Baha'is. Nor did they in the course of their long history, as far as can be ascertained, commit 'ethnic cleansing' against other religious or ethnic groups (perhaps with the exception of the Mazdakites in the sixth century). Thus, 'Babi killing' as a phenomenon in modern Iran history, is not comparable in quantitative or qualitative terms to what European whites did to endogenous peoples of the Americas, Africa and Australia or what the Ottoman Turks did to the Armenians or Nazi Germany to Jews, Slavs and Gypsies or Serbs to Muslim Bosnians.

The genesis of Babi/Baha'i persecution could be traced back even beyond the inception of the movement in Iran, to the recurring insatances of maltreatment of non-conformists of various sorts at least since the late Safavid period (1501-1732); most distinctly in the massacre of the Nuqtawis and the expulsion of Hurufis[58] in the new restrictions imposed on Jewish communities and later in doctrinal refutation and active persecution of the Sufi orders in the seventeenth century and also in hostile treatment of the newly emerging Shaykhi theological school.

But the directly related communal intolerance emerged with religious characteristic of Qajar Iran which led to persecution of dissenters from the orthodoxies of Usuli Shiism[59] one of which was the Bab whom "*God shall make manifest*". Bab was sentenced to death by Shiite clerics of Tabriz in 1848[60] and at this point, it should be noted that Bab was a prisoner of conscience, having committed no crime save doctrinal nonconformity. On 8 July 1850, the Qajar government carried out the clergy's sentence in the wake of fighting that had broken out in Mazandaran, Zanjan and Nayriz between Shiites who had accepted the Bab.[61]

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[58] Ibid., p.172.

[59] Juan R.I. Cole, *Modernity and the Millenium: The Genesis of the Baha'i Faith in the Nineteenth Century Middle East*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 26.

[60] *Supra.*

[61] Cole, *op.cit*., p.27.

The same scenario was at stake for Bahaullah in 1848 that time by Muhammed Shah. The crime attributed to him was nothing but accepting the Bab. Throughout the two decades from the death warrant of 1848 till his brutal incarceration, without adequate food or water, in the Akka fortress, Bahaullah had never committed any civil crime or been convicted of any infraction against the law in any judicial court, as indicated in Cole's study.[62] Moojan Momen indicates that[63] conservative estimates put the total number of Babis killed during the whole period of 1848 to 1853 at 3,000, while other historians, including the Iranian court chronicler Sipihr and the Baha'i leader „Abdul-Baha (1844–1921), claim 20,000 or more.

The social marginalization and legal exclusion of the Baha'is in Iran stands in stark contrast to the religious tolerance that characterized Islamic civilization at its peak[64] and that moderate Muslims around the world and inside Iran still advocate. The security of the Baha'i community, however, has been continually undermined by ongoing power struggles that have played out within and between the civil and religious authorities in Iran throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[65]

As a result of the pressure on Babis/Baha'is, the religion went underground and It was not until the late 1860s that the Babi movement resurfaced. By this time, it had been reinvigorated and transformed under the leadership Bahaullah. The persecutions against the Baha'is took on a new form. The majority of the Baha'is hid their allegiance and tried to avoid problems in this way. From time to time, however, an outburst of persecution would occur in a particular place. On one occasion one or

[62] *Ibid*, p.29.

[63] Moojan Momen, "The Babi and Baha'i community of Iran: a case of "suspended genocide"?", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 7(2), June(2005), pp. 221-241.

[64] Boris Handal, „From Moorish Cordova to the Baha´ 'ı´s of Iran: Islamic Tolerance and Intolerance.'' IDEA Journal of Social Sciences, 12:1 (2002), http://www.ideajournal.com/articles.php?id=45.

[65] Micheal Karlberg, "Constructive Resilience: The Baha'i Response to Oppression", Peace&Change, Vol.35, No.2, April 2010.

two leading Baha'is might be executed; on another, Baha'i houses might be looted and Baha'is beaten up; at another time, the Baha'is of a locality might be driven from their homes and expelled.[66]

With the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty, the persecutions of the Baha'is took on a different format. In the preceding phase, the persecutions were initiated by local factors and the central government would sometimes support the local action but sometimes oppose it for fear of losing control. Now, with the strong centralizing impetus of the Pahlavi regime, it was the central government itself that gradually became the principle initiator of the persecutions.[67] It was partially becuse the Baha'is became more visible with their schools and other organizational bodies.

The most serious episode of persecution during the Pahlavi era took place in 1955 when a minor cleric, Falsafi, was given the freedom to broadcast on the government radio station inflammatory speeches rousing the mob to action against the Baha'is. There was a country-wide outburst of harassment of Baha'is with much looting and some deaths. By the end of the Qajar dynasty (1796-1925), the growing rift between *ulama* and government was evident in their conflicting attitudes toward the Baha'is. The clergy, perceiving a twofold threat from the Baha'i successes at conversion and their rejection of clerical authority that the clergy feared would spread to the Shiite population, embraced a policy of unmitigated hostility towards the Baha'is. Muhammad Reza Pahlavi would embrace this policy in his efforts to mend governmental relations with the hierocracy[68] because while the masses remained largely under clerical influence, the bureaucracy, the officers' corps of the newly created nadonal army, and the intellectual elite began to lose interest in the intricacies of the Sharia and in theological disputations. They welcomed Reza Shah's attempts at modernization, which included unveiling women, restricting turban

[66] Momen,"The Babi and …", p.223.

[67] *Idem.*

[68] Adam Berry, "The Baha'i Faith and its Relationship to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: A Brief History", *International Social Science Review*, Volume 79, Numbers 3&4, pp. 137-151.makale

wearing, secularizing the educational system, and introducing Europeanized legal codes. The clergy that had helped Reza Shah ascend the throne found itself marginalized and with greatly diminished influence in public life. The mullahs perceived similarities between some of the modernizing reforms and Baha'i teachings and linked their dislike for these reforms, and for Reza Shah, with their old hatred of the Baha'is. They spread rumors that the Shah himself was a Baha'i, and that Baha'is dominated the government and were the principal force for subverting Islam.[69]

3.3.2 Persecution by the hand of Islamic State of Iran

Already mentioned in the Introduction chapter, here it is important to recall the discussion regarding "persecution" motif in the history of Baha'is in Iran. Although this chapter is composed of a more legal insight, the identity forming role of persecution should be kept in mind.

After 1979, following the Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a renewed wave of persecution engulfed the Baha'i community. Before Ayatollah Khomeini came to power, he was already a self-declared adversary of the Baha'i Faith and he made it clear that the Baha'i community, which constituted the largest religious minority in Iran with more than 300,000 members, would be denied the basic human rights that would be afforded to other religious minorities in the country.[70] The famous verdict of Khomeini has been matched during the past seven years by both organized and random campaigns against the Bah'is within Iran, which at times have reached the proportions of a full-scale pogrom but not, so far, those of the holocaust some writers have predicted: In an interview given shortly before his return to Iran in 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini was asked about the position of religious minorities in a future Islamic Republic. In his reply, he guaranteed protection and

[69] Firuz Kazemzadeh, "The Baha'is in Iran: Twenty Years of Repression", *Social Research*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Summer 2000), pp. 537-558.

[70] Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied*: *The Persecution of Baha'is in Iran,* p.32.

respect for such groups, but, when asked specifically about the largest of the minorities-the Baha'is-he asserted that 'they are a political faction; they are harmful; they will not be accepted'.[71]

Momen points out the new format of the persecution after the Revolution as following[72]:

> *After this revolution, the bureaucratic harassment and government-directed denials of human rights increased sharply. This differed qualitatively from the situation before 1979 in that whereas previously the Baha'is merely fell victim to sporadic government actions, there was now a specific and planned programme for the elimination of the Baha'i community.*

By denying the Baha'i Faith official status as a religion, and maintaining its stance that the Baha'is represent a seditious movement, the Islamic Republic of Iran has relied on several provisions o fthe constitution, especially the final stipulation of Article 14, to serve as legal justification for effectively denying any rights to the Baha'is. Other provisions, such as Article 22, offer the government the explicit option of using the law to circumvent the constitution, thus rendering these constitutional protections even more worthless. As indicated in Adam Berry's work[73]:

> *Perhaps more frightening than this constitutional maneuvering is a ruling by Ayatullah Muhammad Saduqi, Khomeini's former aide, "[which] publicly declared Baha'is...ma/idur al-dam (those of uselessly squandered*

[71] Denis MacEoin, "The Baha'is of Iran: The Roots of Controversy", *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1987), pp. 75-83.

