

## The Emergence and Evolution of Bábism

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### Abstract

*During the 19th century AD, the Islamic countries witnessed the emergence of various doctrinal movements and new intellectual currents. Followers of these movements found the opportunity and suitable environment to propagate their unconventional ideas within society. The concept of the awaited Imam Mahdi served as the cornerstone for the establishment of such ideas and beliefs. Certain aspects of the Mahdist issue were exploited as a starting point for the propagation of these ideologies. Among these movements were Bábism and Bahá'ism, which emerged in mid-19th century Iran during the reign of Mohammad Shah Qajar. This movement appeared as a breakaway from Sheikhism and Isma'ilism, drawing on their teachings.*

**Keywords:** Bábism - Bahá'ism - Iran - Qurrat al-'Ayn.

### Introduction

Bábism and Bahá'ism are religious-political movements that emerged in mid-nineteenth-century Iran during the reign of Mohammad Shah Qajar. This movement is considered a divergence from Shaykhism and Isma'ilism, with its teachings having roots in those ideologies. Moreover, it's worth noting that it's one of the movements that reinterpreted Islamic Sharia and Shia Ja'fari beliefs, particularly regarding the concept of the Awaited Imam (al-Mahdi). Bábism originated in Iranian society, known for its rapid influence and sympathy for the Mahdist cause. Several factors contributed to the emergence of the Bábism, including the prevailing doctrinal heritage followed by the majority of Muslims in general and the people of Persia in particular, with their belief in the Awaited Hidden Imam. Additionally, the economic decline faced by Iran prepared the society to accept esoteric movements based on revelations and dreams. External interventions also played a role in fueling divisions among Muslims by supporting movements aligned with their colonial aspirations. Furthermore, the Shaykhi movement's spread within Iranian society, along with its deviation from the mainstream intellectual approach, laid the groundwork for the emergence of Bábism and Bahá'ism. These later movements benefited from the expansive interpretative approach presented by Shaykhism, which relied on esoteric revelations and dreams rather than being constrained by logic and rational tools. This approach later evolved into movements deeply rooted in Shaykhism, with Ali Muhammad Shirazi (the Báb) as its central figure. The Báb founded the Bábism, which later evolved into Bahá'ism after his execution, taking on a more religious character.

The research consists of an introduction and a set of main topics. The first topic covers Ali Muhammad Shirazi and his declaration of the Bábism. The second topic discusses external interventions and their role in the development of the Bábism, focusing on Britain and Russia. In the third topic, we examined the direct religious institution's stance

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toward the Báb and how Iranian scholars responded to the movement. The fourth topic addressed the role of Karbala in the development of the Bábism in Iraq. The fifth topic highlighted Mirza Husayn Ali Nuri and his establishment and evolution of the Bahá'í movement. The sixth topic focused on the exile of Bahá'u'lláh to Istanbul and the preservation of the message. Lastly, in the conclusion, we discussed the most important findings reached by the researchers.

#### Ali Muhammad Shirazi and his proclamation of Bábism:

He was born in the city of Shiraz on October 20, 1819 CE (Zahir, 1981: 49). He is of noble descent from the Prophet's family (peace be upon them) (Abdul Hameed, 1969: 45). His father died when he was a young child, so he was raised in the home of his uncle, Sayyid Ali Shirazi, who was a merchant in the city of Shiraz. When he reached the age of six, his uncle sent him to Sheikh Abid (Owara, 1924: 59-60), one of the disciples of Rashti, to receive religious education under his guidance. He learned the principles of religion, reading, and writing. When he reached the age of fifteen, he started working in trade with his uncle in Shiraz. However, due to economic hardships in the city, he left for Bushehr to manage the family's business there. Yet, he turned to spiritual contemplation and was greatly influenced by the teachings of the Shaykhi path (Martin & Hatcher, 2002: 34; Al-Hayani, 1988: 53).

