that he provides, but it is the importance of the questions which he poses that are an index of his contribution to the contemporary discourse on the relevance of the Qur'an to the concerns of to-day's men and women.

Anis Ahmad*


The book, as its name suggests, is a short history of Bahá'ísm, as also a brief account of Bábism from which it is claimed to have sprung. Its writer, Dr Peter Smith, is the Social Sciences Coordinator and teaches world history and sociology in the International Students Degree programmes (ISDP) at Mahidol University, Thailand. Like Qādianism, better known as Ahmadiyyah after the name of its founder, Ghulām Aḥmad, arose from the fold of Sunnīs, Bábism and Bahá'ism emanated from the fold of Shī'īs. While Ahmadiyyah, with its apparent Islamic trappings and the claim of its founder and followers to be part of Islam, claimed to represent "the true Islam" — a claim that the Muslim community did not accept — Bábism and Bahá'ism, according to their founders as well as followers, have claimed and are considered to be entirely new and independent religions which have nothing to do with Islam. However, as pointed out by the author of the book under review, "not only did Bábī religion emerge as a movement within Shī'ī Islam, but the Bábīs and early Bahá'īs were almost all Iranians who had formerly been Shī'ī Muslims; the writings of the Báb (1817–50) — the founder of Bábism — and to a lesser extent those of Bahá'ulláh are pervaded by Islamic concepts; and many Bábī and Bahá'ī practices bear an obvious resemblance to those of Islam" (p. 13). In fact, the word "almost" in this statement should better be removed in order to make it more accurate for the early followers of these two religious, all of them, were formerly Shī'ī Muslims.

The author has rightly added: "Resemblance and derivation are not the same as identity, of course, and to describe the Bahá'í Faith as a Muslim sect — as some writers are still inclined to do — is highly misleading, and as inaccurate as describing second-century Christianity as a Jewish sect". (Ibid).

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While the concepts of revelation and holy law are common, there are some basic differences in the beliefs about the Prophet Muhammad, resurrection and the Islamic law. Unlike Muslims, the Bābās and Bahā'īs do not consider Prophet Muhammad to be the last prophet, nor do they follow the Qur'ān, as, according to their belief, it stands abrogated, and they have their own Books, Bayān and Kitāb-i-Aqdas (or Ḥqāīq) respectively. For them qiyāmah (or resurrection) has already come. Instead of the word prophet (or nabi), they use the word "Manifestation of God" (p. 14) and include Krishna, Zoroaster and Buddha in the list of prophets, as the author says: "Besides Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, the Bahā'īs recognized Zoroaster as a Manifestation (p. 66) and `Abd `l-Bahā later recognized Krishna and Buddha" (p. 67).

The book is divided into three parts; the first having four chapters, the second four, and the third three, with a conclusion and chronology of important dates. Part one deals with the Bābī religion (1844–53), and its four chapters are on its Islamic and Iranian background, emergence and development, conflict and collapse. Part two deals with the establishment of Bahā'ī Faith, and discusses Bahā'ullāh, his writings and teachings, `Abdu `l-Bahā' and Bahā'ī communities, 1866–1921. Part three deals with Bahā'ī Faith since 1922, and gives an account of Shoghi Effendi, the Universal House of Justice and Bahā'ī Communities, 1922 to the present.

The author has admitted that "with such a brief work describing complex historical developments, I had to omit much and to skate over difficult issues. I can hope the ice is not too thin", and adds: "readers wishing for more detail are referred to my work The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions" (p. 9).

The first part of the book makes a cursory reference to the Twelver Shi'ism, particularly Shaykhism, the fountain head of Bābism, the transformation of Sayyid Muhammad `Āli, the Bāb, from his early claims of being a Bāb (or Gate — an intermediary or harbinger for the Shi'ī's Twelfth Imam, Mahdī), to be Mahdī himself as contained in his early writing Qayyūm al-Asmā', a commentary on the Qur'ānic Sūrah Yūsuf, composed in the manner of the Qur'ān and presented as "new verses from God". Dubbed as a heretic by the clerics, he was confined in Mākū and Chihāq, where he wrote his Bayān and nine commentaries on the whole Qur'ān mostly in Arabic. Now he presented a new religious framework distinct from Islam, in which he used the word Mazhar-i Ilāhī (Manifestation of God) instead of Nabi (or Prophet), and claimed that these Manifestations started from Adam and through Muhammad (peace be on him) came down to Bāb and would continue by the coming of "Man Yuzhiruhu Allāh" (He whom God shall make Manifest), and so on indefinitely. Thus, Bābism emerged as a new religion, with Bāb as the new
Manifestation superseding the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him), and his Bayān replacing and abrogating the Qur'ān.

The author then describes the raising of the black standard in July 1848, the massacre of Bābīs in Bārfurūsh near Caspian and Țabarsī, followed by two revolts in Zanjān and Nayriz in early 1851.