[72] Momen, *"The Babi and ..."*, p.224.

[73] Berry, *op.cit*., p.141.

blood)...[meaning] that the blood of Baha'is was halal (permitted) and therefore lawful to shed.

The peculiarity of the persecution faced by the Baha'is in Iran is its systematic and particularly organized nature, proven by the emergence in early 1993 of a secret official document giving precise instructions for the slow strangulation of the Baha'i community. Drafted in 1991 by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council at the request of the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader and approved by the latter, this memorandum came to light in the 1993 report by the Special Representative to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. It sets forth specific guidelines for dealing with "the Baha'i question" so that Baha'i progress and development [be] blocked. The memorandum includes the following instructions:

· "They must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Baha'is."

· "Deny them employment if they identify themselves as Baha'is."

· "Deny them any position of influence, such as in the educational sector, etc."

· "A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country."

a. Denial of the right to exist and function as a religious community

Since Article 13 of the Constitution states that "Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education", Baha'is are not allowed, even in theory, to exercise freely their religion and to exist and function as an organized religious community.

i. Denial of the right to assemble and to maintain administrative institutions

The Baha'i Faith has no clergy. Its institutions perform many of the functions reserved to clergy in other religions and are the foundational element of Baha'i community life.[74] However, the Baha'is have been denied for two decades the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Even those who worship or meet in small groups have been harassed by the authorities, who regularly disrupt such meetings.

The Iranian Baha'i community annually elected an administrative assembly of nine members to look after its vital needs until 1983, when the government called for the institutions to be dismantled. This measure has been particularly trying for this religious minority because, in the absence of any form of clergy, the communal, spiritual and social activities of Baha'is revolve around these institutions.

The National Spiritual Assembly of Iran dissolved itself and the rest of the administrative structure in the country as a demonstration of goodwill towards the government. Since then, the Baha'i community in Iran has officially been denied freedom of association, the right to assemble and to maintain its institutions. And no Baha'i community centers are permitted in Iran.

ii. Denial of the right to possess or rent community property

Baha'i cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, administrative centres and other assets were seized shortly after the 1979 revolution. The few properties that were not destroyed have not been returned. After the destruction of Baha'i cemeteries, members of this minority have only been given Access to specifically designated areas of wasteland to bury their dead. They are forbidden to mark individual graves or to construct mortuary facilities.

[74] *A Faith Denied,* p.3.

In 2001, a colonel of the Revolutionary Guard bulldozed a piece of land in Abadeh officially used by the Bahá'ís as a cemetery. Although the colonel was found guilty by the local court, he was acquitted on appeal. Also of concern is the sentence issued on appeal in 2001 by a judge of the Supreme Office of Control and Review following the confiscation of a property rented by Muslim owners to the Baha'is[75]:

> *[…] seizure and confiscation of the properties belonging to the misguided sect of Baha'ism is legally and religiously justifiable.*

Since 2005, there have been severe attacks, often repeated against Baha'i cemeteries in over 25 different localities. The destruction was carried out with full cooperation from the authorities, despite appeals by local Baha'is who were even prevented from retrieving the sacred remains.

b. Executions and imprisonment on religious grounds

i. Executions

Since 1979, 201 Baha'is have been executed solely on the basis of their religious belief. 15 other members of the community have disappeared and are presumed dead. The last person to be executed was hanged in 1998 for having presumably converted a woman to the Baha'i Faith, an accusation that was consistently refuted by the woman. There is no evidence that the accused was accorded any legal process or access to a lawyer. His death sentence was not announced to him prior to his execution.

[75] *Discrimination Against Religious Minorities in Iran*

ii. Imprisonment

During the past few years, there has been a shift away from long-term imprisonment. The Baha'is previously sentenced to death have either been released or had their sentences reduced. However, as of July 2003, four Baha'is are still being detained because of their religious beliefs.

Two of them are charged with "Association with Baha'i institutions" and sentenced to 15 years of prison. Since 1998, arbitrary arrests and short-term detentions of Baha'is have increased and are being used by the authorities, instead of long-term imprisonment, as a new way of harassing and intimidating the Baha'i community by creating a permanent sense of insecurity.

According to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, who visited the Islamic Republic of Iran in February 2003, 23 Baha'is were arbitrarily arrested and detained for short periods of time because of their religious beliefs during the first semester of 2003. They were released only after humiliating interrogations concerning their Faith.

c. Denial of access to education

Baha'i children and adolescents have been subjected to harassment, vilification and severe psychological pressure in primary, middle and high schools throughout Iran- and these abuses are mainly committed by their teachers and school administrators.

For at least five-years anti-Baha'i leaflets have been distributed in schools in different cities, and efforts have been made through the school system to identify Baha'i students of all ages and members of their families.[76]

[76] *Nature of the Persecution …*, p.8.

Baha'is have also been officially barred from attending legally recognized public and private institutions of higher education in Iran for over two decades. It is an official policy of the government to expel Baha'is from universities and vocational training institutions, as soon as they are identified as adherents of this religion. All the Baha'i students who have appealed againts their expılsions with relevant authorities, and/or through the courts have seen their cases rejected and dismissed.

In 1987, in response to this demoralizing situation, the Baha'i community established its own programme, the "Baha'i Institute of Higher Education" (BIHE), created to address, to the extent of its resources, the needs of at least some of the community's young people. The government has been watching the BIHE's activities closely. Since 1998, the authorities have strived to intimidate those involved and to suppress the program. Faculty members have been arrested and pressured to sign statements attesting the end of the BIHE and their cooperation with it; materials, including textbooks, computers and documentary records have been seized.[77]

On 19 July 2002, while the BIHE was holding its qualification examinations across the country, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards entered eight of the fourteen premises where examinations were being held in two cities. In Shiraz, they videotaped the proceedings, interviewed several of the students and confiscated the examination papers of 25 students. In Mashhad, the Revolutionary Guards confiscated all of the examination papers as well as Baha'i books.[78] And more examples exist within that aspect of the presecution the Baha'is face.

d. Denial of the economic rights of individuals

The Iranian government has been carrying out a well organized and widespread scheme to deny Baha'is the right to employment. In hundreds of cases over the past

[77] *Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Iran...*

[78] *Idem.*

six years, officials have taken measures to make it impossible for Baha'is to earn a living, following the implementation of government orders to identify all members of the community. Official documents prove that these abuses are government policy. The government has also been seeking to systematically weaken the economic base of individuals.

i. Confiscation of individual properties

The property rights of individual Baha'is are generally disregarded in Iran. Since 1979, officials have confiscated a large number of private and business properties, homes, farms and shops belonging to Baha'is throughout the country. Since the Islamic revolution, the authorities have violated the right of the Baha'is to own property as well as their right to housing. They have confiscated large numbers of private and professional properties belonging to Baha'is, a phenomenon that has increased in recent months in several cities.

Some cases were taken to court, but the judgements demonstrated that the authorities continue to consider the Faith as an illegal movement and to legitimize human rights violations against Iranian citizens who are members of the community.[79] In such cases, some court decrees have justified the confiscations by the fact that the owner was an "active member of the misguided Baha'i sect". In a recent case, a Baha'i appealed to the Islamic Revolutionary Court for the return of his confiscated property. The Court upheld the decision of a lower court on the grounds that the owner had held Baha'i classes in this home and that many volumes of Baha'i books had been found there.