The study of spirituality attracted many merchants who would spend their money and exert significant efforts to learn these spiritual practices, believing that they would enhance their profits and safeguard their trade. The Shirazi himself engaged in these practices, staying awake for long hours, dedicating himself to worship under the scorching sun, uncovered head, seeking isolation for contemplation, engaging in supplication, and practicing mystical symbols. He continued in this state for two years before declaring his mission in Shiraz. However, his health deteriorated, so his uncle sent him to the holy shrines in Iraq out of concern for his well-being. There, he sought healing by visiting the sacred places of the household of the Prophet (peace be upon them), aiming for mental clarity and drawing closer to Allah, the Almighty (Al-Husaini, 2007: 33; Mahmoud, 2004: 396).

The Shirazi settled in the holy city of Karbala, where he met Sayyid Jawad Al-Karbala'i (Bahr Al-Ulum, 1944: 30; Owara, 1924: 56). They discussed the idea of the emergence of Imam Al-Mahdi (peace be upon him) and the nearness of his appearance. Al-Karbala'i urged Ali Shirazi to attend the lessons of Sayyid Kazim Al-Rashti and benefit from his religious knowledge. So, Ali Shirazi attended the lessons and gatherings of Al-Rashti, who combined philosophy, Sufism, and Islamic law, blending them together. He was impressed by Al-Rashti's lectures and held great respect for the explanations he provided. Ali Shirazi used to ask about various matters that he found difficult to understand, and this caught Al-Rashti's attention. Eventually, Ali Shirazi gained prominence among Al-Rashti's students and became distinguished for his inquiries.

He studied the ideas and opinions of the Sheikhiyya and found them aligned with his own inclinations and ideas, which he had received from Sayyid Jawad Al-Karbala'i, his teacher 'Abid, and his family, who followed the Sheikhiyya (Al-Husaini, 2007: 33). Al-Rashti would inform his followers and students about the imminent appearance of the absent Imam, reassuring them that he was among them and close to them. Influenced by the lessons of Al-Rashti and the mental turmoil he experienced after the death of his eldest son, along with the deteriorating state of affairs in Iran, Ali Shirazi started contemplating that he might be the hidden Imam Al-Mahdi, who would emerge to establish justice on Earth after it had been filled with oppression and tyranny (Zahir, 1981: 53).

#### Foreign Interventions and Their Role in the Development of Bábism

Moreover, the factor of foreign intervention (Al-Dijaili, 1999: 146-147; Mustafa, 2016: 25) has contributed to the development of Ali Muhammad Shirazi's ideas towards

Babism. Some historical sources point to the role of Russia in the emergence of Babism. Russia sent one of its agents named Kenyaz Dalqorqi (Al-Fali, 2012: 147), who changed his name to Sheikh Isa Al-Lankarani while disguising himself in the attire of religious scholars. He joined the gatherings of Sayyid Rashiti in the holy city of Karbala, where he met Mirza Ali Muhammad Shirazi. Some suggest that Kenyaz played a significant role in solidifying the concept of the Mahdi in Shirazi's mind. It is said that he succeeded in exploiting Shirazi and making him a victim of his ambitions. Researchers have referred to the memoirs of the Russian spy Kenyaz, published in the Soviet journal "Al-Sharq," which was issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry in the years 1924-1925. In these memoirs, he stated:

"I once asked Sayyid Kazim Rashiti about the Mahdi's whereabouts, where he might be. He said, "I don't know, maybe he is here in this gathering." The idea flashed in my mind like a sudden lightning, and I intended to portray it and transform it into reality. He also said, "In the gathering, I saw Ali Shirazi." I smiled and resolved within myself to make him that alleged Mahdi. From that time on, whenever I found the opportunity and seclusion, I would address him: "O Companion of Time, O Master of Affairs." At first, he would appear elevated and composed, but it didn't take long before he started showing joy and delight from these addresses." (Abbas, 2009: 26)

