



BAHAISM X. BAHAI SCHOOLS

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x. Bahai Schools

The Bahai schools were a series of government recognized educational institutions established, owned, and controlled by the Bahai community in various centers of Iran and Ashkhabad and conducted on Bahai principles from 1897 until 1929 in Ashkhabad and until 1934 in Iran.

Despite the significance of child education, both general and religious, as explicitly propounded in the writings of Bahā'-Allāh, who made the education of both boys and girls an obligation of the parents (see *Bahá'í Education*, pp. 4-6), and further elaborated by his son and successor, 'Abd-al-Bahā' (d. 1340/1921; *ibid.*, pp. 11-53), the prolonged and severe persecution of the Bahai community which started with the inception of the Babi faith in Iran in 1260/1844 and continued throughout the period of Bahā'-Allāh's ministry (d. 1309/1892), had prevented the process of formal education of Bahai children from unfolding until about 1897. Before then, only informal elementary classes could be offered by individual believers at private homes on a tutorial basis. These classes were designed primarily to provide fundamental courses on the Persian and Arabic languages and literatures, and the history and writings of the Bahai faith. They were held in early Bahai communities such as Russian Turkmenistan, Burma, and various places in Iran like Najafābād near Isfahan.



Under the guidance of ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ more than thirty Bahai schools were gradually established as circumstances permitted throughout Iran and several places in India, Egypt, Turkey, Palestine, and southern Russia.

Established, controlled, and funded through the support of the Bahai community, the earliest Bahai schools began in Tehran and [Ashkhabad](#), now in Russian Turkmenistan, and were followed by the erection of the Tawakkol school in Qazvīn, the Ta’yīd and the Mawhebat (for girls) in Hamadān, the Waḥdat-e Bašar in Kāšān, the Ma’refat in Ārān (near Kāšān), the Taraqqī in Šahmīrzād (near Semnān), the Mīṭāqīya in Neyrīz, and a number of similar schools in Ābāda, Qomrūd (near Kāšān), Najafābād, Bahnamīr (near Sārī), Maryamābād and Mehdīābād (near Yazd), Bārforūš, Sārī, Bošrūya (in Khorasan), Ešteḥārd (near Karaj), and several other schools outside Iran such as Tashkent, Marv, Īskenderun (Turkey), and Daidanaw (Burma). Bahai schools not only attracted the children of Bahai background but soon gained enough educational strength and reliability to attract children of various religious and social backgrounds.

The Tarbiyat school was established in Tehran in 1315/1897 and two years later became officially recognized by the government. Founded by Ḥājī Mīrzā Ḥasan Adīb Ayādī (d. 1337/1918), the Tarbiyat became one of the best-known schools in Iran by virtue of the devotion of its teachers, the advanced quality of its curriculum, and its high standard of order and discipline (Tābet, pp. 94-95; *Bahá’í News* 1/7, 1910, p. 5). During the first few years of its existence the Tarbiyat was supported by financial contributions from individual Bahais, but, as it expanded in subsequent years, the local Spiritual Assembly of Tehran formed a management committee. Among its earliest members were Dr. ‘Aṭā’-Allāh Baḳšāyeš (d. 1363/1944) and Dr. Moḥammad Monajjem (d. 1338/1920). Following Adīb, Monajjem and Baḳšāyeš, ‘Azīz-Allāh Mešbāḥ (d. 1363/1945) and ‘Alī-Akbar Forūtan became the principals of the school. A statistical report shows that the school in 1330/1911 had a total of 371 students in 8 grades (in 11 classes), 18 faculty members, and 4 staff (ms., International Bahá’í Archives, Haifa, MR 1402). By 1932 the school offered 6 preparatory grades and 4 intermediate grades; of the 26 teachers, 20 were Bahais, and of the 541 students, 339 were Bahais, 175 Muslims, 21 Christians, 4 Jews, and 2 Zoroastrians (*The Bahá’í World* V, p. 117).