[79] *Nature of the Persecution…,* p.11.

ii. Denial of the possibility to earn a living

In the early 1980s, more than 10,000 Baha'i were dismissed from various positions, in particular in governmental and educational institutions. Some of them were even required to reimburse salaries received before their dismissal. Many remain unemployed and receive no unemployment benefits. Today, employment opportunities are still limited for Bahá'ís. In many cases, even when Baha'is manage to find employment in the private sector, the authorities force their employer to fire them. When Baha'is are able to start a private business, attempts are made to block their activities.

The Baha'is dismissed because of their religious beliefs were deprived of their pensions and some others were requested to pay back pensions previously granted. In four recent cases where Baha'is have been denied access to their rightfully earned pensions, documentary evidence prove that these benefits were denied solely on the basis of religious belief. Those documents explicitly state:

> *Payment of pension to those individuals connected with the bahá'í sect is illegal" [or an "unlawful act"].*

The right of Baha'is to inherit is also denied. A recent court decision dispossesses a Baha'i from inheritance on the following ground[80]:

> *...the religion of the deceased has been stated as Bahá'í. Since the religious minorities, according to the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, are only Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian, and Bahá'ísm is a misguided sect and is not recognized as a religion or as a religious minority, the issue of the*

[80] *Discrimination against religious minorities ...*

probate ofthe will as the sole beneficiary of the deceased is not religiously allowed, and is against the law.

The upsurge in human rights violations against Baha'is over the past six years was preceded and accompanied by efforts to incite hatred against them. Some officials openly encourage the persecution, and some members of the clergy preach sermons against the Baha'i Faith and its adherents. National and provincial budgets include allocations for "educational" programmes to "confront" the Baha'i Faith and there are official organs dedicated to that purpose. This is incitement to hatred, institutionalized.[81]

Articles, TV and radio programmes, government-affiliated websites, pamphlets, posters, exhibitions vilify the Baha'is and their religion. However, the Baha'is are prohibited from using any means of communication; therefore they have not been able to encounter those accusations. It is of particular concern that the government blocks all Baha'i websites, whether originating from within or outside Iran, thus depriving Baha'is of this most effective means of providing accurate information about their Faith.

Outside Iran, the persecution against tha Baha'is is one of the issues repeatedly denounced by the international community – the United Nations, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society – when condemning Iranian government violations of international human rights standards. For over 20 years, the UN General Assembly has adopted resolutions that include references to violations perpetrated against minorities in Iran, including the Baha'is.[82]

[81] *Nature of the Persecution ...,* p.14.

[82] *Idem.*

Since 2005, many special UN procedures reported and condemned the upsurge in oppressive acts[83] many of which were also mentioned in the reports on human rights in Iran by the UN Secretary General to the General Assembly in 2009 and 2010.[84]

As an updated example of those reports on the persecution of Baha'is published in 2012, the following statements may be attractive[85]:

> …
>
> *F. Unrecognized religious communities*
>
> *59. The Special Rapporteur continues to be alarmed by communications that demonstrate the systemic and systematic persecution of members of unrecognized religious communities, particularly the Baha" i community, in violation of international conventions.*
>
> *Moreover, the Government" s tolerance of an intensive defamation campaign meant to incite discrimination and hate against Baha" is violates its obligations as set out in article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.According to one report, 440 instances of slanderous speech against Baha" is were published A/HRC/19/6618 or broadcasted in the past two years. One such article, posted by the Rasa news agency on 8 March 2011, accused the Baha" i community of attempting to subvert Islam.*
>
> *60. Baha'is continue to be arbitrarily arrested and detained for their beliefs, in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In a report submitted to the Special Rapporteur, it was alleged that 474 Baha'is had been arrested since August 2004.*

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[83] Since 2005, human rights violations against Iranian Baha'is have been mentioned in documents submitted to the UN Human Rights Council by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, the Independent Expert on minbority issues, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression.

[84] See http://news.Baha'i.org/story/732 and http://news.Baha'i,org/story/796

[85] See http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A-HRC-19-66_en.pdf

Of that number, 97 were currently imprisoned (see annex, table IV); 199 had been released on bail and were awaiting trial; 26 had been released without bail; 96 had been tried andsentenced, and free pending appeal or summons to begin serving their sentences had been overturned on appeal; and 5 Baha'is had served their prison sentences and begun their terms of internal exile. An additional sentences; 34 had been tried and sentenced and had completed their prison terms and/or paid a fine; 35 arrests were reportedly made between August and November 2011.

61. Baha'is are subjected to severe socio-economic pressure, in violation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; in some cases, they have been deprived of property, employment and education. In recent months, for example, 10 shops and a well owned by Baha'is in two cities in Semnan Province were sealed by the authorities. Moreover, copies of several unsettling Government documents dating back to 1991 prescribe deprivation of education, the establishment of an office to counteract Baha'i publications, the denial of "positions of influence" to them and the trades prohibited for them. One Baha'i student reported in an interview that 800 Baha'is were denied university admission the year that his application was denied. In addition, several Baha'is recently arrested were affiliated with the Baha" i Institute for Higher Education, which is a university designed to educate Iranian Baha'is that are excluded from education.

CHAPTER 4

AN OVERVIEW TO "RECOGNIZED MINORITIES"

As indicated in the Introduction chapter, the aim of this chapter is to create a sense of location where the Baha'is stand in the long history of Iran and in relation to other religious minorities. The historical experiences of "recognized minorities" of Iran, namely Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians can create a deeper understanding of the roots of controversy and asymmetric relationship between Baha'is and the state of Iran.

4.1 Christians

Christianity arrived in Iran during the Parthian (Ashkanian) period. In the book of 'Acts of Apostles'[86] it is mentioned that on "the Day of Pentecost (part of harvest festival observed by early Christians) there were at Jerusalem "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and inhabitants of Mesopotamia".

Arbela, fifty miles east of river Tigris (Dejleh), the capital of Adiabene a small Persian border kingdom was the earliest center of Christianity in Iran (present day Iraq). There was a large concentration of Jews in Arbela and in Nisibis in eastern Mesopotamia and while some Jews were instrumental in spreading Christianity others opposed the new Faith. The first century Jewish historian, Josephus mentions that a king of Adiabene accepted Judaism about AD 36. Such a conversion made Arbela a natural center for Jewish Christian mission at an early date. Nisibis another major city of the area was also the seat of a Jewish Academy of learning. Christianity spread in both Villages and cities and by the end of the Parthian period (AD 225),

[86] See http://www.whiteestate.org/books/aa/aa.asp

Christian communities were settled all the way from Edessa, an important missionary center, to Afghanistan. The Chronicles of Arbela report that by this time there were already more than twenty bishops in Persia and Christians had already penetrated Arabia and Central Asia.[87]

At the time of the persecution of Christians in Rome many sought refuge in Iran and were given protection by the Iranian rulers who were tolerant towards them. Though thousands of Persians embraced Christianity, Persia remained Zoroastrian. The Persian Church was of Syrian origin, traditions and tendencies and for about three centuries, regarded Antioch (in Syria) as the center of its Faith and the seat of authority.

With Sassanian (AD 226-641), Christianity (and other religions) suffered resentment. When the Roman emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion in Rome (AD 312) and himself the sovereign of all Christians, the new fate became associated with Iran's archenemy. Religious and national feelings were united and paved the ground for future persecutions that continued in Persia for a century after they had ceased in Rome, where they started in the first place. [88]

The Sassanian kings in general championed Zoroastrianism, and though some did not mind Christianity, the national feeling always clung to the ancient creed. Nevertheless Christianity kept steadily growing partly due to deportation of several hundred thousand Christian inhabitants of Roman Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia by Shapour I (240-270 AD).[89] The deportees were settled in Mesopotamia, Persis (Pars) and Parthia. The decision was based on economic and demographic reasons but unintentionally promoted the spread of the new Faith. New cities and settlements in

[87] *Idem.*

[88] *Idem.*

[89] *Idem.*

fertile but sparsely populated regions such as Khuzistan and Meshan were built. Many Christians were employed in big construction projects and had a large number of skilled workers and craftsmen among them. The city soon became a significant cultural and educational center with the famous library and University of Jundaishapour, home to scholars from all over including many Christian and Jewish scholars. It also became the center of silk production in Iran with many Christians involving in every aspect of silk production, management and marketing.