Ali Muhammad Shirazi returned to the city of Bushehr in the year 1259 AH / 1843 CE, after two years of studying in the holy city of Karbala. Shortly after his return, Sayyid Kazim Rashti passed away in 1844 CE without designating a successor among his followers. One of Rashti's disciples, Hussein Boshru'i (1813-1849), formulated signs of the appearance of the hidden Imam. The first sign involved posing mysterious questions inspired by his mentors, Al-Hilli and Rashti, which he compiled into letters containing inquiries and responses. The second sign was his unique interpretation of the story of Joseph, deviating from established norms and innovative for his time (Al-Wardi, 1971: 134). Boshru'i's initial act was to engage in forty days of seclusion in 1844 CE at the Kufa Mosque, seeking divine guidance to witness the hidden Imam. Afterward, he traveled to Iran and arrived in the city of Shiraz in 1844 CE. On his first day there, he encountered a handsome youth wearing a green turban (indicating his relation to Prophet Mohammed peace be upon him), named Ali Muhammad Reza Shirazi. The youth greeted Boshru'i and invited him to his home. Boshru'i accepted the invitation and spent that night at his residence. This night held paramount significance for the history of the Babi movement. Through a series of dialogues, tests, and inquiries, Boshru'i confirmed Shirazi's claim and was the first to believe in him (Al-Wardi, 1971: 135). Before departing, Boshru'i turned to him and said, "O the first to truly believe in me, indeed, I am the Gate of God, and you are the Gate of the Gate." This event took place on the fifth night of the month of Jumada al-Awwal, in the year 1260 AH, corresponding to May 23, 1844 CE. This night became a significant Babí celebration, and the Bab uttered:

"This night, at this hour, shall be celebrated in the days to come as one of the greatest festivals, the most important of all, and give thanks to God, who has brought you to your desired goal, and allowed you to drink from the honeyed essence of His sealed Word. Blessed are those who are His and continually turn towards Him."

With this, Shirazi commenced his declaration of his message in Iran in 1844 CE (Khan, 1914: 200-201; Al-Hayani, 1988: 58). After Boshru'i believed in the Babhood of Ali Muhammad Shirazi and they pledged to propagate the message, a group of Rashti's followers who believed in the imminent appearance of the awaited Imam (as) joined him. Their number was eighteen, and they were known as the Letters of the Living. Among them were Mulla Ali Bashtami and Razin Taj, known as Qurratu'l-Ayn (Umm Salma), who played a prominent role in spreading Babism in Iraq (Al-Husaini, 2007: 36; Al-Attar, 2021: 16).

After the Bab announced his new calling, he went on a pilgrimage journey to the Hijaz in 1844 CE. The purpose of this journey was to utilize the Hajj season as an opportunity to spread his message in Mecca. The prevalent belief was that the appearance of the Imam Mahdi (as) would occur between the Rukn and the Maqam in this city. After performing the Hajj pilgrimage, the Bab sent a letter through the holy Quddus to the Sharif of Mecca and the dignitaries of the revered Kaaba, inviting them to believe in his message and follow him. However, they did not respond positively to his invitation, and when he met one of them in Mecca, they rejected his call (Fadhil, 1917: 167; Afandi, 2002: 28). Subsequently, the Bab openly declared his mission, which created a clash between religious and political authorities. Through his declaration, he challenged the religious boundaries established by Islam. One of his followers, known as Mulla Sadeh Khurasani, advocated changing the wording of the call to prayer and called for the abolition of the Hajj pilgrimage. He claimed that divine revelation was continuous and rejected the obligatory five daily prayers (Afandi, 2002: 32). This stance angered scholars, scientists, and the people of Shiraz (al-Quds), who responded by shaving their beards, piercing their noses, parading them through the city, expelling them, and warning them not to return (Zahir, 1981: 66; n. a., 1967: 5). Despite the harsh treatment endured by the Bab's followers, he continued to propagate his message, which not only proclaimed his identity as the Bab to the Imam Mahdi (as) but also declared himself as a Divine revelation and a heavenly bearer of glad tidings. He even claimed that the Imam's essence was present within him (Ismail, 2009: 128-129). His teachings, principles, and rules challenged the social order. This created fear and anxiety within the ruler of Fars, leading to the order for the Bab's arrest and the confinement of his companions from Bushehr to Shiraz under strict guard. The Bab was brought to face religious scholars in the presence of the governor of Fars. When he presented his beliefs to them, some scholars declared him an apostate and recommended his execution. Others attributed his ideas to mental instability. The Friday imam of Shiraz saw the potential turmoil in the city if the Bab were killed. With the intervention and intercession of the Friday imam, the Bab was released, but he was entrusted to his uncle, Sayyid Ali. Sayyid Ali requested that the Bab publicly declare his repentance and innocence from the accusations made against him in the mosque of al-Wakil, where Friday prayers were held in Shiraz. When the day arrived and the time for Friday prayers came, the Bab complied with the request to attend. Upon his arrival, the Friday imam asked him to ascend the pulpit and address the congregation. He stood on the pulpit and declared,