The foundation of the Tarbiyat school for girls in Tehran was in response to ‘Abd-al-Bahā’'s emphasis on the education of women as a matter of necessity. Established in the name of Dr. ‘Aṭā’-Allāh Baḳšāyeš in 1329/1911 (Solaymānī,



1973, p. 23), a few American Bahais such as Miss Lillian Kappes (d. 1338/1920), Dr. Susan Moody (d. 1353/1934), Dr. Genevieve Coy (d. 1382/1963), and Miss Adelaide Sharp (d. 1396/1976) served in the school in close cooperation with their Persian Bahai and non-Bahai colleagues. Starting with 6 grades for children and offering special courses for girls up to the age of 20 (Tābet, p. 104), the school could accommodate 400 students around 1919 (Āvāra, p. 73) and a decade later was advanced enough to offer 11 grades to 719 students, of whom 359 were Bahais, 352 Muslims, and 8 Jews (*The Bahá'í World V*, p. 117).

Outside Iran, the private informal education of the Bahai children of Ashkhabad, which had started with the establishment of the Bahai community in that land in 1301/1883 (*Tārīk-emoḵtaṣar-e ta'sīs wa baqā-ye madrasa-ye pesarāna wa doḵtarāna-ye bahā'tān-e 'Ešqābād 1897-1927*, ms., International Bahá'í Archives, Haifa, M1678), received official governmental recognition in 1315/1897 through the unfailing efforts of its founders Sayyed Mehdī Golpāyegānī (d. 1346/1928) and Ḥājī Mīrzā Ḥosayn Mo'allem Yazdī (d. 1346/1928) who erected a new building for the school and hired Bahai and non-Bahai teachers (Solaymānī, 1968, pp. 407-17). By 1907, the increasing number of girl students required a separate girls' school of seven grades. Both schools (ca. 1927) had 462 students (237 boys and 225 girls), 62 of whom were non-Bahais; 20 percent of the students were exempted from paying the tuition and 46 percent would pay part of it (*Tārīk-emoḵtaṣar*). These Bahai schools were the first educational institutions to be conducted along modern pedagogical lines in the region (Hoonard, p. 109). The schools were confiscated by the Bolshevik government in 1929 (Māzandarānī, 1975, p. 1041). Following the foundation of Bahai schools in Tehran and Ashkhabad, numerous other schools were opened in almost every major Bahai community. To refer to just a few leading ones, in Qazvīn, the first Bahai school, called the Tawakkol, was opened in 1324/1908 as a result of the encouragement and financial support of the leading Bahais of the city such as Mīrzā Mūsā Ḥakīmbāšī (Ḥakīm Elāhī) and Mīrzā Rezā Khan Taslīmī under the management of Ḥājī Ebrāhīm Wā'ez.

In 1327/1909 the Ta'yīd school for boys and the Mawhebat school for girls were officially opened in Hamadān (Ešrāq Kāvārī, p. 139), through the efforts of Mīrzā Āqā Jān Ṭabīb b. Hārūn, and in 1331/1913 were officially recognized by the government (Tābet, p. 39). The name Mawhebat was given the school by 'Abd-al-Bahā', who continued to encourage it ('Abd-al-Bahā', pp. 13-14, 25, 83-84, 183-85).



The Bahai school in Kāšān, which was formed in 1316/1898 through the efforts of K̄vāja Rabī' (d. 1336/1917) received official governmental recognition in 1328/1910 under the name of Waḥdat-e Bašar, given also by 'Abd-al-Bahā'. The school started with 6 grades and in 1332/1913, the seventh grade was added (Māzandarānī, 1972, p. 283).

The local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Najafābād, in about 1328/1910, hired a private teacher to conduct necessary classes for the Bahai children of the village. These classes, which lasted for two years, were the predecessors of a school which was inaugurated in 1330/1912 as a branch of the Tehran Tarbiyat school, to offer four grades under the management of Moḥammad-'Alī Šā'eq. In 1337/1919 the school continued its services under a new name, Sa'ādat, and in 1344/1926 developed to a six-grade school and was officially recognized by the government in 1349/1931 in the name of Aḥmad Šahīdī, its principal. It continued until 1352/1934 when, with about 127 students, it was closed by order of the government.

In the same village the Sa'ādat school for girls occupied its own building in 1346/1928 to accommodate classes in three grades and was officially recognized in 1347/1929. In 1348/1930 it expanded to a six-grade school and in the last three years of its services (1350-52/1932-34) all 24 girls who graduated from the sixth grade passed the final Ministry examinations. The school was closed by order of the government in 1352/1934 (*The History of the Sa'ādat Schools in Najafābād*, ms., Bahá'í International Archives, Haifa, M1741). Subsequent to the establishment of these schools, the Sa'ādat school in Bārforūš, in 1331/1912, a Bahai school in Ardestān in 1332/1913 (Ṭābet, pp. 39-40), and many others in other centers came into being.