This period of peace and prosperity for the Christian community lasted until the reign of Bahram II (276-293 AD). The persecutions were supported and even promoted by the powerful high priest Kirdir who in one inscription declares how Ahriman and the idols suffered great blows and continues as follows[90]:

> *and the Jews (Yahud), Buddists (Shaman), Hindus (Brahman), Nazarenes (Nasara), Christians (Kristiyan), Baptists (Makdag) and Manicheans (Zandik) were smashed in the empire, their idols destroyed, and the habitations of the idols annihilated and turned into abodes and seats of the gods.*

But these persecutions remained exceptions compared to the fourth century when systematic harassment of Christians began. Originally Christianity had spread among the Jews and the Syrians. But by the beginning of the fourth century, Persians in increasing numbers were attracted to Christianity. For such converts, even during peaceful times, membership in the church could mean loss of family, property, civil rights and even death. Some persecutions under Shapour II (309-379AD) were as horrid as those administered by the Roman Emperor Diocletian who used to burn or feed the Christians alive to wild beasts, or have them killed publicly at the games by the gladiators.

[90] Massoume Price, *A Brief History of Christianity in Iran* available at http://www.farsinet.com/iranbibl/christians_in_iran_history.html

Shapour's peace treaty with Emperor Jovian halted the persecutions for a while (AD 363). By this treaty, Mesopotamia and Armenia came under the control of Persia. In AD 409, the Persian king Yazdegard I, by an edict of toleration brought an end, for the time being, to the persecution of Christians. He had a Jewish wife and was well disposed towards both Judaism and Christianity and in fact was called the 'Christian King' by some. The edict allowed Christians to publicly worship and to build churches. The peace helped the Christian community to re-organize its life. Tensions eased further when Iranian Christians created their own ecclesiastical organizations with its own hierarchy and eventually became independent from the Western Church.[91]

Though Rome and Constantinople were the centers of the 'Orthodox Christianity', many Christian groups particularly in Mesopotamia opposed their policies and doctrines. In 410, a meeting of Christians was held at the Persian capital under the presidency of Mar Isaac, the bishop of Ctesiphon. An independent new Church was announced and the leader (metropolitan) was called 'Catholicos-Patriarch'. The council confirmed Mar Isaac as the first Catholicos and Archbishop of all the Orient.[92]

When Yazdegerd died in 420, and was succeeded by his son Bahram V, the persecution continued, and large numbers of Christians fled across the frontier into Roman territory. Bahram demanded the surrender of the Christian fugitives, and once again war was declared against Rome in 422. Although the latter half of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century was a period of conflict in the Eastern provinces, the period was also a time of expansion for the Christian Church and of literary activity. This literary and ecclesiastical development led to the formation of a Syriac literature in Persia (Syriac being the liturgical language of the Persian Church), and ultimately of a Christian Persian literature. By 420 there were 5

[91] *Idem.*

[92] Aptin Khanbaghi, *The Fire, the Star and the Cross: Minority Religions in Medieval and Early Modern Iran*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2006, p.13.

metropolitans including two at Merv and Heart and bishop Dadyeshu was elected Catholicos. He was imprisoned a year later and internal divisions and disputes were intensifying at the time amongst different Christian denominations.

The king took a particular interest in the question of religion and studied all religions practiced in Iran. But he remained a zealous Zoroastrian and at the end started persecuting both Christians and Jews. He tried to convert Armenians back into Zoroastrianism; he was defeated once, won again and took hostage the leaders of the Armenian Church and leading members of the local aristocratic families by carrying them off to Iran. The next successor Peroz (459-84) faced many disasters and wars and ended up a hostage. He persecuted the Jews and watched the Christian community going through internal conflict and doctrinal divisions.

Between 450 and 500 the Nestorians, followers of Nestorius the patriarch of Constantinople who created his own brand of Christianity were persecuted in the Roman Empire. They fled to Persia and received protection. Nestorianism had been rejected at a meeting of Christians from all over at 431 in Ephesus (Turkey) and their bishops were forced to flee to Iran.[93]

In the next century the Persian Church kept steadily increasing with a hierarchy of 230 bishops. Christians were scattered over Assyria, Babylonia, Chaldea, Arabia, Media, Khorasan and Persia proper, Turkestan, Merv and both shores of the Persian Gulf. The figure, 'Catholicos of Seleucia' became a powerful entity and the extent of his jurisdiction rivaled the Byzantine patriarchs. On the whole Christian missionaries were successful amongst all groups including high-ranking Iranians. There are accounts of Christians among the landlord classes in Mosul and the surrounding mountains. Khosro III (630) was killed in an insurrection headed by a Christian

[93] Prince, op.cit.

whose father had been the chief financial officer of the realm. Some of the patriarchs of the Nestorian Church were converts, or sons of converts, from Magi priesthood.[94]

Monasteries were introduced in Mesopotamia by monks from Egypt in fourth century and spread quickly. Accounts by Mar Awgin relates that his monastery near Nisibis contained three hundred and fifty monks, while seventy-two of his disciples established each a monastery. Their numbers must have been very high, in addition to the numerous monasteries in Mesopotamia and the regions north of the Tigris, there were scattered monasteries in Persia and Armenia. Besides the cenobites, living in large communities, there were numerous solitaries living in caves or rude huts. Christian mysticism spread through monasteries and greatly influenced Islamic mysticism that emerged in the area after the Muslim conquest.

Christianity spread in Iran and affected other sects such as Manicheans (Manavi) and persecutions eventually ended. Despite all improvements, Christians of Iran denied the Sassanian their support once the Arabs attacked the Empire. The motive might have been a feeling of affinity with Christian Arab tribes.[95] However once conquered, Christians like Jews became second-class citizens.

The conquest of Islam in seventh century put an end to freedom of religion through out the area. All polytheistic and pagan religions were banned all together with all the other Near and Far Eastern religions. However despite a large number of Christian and Jewish tribes in Arabia, their freedom was substantially restricted and their legal status lowered. They were given the right to practice their religion if they paid a discriminatory religious poll tax called 'jizya'.[96]

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[94] *Ibid,* p.12.

[95] *Ibid,* p.15.

[96] John L. Esposito, *Islam, The Straight Path*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, p.35.

The situation worsened by the time of Harun Al Rashid in eight-century AD. The overwhelming population of the area at the time was Christian, Zoroastrian and Jewish. Their houses of worship were destroyed, they could not build any new ones and jizya was increased substantially. Payment of the jizya was furthermore to be accompanied by signs of humility and recognition of personal inferiority. On payment of the tax a seal, generally of lead, was affixed to the payee's person as a receipt and as a sign of the status of dhimma. By the time of Caliph Al Motevakel in nineth century, non-Muslims were all excluded from employment in government sectors, banned from Muslim schools, had to live in closed quarters and were forced to wear distinct clothing and colored ribbons to indicate they were non-Muslims.

Iran being part of the Greater Muslim Empire was subjected to the same rules. Since non-Muslims were forced out of the government institutions, they went into trade and banking. A wealthy class of Christian merchants emerged with cash but little political influence. Christian artisans, including goldsmiths and jewelers, would find employment in the large cities.

During the last five centuries Christianity in Iran has been a tolerated but oppressed and despised Faith. From the invasions of Tamerlaine until the accession of Shah Abbas, the Safavid ruler (1582), a period of two hundred years, its history is almost a blank. In 1603 some Armenian chiefs appealed to Shah Abbas for protection against the Ottoman Turks. The Shah invaded Armenia and devastated the area to stop Ottomans from gaining acess to provisions.

Under the Safavid kings, the Christians of Azarbaijan and Transcaucasia suffered a lot from the wars between Ottomans and Persians.