"The anger of God is upon anyone who considers me as a deputy for the Imam or the Gate to Him, and the anger of God is upon anyone who attributes to me the denial of the Oneness of God, and I do not deny the Prophethood of Muhammad, Seal of the Prophets, or the Apostleship of any Messenger of God or the Successorship of Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, or any of the Imams who succeeded him." (Al-Sind, n.d.: 239; Abbas, 2009: 30)

#### Direct Position from the Religious Institution:

Religious scholars convened a meeting among themselves where they concluded that what the Bab presented was contradictory to Sharia and had no connection to it. Therefore, they issued a ruling declaring him outside the realm of religion and deserving of death. Upon learning of this ruling from Isfahan's governor, Manouchehr Khan, he asserted that carrying out the verdict was not within his jurisdiction and that the matter must be reported to the authorities in Tehran for their orders on whether to execute the Bab or not. He forwarded a comprehensive report detailing the events in Isfahan and expressed his personal perspective: that implementing the death sentence could lead to a major internal revolution instigated by his followers and supporters, making it difficult to suppress due to their sheer numbers. He proposed keeping the Bab imprisoned until conditions were more favorable.

Notably, the government's eventual agreement with the governor's suggestion was influenced by the deteriorating health of Mohammad Shah, as his death was expected in the near future (Khan, 1914: 154-156). In 1848, the trial and debate of the Bab commenced with Shia scholars and jurists. The trial session began with questions about the nature and truth of his claim and the message he brought. He responded, "I am the Promised One you have been waiting for a thousand years, and you stand upon hearing His name. You supplicate to God for the hastening of His appearance." (Khan, 1914: 49; n. a., 1967: 14)

Following discussions that involved test questions and requests for evidence and proof of the validity of his claim, the Bab started reciting verses without reflection or contemplation, declaring them as evidence of the truth of his claim and his eternal endurance. After consultation among the judges, they passed a sentence to flog him eleven times on his feet with a stick, and then returned him to his place of confinement in Chihriq. Subsequently, he was sentenced to execution, which was carried out in Tabriz in 1850. (Martin & Hatcher, 2002: 49; n. a., 1967: 14)

This sequence of events highlights that the spread of Babism and the threat it posed to Islam and society compelled the government, under the rule of Naser al-Din Shah, to take decisive measures against the Babists, resorting to military force and executing their leader, Mirza Ali Mohammad Shirazi.

#### "Qurrat al-Ain" and its Role in Spreading Babism in Iraq:

Iraq witnessed the emergence of a woman who is considered one of the prominent advocates of the Babi movement within it, named Zeyn Taj, also known as "Qurrat al-Ain." She was the daughter of Hajj Saleh al-Qazwini al-Burghani. She was born in the year 1818 or 1820 CE (Al-Thabit, 2008: 33; Al-Hayani, 1988: 86) in Qazvin. Sources have varied in determining the exact year of her birth, mainly due to the absence of historical documents that specify her birth date. These documents were likely destroyed by her family out of fear of persecution by the Qajar authorities. However, other sources mention her birth year as 1814 CE (Roth, n.d.: 20). Qurrat al-Ain belonged to a well-known religious family in Qazvin. Her father, Mullah Saleh, was a religious scholar of his time. Her uncle, Muhammad Taqi, known as "The Third Martyr," was among those who opposed Sheikh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i and Sayyid Kazim al-Rashti and resisted the Akhbari direction. On the other hand, her other uncle, Muhammad Ali al-Burghani, held views contrary to his brother's; he aligned with Shaykhism (Al-Thabit, 2008: 33; Al-Wardi, 1971: 5; Reza, 1922: 263).