As Bahai institutions, the daily operation of these schools was in conformity with Bahai teachings and principles. Schools were free for the children of poor families and others would pay a sum in proportion to the financial means of the family. The total tuition paid by the students, however, in most cases, was not sufficient to run the school, and the balance had to be paid by the local Spiritual Assembly of the city or be met through private contributions of individual Bahais.

In 1313 Š./1935 the Deputy Minister of Education under Reżā Shah issued an official order to the effect that since the Tarbiyat school had been closed on Thursday, 15 Āḍar 1313 Š./6 December 1934 (the commemoration day of the martyrdom of the Bāb), it could no longer operate (Martin, p. 17; *The Bahá'í*



World VI, p. 27). The closing of the Tarbiyat school was followed by the closing of all other Bahai schools in the country. Since then they have remained closed and the efforts of the Bahais to have the order rescinded have been of no avail.

In addition to the regular, recognized Bahai schools, in 1315/1898 Sayyed Ḥasan Hāšemīzāda (known as Motawajjeh) (d. 1335 Š./1956) gathered a group of Bahai children of south Tehran and inaugurated Bahai classes which became known as “Character Training Classes” (*Kelāshā-ye dars-e aklāq*) and soon were formed in all parts of the city and gradually were instituted in the whole country on Friday mornings (Solaymānī, 1968, pp. 40-45). At the outset the curriculum of these classes consisted of the memorization of prayers and short excerpts from Bahai and other sacred texts. Later the *Dorūs al-dīyāna*, written by Moḥammad-‘Alī Qā’eni (d. 1303 Š./1924) and published in Ashkhabad in 1329/1911, was used and the study of selections from Bahā’-Allāh’s *Ketāb-e īqān* (The book of certitude) and *Aqdas* (The most holy book), ‘Abd-al-Bahā’s *Maqāla-ye šakṣ-i sayyāh* (A traveler’s narrative) and *Mofāwāzāt* (Some answered questions), and the Persian translation of J. E. Esslemont’s *Bahā’u’llāh and the New Era*, formed the curriculum.

As the classes extended, management committees both at the local and national levels were formed to conduct and supervise the classes. The children of each community were grouped according to their age to form classes from grades one to twelve. To fulfill the academic need of the various classes ‘Alī-Akbar Forūtan (in 1933) compiled a series of special textbooks for various grades which became basic standard books and were widely studied throughout the country. The series consisted of Bahai history, laws, ordinances, and administrative principles. Depending on the mutual interest of the teachers and the students, other materials, in addition to the text books, were also taught in the classes. No salary was paid to the teachers and no tuition fees were charged.

Bahai children’s classes are currently held throughout the Bahai world in 165 countries or territories (*The Seven Year Plan: 1979-1986*, Haifa, 1986, p. 75) and the curriculum is prepared by the national and/or local committees in charge of the classes. Many are attended by non-Bahai students, as well.

Bahai seasonal schools, mostly summer and winter schools, are also held around the world to foster association and a spirit of fellowship among the Bahais, provide intellectual training, and offer courses on the history, tenets, and administration of the faith as well as fundamental courses on the history



and teachings of other religions, to deepen their understanding of different aspects of the faith. Courses are usually conducted in lecture form and are accompanied by study classes, seminars, and workshops.

Originated in America in 1927 (Shoghi Effendi, 1970, p. 340) for the primary use of the Bahais, Bahai summer schools were adopted by other Bahai communities around the world and are open to non-Bahais who wish to learn about the faith and the social life of the Bahai community. Bahai seasonal schools as national institutions function under the direct supervision of the national Spiritual Assembly in each country and every member of the Bahai community is encouraged to attend one of the schools each year.

The first Bahai summer school in Iran was instituted in 1939 on the estate of a Bahai in Ḥājīābād, some 40 kilometers northeast of Tehran, and as circumstances permitted continued functioning in various locations until 1979, when the Bahai institutions were closed by the Islamic government.

The latest statistical report shows that 128 national Assemblies, 86 percent of the national communities in the world, held seasonal schools by April, 1968 (*The Seven Year Plan*, p. 100). For detailed reports on Bahai seasonal schools see the “Survey of Current Bahá’í Activities” in volumes of *The Bahá’í World*.

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