The history of Christianity in Iran entered a new phase with the attempts by The Nestorians to join the Catholic Church and the arrival of Christian missionaries in Iran. In 1233 the Nestorian Catholicos sent to Pope Gregory 1X an orthodox

profession of Faith and was admitted to union with the Church of Rome. The subsequent patriarchs confirmed this union and eventually Nestorianism was renounced and several thousand Persian Nestorians became Catholics and changed their name to Chaldean Christians, and because of Turkish persecution, chose Urumiah in Persia as the center for the patriarch. The following Christian leaders all remained Faithful to Rome with their patriarchal see at Urumiah and Khosrowa. By the 17th century there were some 200,000 Christians in Iran, however as of 1670 the relations between the Persian patriarch and Rome were severed once again, mainly due to pressure by the Christians who had remained loyal to Nestorianism and though there were attempts by some patriarchs to re-establish links with Rome the gap between the two widens.

The second epoch of Catholic missionary work in Persia begin in 1840 by the Lazarists and started with a French civil servant Eugene Bori, a fervent Catholic, he was sent to Persia in 1838 on a scientific mission by the French Academy and the Minister of Public Instruction. He founded four schools, two in Tabriz and Isfahan for the Armenians, and two in Urumiah and Salmas for the Chaldeans.[97]

Catholics were not the only Christian group interested in missionary work in Iran. The earliest Protestant missionaries Moravians arrived in 1747 but had to withdraw because of political disturbances. The next missioner was Henry Martin, a chaplain in the British army in India, who, in 1811, went to Shiraz and completed his Persian translation of the New Testament in this city. The German missionary Reverend Pfander arrived in 1829 and in his famous books Mohammedanism and "Mizan-ul-Haag" (The Balance of Truth), argued in favor of the superiority of Christianity over Islam. American Protestant missionaries arrived in 1830s. They established a school in Urumiah but like most other non-Catholic missionaries lost many adherents to the Catholic missionaries.

[97] Price, *op.cit.*

The end of the 19th century was the beginning of fundamental changes in Iran and the start of the Constitutional Revolution. The constitution of 1906 put an end to the segregation of religious minorities, but it was at the time of Reza Shah and the next Shah that they were able to freely integrate in the larger Iranian society.

According to this constitution Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians had the right to elect one delegate each to the Majlis, but they could not participate in elections of other delegates. The constitution also prohibited non-Shiite Muslims from becoming a member of the Government. This was ignored by the Pahlavi regime and there were non-Muslim high government officials even Baha'i by the 1970's.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 guaranteed religious freedom of the Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. According to the new constitution the religious minorities are permitted to follow their own religious laws in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance. The constitution also made Sharia the legal code and therefore gender and religious discriminations are an integral part of the system.[98]

Since the revolution the administration of the Christian schools has been a source of tension between Christians and the government. The Ministry of Education has insisted that the principals of such schools be Muslims that all religious courses should be taught in Persian, that any Christian literature classes have government approval, and that all female students observe hejab inside the schools.

Since the revolution like other Iranians massive immigration of Christians has reduced their numbers nevertheless many have remained in Iran and still participate in the social and economic activities of the country despite restrictions.

[98] Golnaz Esfendiari, *A Look at Iran's Christian Minority* available at http://www.payvand.com/news/04/dec/1207.html

4.2 Jews

The beginnings of Jewish history in Iran date back to late Biblical times. The biblical books of Isaiah, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, contain references to the life and experiences of Jews in Persia. In the book of Ezra, the Persian kings are credited with permitting and enabling the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple; its reconstruction was carried out "according to the decree of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia" (Ezra 6:14). This great event in Jewish history took place in the late 6th century BC, by which time there was a well-established and influential Jewish community in Persia.

Persian Jews have lived in the territories of today's Iran for over 2,700 years, since the first Jewish diaspora when the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V conquered the (Northern) Kingdom of Israel (722 BC) and sent the Israelites (the Ten Lost Tribes) into captivity in Khorasan. In 586 BC, the Babylonians expelled large populations of Jews from Judea to the Babylonian captivity.

Jews who migrated to ancient Persia mostly lived in their own communities. The Persian Jewish communities include the ancient (and until the mid-20th century still extant) communities not only of Iran, but of parts of what is now Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, north western India, Kirgizstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Some of the communities were isolated from other Jewish communities, to the extent that their classification as "Persian Jews" is a matter of linguistic or geographical convenience rather than actual historical relationship with one another. During the peak of the Persian Empire, Jews are thought to have comprised as much as 20% of the population.

According to Encyclopædia Britannica:

> *The Jews trace their heritage in Iran to the Babylonian Exile of the 6th century BC and, like the Armenians, have retained their ethnic, linguistic, and religious identity.*

Three times during the 6th century BC, the Jews (Hebrews) of the ancient Kingdom of Judah were exiled to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

The Parthian Empire was an enduring empire based on a loosely configured system of vassal kings. This lack of a rigidly centralized rule over the empire had its drawbacks, such as the rise of a Jewish bandit-state in Nehardea (see Anilai and Asinai). Yet, the tolerance of the Arsacid dynasty was as legendary as the first Persian dynasty, the Achaemenids. There is even an account that indicates the conversion of a small number of Parthian vassal kings of Adiabene to Judaism. These instances and others show not only the tolerance of Parthian kings, but is also a testament to the extent to which the Parthians saw themselves as the heir to the preceding empire of Cyrus the Great. The Parthians were very protective of the Jewish minority.[99]

By the early 3rd century, Persian influences were on the rise again. While Hellenistic influence had been felt amongst the religiously tolerant Parthians, the Sassanids intensified the Persian side of life, favored the Pahlavi language, and restored the old monotheistic religion of Zoroastrianism which became the official state religion. This resulted in the suppression of other religions.[100]

[99] See http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/exhibit/parthians/essay.html

[100] See http://parents.berkeley.edu/madar-pedar/jewshistory.html

Shapur I (or *Shvor Malka*, which is the Aramaic form of the name) was friendly to the Jews. His friendship with Shmuel gained many advantages for the Jewish community. According to rabbinical sources Shapur II's mother was Jewish, and this gave the Jewish community relative freedom of religion and many advantages.

Both Christians and Jews suffered occasional persecution; but the latter, dwelling in more compact masses in cities like Isfahan, were not exposed to such general persecutions as broke out against the more isolated Christians. Generally, this was a period of occasional persecutions for the Jews, followed by long periods of benign neglect in which Jewish learning thrived. In the 5th century, the Jews suffered from persecution during the reigns of Yazdegerd II and Peroz.

After the Islamic conquest of Persia, Jews, along with Christians and Zoroastrians, were assigned the status of dhimmis, inferior subjects of the Islamic empire. Dhimmis were allowed to practice their religion, but were forced to pay taxes (jizya, a poll tax, and initially also kharaj, a land tax) in favor of the Arab Muslim conquerors, and as a compensation for being excused from military service and payment of poor tax incumbent on Muslims.[101] Dhimmis were also required to submit to a number of social and legal disabilities; they were prohibited from bearing arms, riding horses, testifying in courts in cases involving a Muslim, and frequently required to wear clothes that clearly distinguished them from Muslims.

Although some of these restrictions were sometimes relaxed, the overall condition of inequality remained in force until the Mongol invasion.[102] Persian Jews became exposed to severe persecution.

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[101]Esposito, *op.cit*. p.35.

[102] David Litman, "Jews under Muslim Rule: The Case of Persia"(1979), The Wiener Library Bulletin, Vol.32, No. 49/50, pp.2-15.