Qurrat al-Ain stood out not only for her exceptional beauty but also for her sharp intelligence. Her intellectual brilliance began to manifest from an early age when she attended her father and uncle's lessons, which they conducted for students. A curtain would be drawn for her to listen to the lessons discreetly. At the age of fourteen, she married her cousin, Mullah Muhammad ibn Muhammad Taqi, and they migrated to Iraq for educational purposes, settling in Karbala, the epicenter of Shaykhism and the residence of Sayyid Kazim al-Rashti. They remained in Karbala for thirteen years. Under the guidance of her uncle, Mullah Muhammad Ali, Qurrat al-Ain learned the principles of Shaykhism. He encouraged her to explore these principles through studying the works of al-Ahsa'i and al-Rashti. Interestingly, her inclination was more towards Sayyid Kazim al-Rashti in her pursuit of understanding Shaykhism, unlike her husband, who resisted the concepts of Shaykhism.

As disagreements escalated between Qurrat al-Ain and her husband, she made the decision to leave her husband and children, embarking on a journey to Iraq to be in close proximity to al-Rashti. At that time, she was twenty-nine years old. However, upon her arrival in Karbala, she was met with the news of al-Rashti's passing, and she found his disciples in mourning. Overwhelmed by grief, she participated in his funeral. Qurrat al-Ain then took it upon herself to disseminate al-Rashti's teachings. She later became one

of the initial adherents of the Babist movement. Her role was pivotal in establishing the foundations of the Babist movement in both Iraq and Iran (Al-Wardi, 1971: 8).

Gradually, the teachings of the Babist movement found a foothold among the people of Karbala. The followers, all of whom adhered to Shaykhism, practiced the principle of *taqiyya*, discreetly concealing their new beliefs and teachings. This implies that when Qurrat al-Ain embraced the teachings of Babism, she, like other followers, adhered to the principle of *taqiyya*. Nonetheless, she actively engaged in building connections with people, subtly preparing them for the acceptance of the new Babist teachings (Roth, n.d.: 23).

In the year 1846, Qurrat al-Ain and her followers were compelled to relocate from Karbala to Baghdad and settle in the holy area of Kazimiyah. This move was attributed to two main reasons. Firstly, she had a significant dispute with one of the prominent leaders of Shaykhism in Karbala, Muhammad Hasan Jawhar, regarding who would assume leadership of the Shaykhism movement after the passing of Sayyid Kazim al-Rashti. Her strong competition with him in Karbala led to this decision. Secondly, there was dissatisfaction among the opposing scholars of Karbala's religious community, who were critical of Qurrat al-Ain's outspoken manner and her ability to attract people around her. As she interacted openly with the public, she sought a fertile intellectual ground where she could express her ideas without any hindrance. Thus, she moved to Baghdad to establish a platform conducive to her intellectual pursuits. She continued to deliver her teachings in the holy Kazimiyah area, much like what she used to do in Karbala (Kohr, 2002: 3; Siraj Al-Din, 1994: 387-388; Al-Hayani, 1988: 88).

Qurrat al-Ain stayed in the holy Kazimiyah area for about six months, and then she returned to Karbala in the year 1847 (1264 AH) during the occasion of the Arbaeen pilgrimage. It's worth noting that her return to Karbala marked a new approach in spreading Babist teachings. She departed from the strategy of concealment and secrecy that she initially adhered to upon embracing the movement and began openly proclaiming her beliefs (Shakir, 2012: 105). However, her stay in Karbala wasn't lengthy due to intense disagreements between her and Ahmad al-Khurasani. She subsequently returned to Baghdad once again and settled in the home of Muhammad Shibl. Here, she continued to openly propagate her teachings, which eventually posed a threat to Iraqi society as a whole. This was a result of the poisonous and destructive ideas she spread, which contributed to the erosion of societal bonds in Iraq (Al-Hamdani, n.d.: 87).