Here we may add that in the meantime, in July 1850, Bāb was brought to a Committee of Shi‘ī mujahids in Tabrīz, and after his failure to satisfy them with his "strange" and "irrelevant" replies, he was condemned to death.

After Bāb's escape from death following the shooting by a Christian firing squad, he was again brought before a squad of Muslim soldiers and shot dead on July 9, 1850.

The author has also failed to refer to the difficult language used by Bāb in his writings. Most of Bāb's writings are in Arabic and a few in his mother tongue, Persian. It is difficult to understand them because of their terse and confusing style. In Gobineau's words: "le style de Mīrzā ‘AliMohammad est terne, raide et sans eclat". (See E.G. Browne's A Literary History of Persia, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959, 4: 423). So also Browne says: "Some (of the Bāb's writings) are so confused, so full of repetitions, extraordinary words and fantastic derivatives of Arabic roots, that they defy the most industrious and indefatigable reader" (E.G. Browne, "Bāb, Bābism", Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 2: 305).

The first part ends with the collapse of Bābism after the final extinction of the Bābī resistance at Zanjān in January 1851, the movement being nominally led by Mīrzā Yahyā Nūrī (c. 1832–1912), better known by his title Šubh-i Azal, inexperienced and recluse for still being in his teens. The attempt on Shah's life in August 1852, and the subsequent arrest and killing of all those Bābīs who could be found, under the suspicion of their involvement, including the innocent Qurrat al-`Ayn Tāhirah, proved to be the last nail in the coffin of Bābism, its roots torn up by the opponents.1

The part two opens with the account of Mīrzā Ḥusayn `Āfī Nūrī (1817–92), better known with his title: Bahā'u'llāh, under whose leadership Bābism is claimed to have reemerged and eventually transformed into Bahā'ism. The author then relates Bahā's initiatory visions while still confined in Siyāh Chāl prison, and called "Beauty of God" by "a sweet voiced heavenly maiden", assuring him that God would render him victorious (Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, 101–2). Banished in April 1853 to Baghdad with all his family, Bahā soon eclipsed his half brother, Šubh-i

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1For the claims of Bāb and Bābīs and their Doctrines, not given by the author, reference is invited to Naqavi, Bābīsm and Bahā'īsm, Islamic Studies, 14: 3 (1975), pp. 192-99.
Azal, and after a solitary life for two years in Kurdistan and return to Baghdad, he was recognized as the preeminent Bābī leader, by Bābīs, Iranians and Ottoman authorities (p. 53).

Bahā'ī wrote his famous books, Haft Vādī (The Seven Valleys, c. 1850), Kalimāt-i Maktūnah (Hidden Words, c. 1858), (both being reviewed by us separately) and Kitāb-i Īqān (The Book of Certitude, 1862). Between 22 April and 3 May (21 August 1863: Naqavi, "Bābism and Bahā'īsm", Islamic Studies, 14: 3, 1975, p.199). Before his exile to Edirne in December, he made the announcement in the Garden of Rīḍwān (Garden of Najīb Pāshā, called by the Bahā'īs, Bāgh-i Rīḍwān; Naqavi, ibid) that he was "Man Yuzhiruhu Allāh" as foretold by Bāb. In Edirne, his claims were made generally known and messengers sent to Iran to communicate them to Bahā'īs there (sending letters to various sovereigns, inviting them to support his cause: Naqavi, ibid). The great majority of Bābīs became Bahā'īs, some identified themselves as Azalīs, while others remained unaffiliated with either group (p. 56). The messenger to Shah of Iran was, however, tortured and killed (p. 59). In 1866, the Bābīs split into respective followers of the two brothers, most siding with Bahā'ullāh (p. 56). In August 1868, Bahā', his family and followers were banished to 'Akk (Acre) to live there for the next nine years, while Azal and his followers were exiled to Famagusta in Cyprus (p. 58). A small group of Bahā'ī enthusiasts, much to Bahā's mistress, murdered the resident Azalīs, who, according to the latter's claim created endless difficulties (p. 59).

Bahā'ullāh, like the Bāb, also wrote a book of laws, Kitāb-i Aqdas, for his followers, composed in about 1873 and supplemented by his replies to questions by his followers and some of his other writings.

E.G. Browne, the famous English orientalist, who met Bahā'ullāh in 1890 in 'Akk (Acre) describes him as 'the object of devotion and love' from his followers "which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain (vide 'Abdu'l-Bahā', Traveller's Narratives, II, xxxix–xi)."

Two years later, on 29 May 1892, Bahā'ullāh died of fever. He had stated in his writings that there would be no further 'Manifestations of God' for at least a thousand years … his sons would be his successors, and after them 'the Universal House of Justice'. He appointed his eldest surviving son, 'Abbās (1844–1921), better known by his title, 'Abdu'l-Bahā, his successor and naming his second son, Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Āfī, after him, and directed the Bahā'īs to abide by his book of laws, Kitāb-i Aqdas (pp. 60 and 62).