Ghazan Khan's conversion to Islam in 1295 heralded for Persian Jews a pronounced turn for the worse, as they were once again relegated to the status of dhimmis. In Persia, however, Jewish converts were usually stigmatized on account of their Jewish ancestry for many generations.[103]

Further deterioration in the treatment of Persian Jews occurred during the reign of the Safavids who proclaimed Shi'a Islam the state religion. Shi'ism assigns great importance to the issues of ritual purity — tahara, and non-Muslims, including Jews, are deemed to be ritually unclean — najis — so that physical contact with them would require Shi'as to undertake ritual purification before doing regular prayers. Thus, Persian rulers, and to an even larger extent, the populace, sought to limit physical contact between Muslims and Jews. Jews were not allowed to attend public baths with Muslims or even to go outside in rain or snow, ostensibly because some impurity could be washed from them upon a Muslim.[104]

The reigns of Shah Abbas I and Nadir Shah (1588–1747) were initially benign. Jews prospered throughout Persia and were even encouraged to settle in Isfahan, which was made a new capital. However, toward the end of his rule, the treatment of Jews became harsher; upon advice from a Jewish convert and Shi'a clergy, the Shah forced Jews to wear a distinctive badge on clothing and headgear. In 1656, all Jews were expelled from Isfahan because of the common belief of their impurity and forced to convert to Islam. However, as it became known that the converts continued to practice Judaism in secret and because the treasury suffered from the loss of *jizya* collected from the Jews, they were allowed to revert to Judaism in 1661. However, they were still required to wear a distinctive patch upon their clothings.[105]

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[103] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, London, Routledge&Kegan Paul, 1984, p.100.

[104] *Ibıd*., p.33-34.

[105] Littman, *op.cit.* p.3.

Under Nadir Shah Jews experienced a period of relative tolerance when they were allowed to settle in the Shi'ite holy city of Mashhad. Yet, the advent of a Shi'a Qajar dynasty in 1794 brought back the earlier persecutions. Lord Curzon described the regional differences in the situation of the Persian Jews in the 19th century[106]:

> *In Isfahan, where they are said to be 3,700 and where they occupy a relatively better status than elsewhere in Persia, they are not permitted to wear kolah or Persian headdress, to have shops in the bazaar, to build the walls of their houses as high as a Moslem neighbour's, or to ride in the street. In Teheran and Kashan they are also to be found in large numbers and enjoying a fair position. In Shiraz they are very badly off. In Bushire they are prosperous and free from persecution.*

Driven by persecutions, thousands of Persian Jews immigrated to Palestine in the late 19th – early 20th century as Littman indicates.

The Pahlavi dynasty implemented modernizing reforms, which greatly improved the life of Jews The influence of the Shi'a clergy was weakened, and the restrictions on Jews and other religious minorities were abolished. Reza Shah prohibited mass conversion of Jews and eliminated the Shi'ite concept of ritual uncleanness of non-Muslims. Modern Hebrew was incorporated into the curriculum of Jewish schools and Jewish newspapers were published. Jews were also allowed to hold government jobs. However, Jewish schools were closed in the 1920s. In addition, Reza Shah sympathized with Nazi Germany, making the Jewish community fearful of possible persecutions, and the public sentiment at the time was definitely anti-Jewish.[107] A spike in anti-Jewish sentiment occurred after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and continued until 1953 due to the weakening of the central government and strengthening of the clergy in the course of political

[106] Lewis, *op.cit.* p.167.

[107] Eliz Sansarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, Cambridge, Cambridge Univesity Press, 2000, p.46.

struggles between the Shah and Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. Eliz Sanasarian estimates that in 1948–1953, about one-third of Iranian Jews, most of them poor, emigrated to Israel.[108] David Littman puts the total figure of emigrants to Israel in 1948-1978 at 70,000.[109]

The reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi after the deposition of Mossadegh in 1953, was the most prosperous era for the Jews of Iran.[110]

During the Islamic Revolution, many of the Iranian Jews, especially wealthy Jewish leaders in Tehran and many Jewish villages surrounding Isfahan and Kerman, left the country. In late 1979s, the people who left were estimated at 50,000 – 90,000.

Instead of expelling Jews en mass like in Libya, Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen, the Iranians have adopted a policy of keeping Jews in Iran, by providing a special sphere of protection.

4.3 Zoroastrians

Zoroastrians in Iran are the oldest religious community of the nation, with a long history continuing up to the present day.

Prior to the Islamization of Iran, Zoroastrianism was the primary religion of Iran. Since the Sassanid Empire was conquered by Muslimsin the 7th century CE, Zoroastrians in Iran have faced much religious discrimination, including forced

[108] *Idem.*

[109] Littman, *op.cit.*, p.5.

[110] Sansarian, *op.cit.*, p.47.

conversions and harassment although technically, Zoroastrians are protected as "People of the Book" in Islam.

According to Iran's 2012 census results, there were 25,271 Zoroastrians in Iran.[111] Prophet Zoroaster and his first followers have been the proto-Indo-Iranians that lived between the Bronze Age and Iron Age (est. 1400-1200BC).[112] The proto-Indo-Iranians (Aryans) were later divided in to two distinct branches of Iranian and Indians; the Iranian branch migrated to Iran as early as 2000 BC.[113]

Persians led by Cyrus the Great soon established the second Iranian dynasty, and the first Persian empire by defeating the Medes dynasty in 549 BC.[114] As Persians expanded their empire, Zoroastrianism was introduced to Greek historians such as Hermodorus, Hermippus,Xanthos, Eudoxus and Aristotle; each giving a different date regarding the life of Zoroaster but naturally believed him to be a Persian prophet and called him "Master of the Magi"[115]

Although there are no inscriptions left from the time of Cyrus about his religion, the fire-altars found at Pasargadae, as well as the fact that he called his daughter Atossa, name of the queen of Vishtaspa (Zoroaster's royal patron), suggest that he indeed may have been a Zoroastrian.[116] However, it is clear that by the time of Darius the Great (549 BC– 485/486 BC), the empire was clearly in favour of Zoroastrianism.

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[111] Seehttp://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5juj_KhuuT0v7aaT3PPDmJFbQYrtw?docId=CNG.174be06ad8ee4755308494817ef96f0e.781

[112] Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians, Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London, Routledge&Kegan Paul Ltd., 2001, p.1.

[113] *Ibid.,* p.2.

[114] *Ibid.,* p.48.

[115] *Ibid.,* p.49.

[116] *Ibid.,* p.51.

The Sassanid dynasty (224-651 CE) was the first Persian empire which declared Zoroastrianism as the state religion and promoted the religion more than ever. It is believed that Avesta (a compilation of Zoroastrian sacred texts) was first gathered and put together at this time.

The prophet Mani was an Iranian of noble Parthian roots who established Manichaeism which contained many elements of Zoroastrianism as well as Gnosticism, however it saw the experience of life on earth by humans as miserable, which was a contrast to the Zoroastrian view which was to celebrate life through happiness.

Mani was received kindly by king Shapur I and spent many years at his court where he was protected during all of Shabuhr's reign. However Mani wrote in a semitic language (Syriac Aramaic), and all his work had to be translated in to Middle Persian by his followers, who rendered the name of Mani's supreme god as Zurvan and called him the father of Ohrmazd. [117]

Although the origins of Zurvanite Zoroastrianism are unclear, it was during the Sassanid period that it gained widespread acceptance, and many of the Sassanid emperors were at least to some extent Zurvanites. Zurvanism enjoyed royal sanction during the Sassanid era but no traces of it remain beyond the 10th century.

The Mongol invasion of Iran resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and ruined many cities. The early Mongol invaders were, however, pagans or buddhists so most of their attention was directed towards Muslims, whom they hated. However, within half a century of the conquest, the leader of the Il-Khanate, Ghazan Khan, became a Muslim, which did not help the status of Zoroastrians in Iran. However, by the time that the Mongols were expelled, Pars province had escaped major damages and the

[117] *Ibid.,* p.107.

Zoroastrians moved to the North of Pars mainly in the regions of Yazd and Kerman, where even today the main Zoroastrian communities are found.

Shiite Safavid dynasty destroyed what was once a vibrant community of Zoroastrians, adherents of the pre-Islam religion of Iran. As per the official policy, Safavids wanted everyone to convert to their sect of Islam and killed hundreds of thousands of Sunnis, Zoroastrians, Jews, and other minorities when they refused to follow these orders.

Thousands of Jews left Iran for India, Syria and Turkey with only about 10% remaining. Majority of Zoroastrians also left for India though about 20% remained; most of which had to migrate in the late 19th century as Qajar dynasty imposed greater restrictions on them.