As a result, Qurrat al-Ain was confined to the house of Shihab al-Din al-Alousi under the orders of the Ottoman governor. The case of her imprisonment caused a sensation in Qazvin, where it reached a point where her uncle, Muhammad Taqi, intervened on her behalf with the Ottoman governor, Najib Pasha, urging him to release her. Meanwhile, news of Qurrat al-Ain's release from Istanbul and her deportation from Iraq began to circulate. Accompanied by around thirty of her followers, she left the country (Al-Wardi, 1971: 83).

However, Qurrat al-Ain did not stop there. She continued to spread her teachings in Kermanshah and Hamadan as well, gaining significant attention and followers. This provoked strong resistance and a forceful reaction from religious figures, prompting her to consider returning to her hometown, Qazvin. Upon her return, she began plotting the assassination of her uncle, Muhammad Taqi, who vehemently opposed Shaykhism and her ideas. He was eventually killed while praying Fajr in the mosque. The Shaykhis and Babists were accused of this crime, and Qurrat al-Ain and her supporters were implicated in the assassination. This led to the arrest and execution of her followers, while Qurrat al-Ain herself was imprisoned (Abdul Hameed, 1969: 59; Al-Thabit, 2008: 240-246; Al-Hayani, 1981: 90).

Despite her captivity under Qajar authority, she remained firm in her belief that the Bab was the awaited Imam Mahdi and refused to recant. She declined to provide a detailed

report about her teachings in Babism. This prompted Mulla Muhammad Andarmani and Mulla Ali Kani to write a report declaring that Qurrat al-Ain had apostatized, refused to repent, and deserved death. Opinions varied on the method of Qurrat al-Ain's execution, but most sources suggest she was found murdered in a well within a public garden in 1852 (Zahir, 1981: 250; Al-Thabit, 2008: 25; Shakir, 2012: 106).

#### Mirza Husayn Ali al-Nouri and the Foundation and Development of the Baha'i Movement

Mirza Husayn Ali al-Nouri (Al-Washah, 2020: 38; Al-Hayani, 1981: 98; Esslemont: 2006: 32) (Baha'u'llah) embraced the call of the Bab in the year 1844, at the age of about twenty-seven. Later on, he became one of the most prominent advocates of the Babi movement. Upon reviewing some of the writings of the Bab sent to him by one of his closest supporters, Mulla Husayn al-Bushru'i, Baha'u'llah undertook the dissemination of its teachings in the region of Nur, his birthplace in Mazandaran. His family's social standing and his good reputation shielded him from persecution during the initial years of his adoption of the Babi faith.

Baha'u'llah's role became prominently evident during the Badasht Conference, where the declaration of the Babi sharia's independence from Islam took place. Baha'u'llah believed in the necessity of establishing a new religion and actively sought to found and promote it. It was from this conference that he adopted the title "Baha'u'llah" (Glory of God) (Esslemont: 2006: 33).

Baha'u'llah was imprisoned in the year 1852, following accusations of being involved in a plot to assassinate Naser al-Din Shah. He was held in a prison known as "Siyaah Chal," meaning the Black Pit (Martin & Hatcher, 2002: 65). During this ordeal, the Russian embassy in Tehran supported Baha'u'llah due to their strong relationship. The Russian ambassador in Tehran exerted significant efforts to clear Baha'u'llah of the charges against him. After spending four months in prison, he was released upon proving his innocence in the assassination attempt. However, despite his exoneration, the Iranian government required him to leave Iran along with his family and anyone who wished to join them on their journey to Baghdad (Afandi, 2002: 132-133; Martin & Hatcher, 2002: 69). He departed with his followers under strict guard by Iranian authorities, led by an officer from the Shah's guard and a representative from the Russian embassy, ensuring Baha'u'llah's safe arrival in exile. This journey lasted for three months (Afandi, 2002: 136).