The writings and teachings of Bahā'ullāh (contained in chapter 6 of the book) will be dealt with in a separate review on A Short Introduction of Bahā'ī Faith.

'Abdu'l-Bahā brought about several changes in the Bahā'ī religion including the prohibition of polygamy. In his late sixties, he took up several
journeys to consolidate the Bahá’í communities. He travelled to Egypt in 1910, and to London, Bristol and Paris in 1911. Then from March 1912 to June 1913, he visited 38 American and Canadian cities before proceeding to Europe, where he visited Britain, France, Germany and Australia-Hungary. His addresses during these journeys form an important addition to Bahá’í religious literature. In 1920, he was awarded knighthood by Britain in Haifa. During his ministry, in 1909 Báb's remains were brought to Haifa and buried there.

The writings and recordings of ‘Abdu ’l-Bahá’ date from 1892, though earlier he wrote The Secret of Divine Civilization (1875) and Travellers' Narratives (1886) published under the name of E.G. Browne, its translator. ‘Abdu ’l-Bahá’s Treatise on Politics was composed in 1892–3 for the guidance of the Iranian Bahá’ís. Over 27,000 of his letters, along with 'pilgrim's notes' of conversation duly recorded have survived. His letters included in Tablets of the Divine Plan (1916–17) were addressed to the North American Bahá’ís. Then there are his Nineteen Principles which have become a common element in Bahá’í literature (pp. 85–87).

‘Abdu ’l-Bahá died on 28 November, 1921 and was buried in a separate part of the Báb’s shrine in Haifa (p. 84).

‘Abdu ’l-Bahá is reported to have written his Will and Testament, which, however, remained secret until his death in 1921, in which, in utter violation of Bahá’ulláh’s clear instructions concerning the succession of his younger son, Mírzá Muḥammad ’Alí after ’Abdu ’l-Bahá, contained in his Book of Covenant, ‘Abdu ’l-Bahá appointed Shoghi Effendi, his daughter’s son as his successor, superseding Mírzá Muḥammad ’Alí who had been ‘cut off from the Holy Tree’ as a result of his misdeeds (p. 102).

Part three deals with Bahá’í Faith since 1923, and starts with the succession of Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Cause of God (Valí Amrilláh).

After taking up the reins of the Guardianship of the Bahá’í community, he paid full attention to the regularization of its administration and its expansion. He established the International Bahá’í Council (1950–51), a precursor of the Universal House of Justice; the Hands of the Cause of God as a functioning group of senior Bahá’ís; and two Auxiliary Boards on a continental level in 1954 and 1957 respectively. After the completion of two Seven Year Plans (1937–44 and 1946–53), he embarked on a Ten year ‘Global Crusade’ in 1953 for expansion of the Faith and construction of Houses of Worship and increase contact with the United Nations. He married Mary Maxwell, the only daughter of two North American Bahá’ís. He died unexpectedly on November 4, 1957 during a visit to London and was buried there (p.112).
After Shoghi's death, who died issueless and intestate, the Universal House of Justice, first elected by the first International Bahá'ís Congress held in London in April 1963, acts as the supreme administrative body and has assumed permanent headship of the Bahá'í community. In contrast to all other present Bahá'í bodies, its membership is confined to nine men. Elected once in every five years at an international convention of the Bahá'í national assembly members, it conducts its work as a spiritual assembly. To date a total of 16 men served as its members, including three originally elected in 1963, its membership changing only as a result of death or retirement. Like the Shi‘i mujtahids, the House is empowered to legislate on matters not incorporated in the Bahá’ís Holy books. Besides providing directive guidance, the House has collected and published a large number of writings of Bahá’ulláh, Báb, 'Abd al-Bahá' and Shoghi Effendi.

The total number of Bahá'ís in the world is now claimed to be five million mostly living in USA and Canada, Australia and New Zealand, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. The Pacific is one of the most important areas having the only Bahá'í head of the state in the world, Malietoa Tanumafili II of Western Samoa and the first House of Worship in the region outside Australia, opened in 1984. They have radio stations in Latin America and have opened schools and dispensaries, like Christian missionaries, for the lower segments of the society, particularly in the Third World, which have proved very effective weapons for the propagation of their Faith.

Ali Raza Naqavi


Until recently the study of Sufism has mainly been the domain of orientalists and historians. From the perspective of orientalists, contemporary shrine cults predominantly appear as degradations of classical Sufism into 'decadence' characterised by superstition and magical practices. Historians, on the other hand, have for long emphasised the syncretism of saint worship, depicting it as part of a process of 'indigenisation' of Islam.

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