During the Qajar Dynasty, religious persecution of the Zoroastrians was rampant. Due to the increasing contacts with influential Parsiphilanthropists such as Maneckji Limji Hataria, many Zoroastrians left Iran for India. There, they formed the second major Indian Zoroastrian community known as the Iranis.

Starting from the early twentieth century, Tehran, the nation's capital, experienced rapid migrations from all Iranian minorities. The Zoroastrian population increased from about 50 merchants in 1881 to 500 by 1912.

During the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty, Zoroastrians changed from being one of the most persecuted minorities in Iran to a symbol of Iranian nationalism.

However, the establishment of an Islamic Republic following the Iranian revolution of 1979 posed many setbacks for Iran's religious minorities. Since that time many Zoroastrians, aided by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society program, have emigrated

to the US, as well as to Canada, Australia, and the UK. Together with the issues of out-marriage and low birth rates, this is leading to a steady decline in Iran's Zoroastrian population[118] which, according to Iran's 2012 census results, currently stands at 25,271.

Like the Armenian, Assyrian and Persian Jewish communities, Zoroastrians are officially recognized and on the grounds of the 1906 Constitution allocated one seat in the Iranian Parliament.

4.4 What differs Baha'is?

Baha'i Faith, a relatively new phenomenon in history dates back to 1800s as already has been elaborated in the previous chapters. As such a new formation in a country of Islam, namely Iran, the Faith has a disputable history in Iran's socio-religious life.The main problematic of this paper comes out at that point: In spite of various religious minorities having chance to live in Iran, why Baha'i minority has been exposed to such severe persecution, especially after the Revolution; what differs the Faith from others?

There are several factors to be entailed: being successor of Islam is among the other reasons and the most apparent one. Islam, in claim of universiality, held the title of being the last and straightest of all previous religions for centuries.

Baha'i Faith was developed from Shi'i Islam in the middle of the 19th century and it is the most important example of a religious movement which emerged within Islam but eventually broke away. The Baha'is regard their religion as *independent* and not a branch of Islam. In its country of origin, Iran, the Baha'is constitute the largest religious minority, and since the Baha'is are considered heretics, primarily for

[118] Richard Foltz, "Zoroastrians in Iran: What future in the homeland?", The Middle East Journal, Volume 65, Number 1, Winter 2011, pp. 73-84.

believing in a prophet after Muhammad, they have been persecuted from time to time, not least during the reign of Ayatollah Khomeini. At the time of the founding prophet, Bahaullah and his son and successor, Abdul-Baha, Baha'i evolved from its Shi'i millennial origin into a religion whose primary doctrine claims the unification of all nations and religions.[119]

Baha'i Faith is claimed to be a universalistic religion, and compared with its parent religion, Islam, Baha'i is probably less bound to a particular culture. Although Islam is normatively a universalistic religion it has a distinct theological basis in Arabic culture. Arabic is maintained as a particular holy language, and the Arabic world harbours the sacred centre of Islam. In Baha'i there is no such holy language, and the most important holy places are not found in Iran but by historical coincidence in the Haifa area.

Another factor of harsh suppression may be sought in line with perceived relation with Israel. The early conversions (see Chapter 1) of Jews and the religious center's location Haifa are primary connotations of this perception. They have been long accused of funding Israel's Zionist activities while they were funding their center's in that country.

Those factors have been the grounds of persecution of Baha'is throughout the history of the Faith. However, there was a sharp increase in the systematic, government supported programme to eliminate the Baha'i community as a viable entity in the country following the Islamic Revolution.

The progressive ideas of Faith on matters such as women's rights, the independent investigation of truth and the absence of clergy were of concern to many Muslim clerics.

[119] Margit Warburg, "Baha'i: A Religious Approach to Globalization", Social Compass, no.46(1), 1999, pp.47-56.

But the most outstanding issue in the Baha'i question of the Islamic State was that the Baha'i religion has a special doctrinal commitment to global market and consequent modernity and holds as a fundamental doctrine that all the basic principles of the great religions are in harmony.

A sociological parallel may be drawn to Judaism in antiquity and the emergence of Christianity from one of the many Jewish religious movements of that time. The Jeiwsh movement was religiously innovative by severing the bonds to a particular place or people and abandoning a particular holy language, which were important factors in turning this movement into a universalistic religion.[120]

Baha'is have close links with their inter-national community, with Iranian members traditionally playing a major role in missionary activities in the West and the Third World, and holding important positions within the leadership cadre at all levels. Members tend to belong to the professional and entrepreneurial classes and are ideologically motivated to accept or strive to implement Westernizing reforms within the wider society without being forced to challenge traditional values within their own religious systems (as is often the case with Jewish, Zoroastrian, or Christian modernizers).[121]

Outside Iran, the Baha'i community is sizeable and widely distributed, with perhaps 3,000,000 members worldwide. This international community possesses a highly organized and efficient bureaucratic structure that enables it to respond effectively to situations like the one in Iran. It is represented as a non-governmental body at the UN, with an office in New York, while national Baha'i organizations often have good relations with influential institutions and individuals in their countries. Baha' attitudes toward the current persecutions in Iran range from genuine concern for the

[120] *Idem.*

[121] Denis MacEoin, "The Baha'is of Iran: The Roots of Controversy", British Soceity for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin, vol.14, no.1 (1987), pp.75-83.

plight of their co-religionists there to what seems uncomfortably like self-interested exploitation of the pogrom's publicity potential (as expressed, for example, in official statements to the effect that the Iranian situation offers 'golden opportunities' that may lead to 'large-scale conversion and an increasing prestige'.[122]

For above mentioned reasons, the Baha'is are seen to symbolize threatinig aspect of modernity and the global market. And Juan Cole indicates in his study that anti-Baha'ism in Iran might be compared to anti-Semitism in Europe:[123]

> *Like the Jews, the Baha'is are seen to symbolize threatinig aspect of modernity. They are caricatured as corrupt financiers and as rootless cosmopolitans easily tempted into spying and treason for foreign powers.*

The Baha'is in Iran have, from the outset, been presenting a programme at odds with the values of the wider society, either by preaching radical changes in the traditional system (e.g. post-Qur'anic revelation, anti-clericalism) or by promulgating Western-inspired reforms. Baha'ism is a genuine threat to the present system in Iran, if only because it derives much of its *raison d'etre* from the same sources, bases itself on identical premises, and yet proposes a wholesale re-organization of religion and state that would automatically rule out any serious role for Islam. Precisely because the Baha'is seek to fulfil the theocratic vision of messianic Shi'ism, there can be no room for a modus vivendi between them and the advocates of a traditional Shi'ite order.[124]

The Iranian Revolution in part constituted a struggle between the Shiite bazaar with its old classes of petty commodity producers and marketers on the one hand and on the other the new bourgeoisie and professional classes. Although Baha'is had more

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[122] *Idem.*

[123] Juan Cole, "The Baha'is of Iran", History Today, March 1990, p.29.

[124] MacEoin, *op.cit.*

involvement in the petty commodity sector than is usually recognized, Iranians formed an image of them as bourgeoisie.[125]

For an explanation of the pattern of anti-Baha'i violence and persecution one may resort to a theory of „class conflict' and find some supporting evidence in the way the urban poor and in particular the lower strata of the bazaar „proletariat', targeted the Baha'i „bourgeoisie' of the cities; a mercantile class which successfully linked up to the emerging markets of international commerce and represented economic interests essentially at odds with the dying local workshop industry and its domestic manufacturers and distributors. Amanat indicates that[126]:

> *The new bourgeoisie [Baha'is], it may be argued, had adopted 'Protestant work ethics' with a modernizing this-wordly view and a moral idealism equally at odds with the otherworldly ethos of Shi'i culture which ultimately viewed as detrimental to the spirit of the old bazaar-ulama alliance*

Given the above mentioned aspects of the persecution to which Baha'is were subjected, economical positioning of Baha'is in Iran society is undeniable. However, an overt class-analysis may cause an immense body of contesting historical data. For one thing, as Amanat argues[127], the target of much of the Babi and Baha'i mistreatment in the cities, as in the countryside, was the indigenous population in the same urban centers and villages who were neither better nor worse off than their oppressors. Moreover, the appeal of the Babi movement and later the Baha'i Faith was to the artisans and manufacturers of the bazaar, the very same groups who suffered from the changing economic climate of their time.