Baha'u'llah arrived in Baghdad in the year 1853 with his family. Shortly after their arrival, a conflict arose between Baha'u'llah and his brother Subh-i-Azal regarding the religious leadership of the Babi movement. Each claimed leadership for themselves (Mahmoud, 1992: 56; Al-Hamdani, n.d.: 89). As a result of this dispute, the Babis in Iraq split into two factions. One faction followed Mirza Husayn Ali (Baha'u'llah) and became known as the Baha'is. The other faction followed his brother Mirza Yahya Subh-i-Azal and called themselves the Azalis. The dispute between the two brothers escalated over the leadership of the Babis. Baha'u'llah's life was at risk, and the conflict persisted for about a year. Eventually, Baha'u'llah was compelled to leave Baghdad, leaving the administration of the community in the hands of his brother. He headed north in Iraq (Zahir, 1981: 26).

During the years that Baha'u'llah and his followers spent in Iraq, they actively promoted their faith, both in Iraq and Iran. The Babis began to leave Iran and head to Baghdad to escape the persecution by the Qajar government in Iran that they had experienced in 1852. Their numbers gradually increased in Baghdad, strengthening their presence. This led to conflicts and internal tensions, not only between the Babis and Muslims but also within the Muslim community of Baghdad and among the Shia scholars in religious cities like Najaf, Karbala, and Kazimain. This situation prompted them to contact the Iranian consulate in Baghdad, urging them to communicate with their government to pressure the Ottoman government to relocate the Babi leaders from Baghdad to a more distant location. The presence of Babi leaders in the nearby city of Baghdad was seen as a threat

due to its proximity to Iran. Consequently, the Iranian authorities requested the Ottoman government to move the Babis to a more remote place (Brockelman, 1968: 668).

#### Baha'u'llah's Move to Istanbul and Ensuring the Spread of the Faith:

In the year 1863, an order was issued by the Ottoman authorities summoning Baha'u'llah to Istanbul based on a request from the Iranian government after a series of communications and negotiations with them. When news of the summons reached Baha'u'llah and his followers, he chose his garden in Najib Pasha as a residence for him and his family in preparation for the journey to Istanbul. He stayed there for twelve days while the caravan was being prepared for departure. After nineteen years since the Báb's proclamation of his mission, Baha'u'llah announced to his close followers that he was the Promised One prophesied by the Báb. He declared himself as the one mentioned by all religions, the Promised One foretold by all the previous prophets and messengers. He also informed them that he received revelations during his imprisonment in the "Siyyid-i-Chál." He stated that the appointment of Subh-i-Azal as the leader of the Bábí community in Shiraz was made in consultation with him and was his suggestion. The purpose of this was to establish a secure method for managing the affairs of the faith without drawing the attention of the Qajar government, until the time came to publicly announce his identity as the Promised One or "He Whom God shall make manifest," as described by the Báb in his writings (Esslemont, 2006: 233).

The garden where Baha'u'llah proclaimed his mission became known as the Garden of Ridván. Baha'u'llah only shared his call with his close associates, loved ones, and companions. The majority of the Bábís present in Baghdad and in the garden of Najib Pasha were unaware of his mission, including his brother Mirza Subh-i-Azal. Unless one accompanied him on the long journey to Constantinople, he or she would not have known about his call. Baha'u'llah did not publicly declare his mission until 1867, in Adrianople (Siraj Al-Din, 1994: 35).

In Adrianople, the rivalry between the two brothers over who claimed leadership of the Bábí movement continued. This competition escalated after five years of their settlement in the city. Conflicts grew between them, and they openly argued and even attempted to poison each other's food. However, this conflict was not spontaneous; it began when Baha'u'llah proclaimed himself as "the Promised One" or "He whom God shall make manifest," a title foretold by the Báb. This announcement angered Mirza Subh-i-Azal, but he concealed his frustration and anger until he reached Adrianople.

He claimed that the will signed by the Báb was conclusive evidence that he was the Báb's successor and his appointed vicegerent. On the other hand, Baha'ís believed that the Báb wrote the will to ensure Baha'u'llah's safety and protect him from enemies' harm. According to Baha'ís, the Báb wanted to keep Baha'u'llah hidden and away from harm's reach. Therefore, the leadership was displayed to his brother Mirza Subh-i-Azal as a means of preservation and protection (Afandi, 2002: 198; Al-Wardi, 1971: 233; Taherzadeh, 2008: 147-148).

Additionally, Baha'ís state that when the Báb appointed Mirza Subh-i-Azal as his successor in Syria, he warned and admonished him that this leadership was temporary and would remain until the "Promised One" or Baha'u'llah announced his call. At that point, Mirza Subh-i-Azal should not oppose or antagonize the "Promised One," or he would be expelled from the realm of faith, according to their interpretation. However, he did not adhere to the Báb's words; he rebelled and opposed the content of the will, thus, in their view, departing from the realm of faith (Al-Wardi, 1971: 233; Martin & Hatcher, 2002: 71; Ottoman Archive. (n.d.). Document in DK.MKT.2207.72.1.).

#### Emigration to Palestine and the Evolution of the Movement:

These conflicts raised concerns for the Ottoman government, prompting them to contemplate and remove these groups from the city. As a result, the Ottoman government



reached an agreement with the Iranian side to necessitate the separation of the two communities and their relocation to a distant place. Subsequently, an order was issued to relocate (Bahá'u'lláh) and his followers to Acre in Palestine, while (Subh-i-Azal) and his followers were sent to the island of Cyprus in 1868, where orders for their execution were issued there (Ottoman Archive. (1850). Letter from Sultan to Minister. (Document Identifier: 74.001 ZB.00002.000); Al-Wardi, 1971: 234; Khayoon, 2016: 601).

After the exile of Bahá'u'lláh and his followers to the city of Acre in Palestine on August 31, 1868, he settled there and spent twenty-four years, alternating between being imprisoned and isolated within his residence. During this period, his stature rose in comparison to his brother, Subh-i-Azal. He wrote numerous works, letters, and books containing teachings, principles, advice, and guidance for his followers. Through these writings, he claimed to be the representative and successor of the Báb. Subsequently, he asserted that the Báb (from Shiraz) had heralded his coming and paved the way for him. Beyond this, he proclaimed himself to be the awaited Imam Mahdi, the savior anticipated by people, who would establish justice and equity after the world had been filled with injustice and oppression. Not content with asserting his Imamate, Bahá'u'lláh aspired for more and claimed a general prophethood, elevating himself to the rank of absolute divinity. He viewed himself as God on Earth. Through these writings, he managed to exert control over his followers and supporters (Al-Jalali, n.d.: 34; Ismail, 2009: 184; Qabain, 1922: 14).

On May 28, 1892, Bahá'u'lláh passed away in the city of Acre in Palestine at the age of seventy-five. Before his death, he had designated the future leadership and institutions to manage the affairs of his religion, specifying the roles and authorities of each. He appointed his eldest son, 'Abbas Effendi, to oversee the administration of his teachings and the interpretation of his teachings thereafter (Esslemont, 2009: 97; Khan, 2016: 255; Saloom, 2013: 124).

## Conclusion

After this brief overview of the emergence and development of the Babi and Baha'i movements, several conclusions can be drawn. The economic, social, and political deterioration that Iran was experiencing contributed to creating a receptive environment for Iranian society to accept movements with esoteric tendencies that relied on revelations and dreams. This context allowed the Shirazi (the Bab) to gain popularity among the impoverished segments of society, as he was perceived as the path and means to the Imam Mahdi who would establish justice and equity on Earth, addressing their genuine thirst for the Promised Imam's person who would deliver them from oppression.

The method of occultation, which adopts the doctrine of the discontinuation of direct communication with religious authority after the Greater Occultation, logically provided a barrier and obstacle to any claim of communication or messengership, explaining the skeptical and opposing stance of the traditional religious establishment towards the Babi movement. The escalation of discourse from the religious institution began after the Bab's proclamation of receiving divine revelation in his imprisonment. Additionally, Mirza Husayn Ali (Baha'u'llah) claimed that the Kitab-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Book) was superior to all other heavenly scriptures. These circumstances illustrate the foundation for the emergence and evolution of the Babi movement in Iran, followed by its migration to Iraq and other countries. This migration posed a significant challenge to the religious institution, necessitating an intellectual and doctrinal confrontation with Babism and Baha'ism.

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