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[125] Cole, *op.cit*.

[126] Amanat, *op.cit.,* p.180.

[127] *Idem.*

As Amanat further argues, the socio-moral message of the Baha'is was often at the heart of their grass-roots proselytizing among the ordinary people rather than the political or commercial elites; a fact which moved the ulama to act against the Baha'is in the first place.[128]

I also agree with Amanat that a gaunt class-analysis would not be accurate to solve the „problem of Baha'i'. It is both because of the validity of class-analysis has expired in the new age and also it does not fit to the socio-economical construction of Iran. Therefore, I will refrain from falling into the trap of such an analysis while I am trying to put forward some economical roots of harsh suppression and persecution of Baha'is in Iran.

The Baha'i Faith, as it has been frequently stressed throughout the study, is a new religion born into an ancient civilization. The ancient one had already established its institutions and deeply stroke roots when the new one came with its fresh ideas, ideals and practices. 1860s was the period when the Faith started to emerge but it was also a significant time-period with an emerging international market with its economical consequences for each entity present on the world. Hence, it is not essential to have a comprehensive economical knowledge to estimate on which level those two entites responded to those consequences. It was long before the Islamic Revolution that dissociation had occurred as a result of the difference of strata in responding to that new world-system (the integration of Baha'is to new world-system separately from Iran may be another thesis subject).

The teachings of Baha'i Faith, which have not been elaborated in the range of this study but still mentioned roughly, consist of ideas in conformity with modernity which was the ultimate goal of Pahlavi dynasty. The ruling elite was in aim of modernizing the society and gain a westernized image whereas Baha'i Faith

[128] *Idem.*

appeared with ideas already modernized and in harmony with Western values. This asset of the Faith resulted in several dimensions:

- First of all, being in line with modern Western values required fund-raising which was much more difficult for a huge state than a petty community which emerged with attractive ideas; hence a strata difference in economical terms came to surface between the majority and Baha'i minority;
- Secondly, the other „recognized' minority groups acceded to lose their vested interest in favor of acquiring a modern identity;
- After the Revolution, the progressive ideas of the Faith turned out to be the anchor of the persecution.

The conversion patterns of Jews and Zoroastrians have already been deeply elaborated in previous sections. As an outcome of both conversion motives, having a modern identity in global system, acquiring some international ties were remarkable. It was not the case for Christians because it may be argued that Christians have already strong ties with global economy which has the Christian Europe in its center or at least semi-periphery.

The Baha'i question turned out to be a vicious circle after the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Given the above mentioned facts, Baha'is have had international ties since the very beginning of emergence as a religion and as the persecution they faced was intensified after the Revolution, they started to rely on their Western ties even more than the past in order to increase awareness regarding their historical case. That causality created a perception of a sort of massonic ties of Baha'is with their fellows outside Iran. In a conservative society like Iran, it was not surprising to raise enemity towards a group with Western ties as well as financial resources.

The scope of this economical analysis may be droven further but the capacity of this thesis and the researcher, me, end here.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will try to summarize each chapter of the study and refer to recommendations and implication for future studies.

The research question of this current study was „What differs Baha'is from other minority groups in Iran?' and the whole text was aimed to turn round this problematic.

In this respect, an idea of the term Baha'i was tried to create in the first chapter. Therefore, a long chapter in an historical panaroma was dedicated to this aim. Baha'i history with references to various resources was divided into periods beginning with Bab, the founder of Babi movement. The other periods were as follows:

- The Ministry of Bahaullah (1852-1892)
- The Ministry of Abdul-Baha (1892-1921)
- The Period of Guardianship Shoghi Effendi (1921-1963)
- The Universal House of Justice (1963-)

Each period was depicted with its particularity and the significance in Baha'i history.

The following section was devoted to coversions of Jews and Zoroastrians. The arguments between scholars have been mentioned and a conclusion was tried to reach through those arguments. It has finally been concluded that the answer may be sought in economical developments in Iran in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Baha'i Faith was one of the few anchors of personal stability and community support

and constituted a gateaway for those and enabled to create new identities which were more affiliated with the evolving European-like environment and had close ties with West and its trade modes.

The Bahai Faith also easened the lives of the ones both affected negatively and positively by the new developments in the economy of Iran and it became a tool of identity estsablishment in such facets.

For Zoroastrian conversions, Fereydun Vahman's themes were used to identify what kind of reasons might have been behind the conversions. They were as such:

1. the impact of the suffering and persecution of the Baha'is
2. the fulfillment of prophecies
3. Baha'i universalism and ethics
4. Iranian elements in the Baha'i teachings
5. Bahaullah's and Abdul-Baha's letters to Zoroastrians

Each theme was analyzed in depth and then a conclusion was drawn up similar to the one which the case for Jews: It was the end of nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century and Iran had recently started to engage in economical activities of West and consequently its values through a series of reforms in economical and socio-cultural arena. Seeing their dream of redemption coming true with these reforms, and with more contact with the West and modern ideologies, many Zoroastrians, in particular those residing in Tehran and larger urban areas, adopted more liberal lifestyles and loosened their ties with traditional society and it happened through conversion to Baha'i Faith.

The following chapter started with theoretical explanation of „persecution' in international law and its harm factor was analyzed in details in order to create an image of the persecution the Baha'is face and what kind of harm they were exposed to. All kind of basic human rights denials such as existing as a religious minority or right to private property were exampflied in subsections.

The next chapter was a descriptive one with shortened histories of Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians in Persian land and then their existence in Islamic State of Iran. The histories were tried to be summed up as much as possible but the purpose of giving details was to create an integral view throughout their existence in Iran. It was also essential in order to comprehend the stance of Islamic State towards those „recognized minorities' and where their recognition comes from.

The second section of that chapter constituted a crucial importance to this thesis. In that section, all available data was put together in order to come up with a conclusion for the research question of the thesis. It was a comparative part and comparison of Baha'is with other three minorities was the core of the current study. Since the research question was established on the difference of Baha'i persecution, it was essential to find out the roots of that difference.

A socio-economical outcome was aimed but it was hard not to fall in easiness of class-analysis. However, as available data demonstrated, neither Baha'is own situation in the society nor Iran's structure was convenient for such an analysis.

As a result, it has been concluded that Baha'is were distinct from other minority groups:

1. for being successor of Islam,
2. for having ideals in conformity with modernity,

3. for having ties with international community,
4. for being attractive even to those „recognized minorities'.

For further research in the Baha'i field, given the scarcity of non-Bahai researchers, I would have a few humble recommendations:

First of all, theories on new religious movements (NRM) have recently been covered by a few scholars. A new religious movement is a religious community or ethical, spiritual, or philosophical group of modern origins, which has a peripheral place within the dominant religious culture. NRMs may be novel in origin or they may be part of a wider religion, in which case they will be distinct from pre-existing denominations. Scholars studying the sociology of religion have almost unanimously adopted this term as a neutral alternative to the word *cult*, which is often considered derogatory. In this area, James Beckford's *Cult Controversies* may be a guiding resource in order to determine if Baha'i Faith can be considered under these movements; if yes, in which extent; if no, why it is excludable.

Another area of research in Baha'i studies may be the analysis of emergence of Baha'i Faith and its probable relation with the economical transformation of world-system at the time of its emergence.

As a last recommendation, Baha'is' integration to globalization and the tools used in this process may be an outstanding subject as well.

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TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

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Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü ☐

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Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü ☐

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YAZARIN

Soyadı :
Adı :
Bölümü :

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TEZİN TÜRÜ : Yüksek Lisans ☐ Doktora ☐

1. Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir. ☐
2. Tezimin içindekiler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir. ☐
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