



BĀRZĀNĪ

BĀRZĀNĪ or **BĀREZĀNĪ**, the name of a Kurdish tribe from Bārzān, a town in the former Hakkārī-Bahdīnān territory of northeastern Iraq (lat 36°50' N, long 44° E). Originally followers of the Naqšbandī order, the tribesmen now have little awareness of this past.

The shaikhs of Bārzān came to prominence in the wake of lawlessness and disorder following suppression of the semi-independent Kurdish principalities in the middle of the 13th/19th century. Information on the early Bārzānis is shrouded in Kurdish oral history. The first reference is to Bāzīrān (*Šaraf-nāma* I, p.107). The leading shaikhs of the 13th/19th century were Shaikh Tāj-al-Dīn (also known as 'Abd-al-Raḥmān) and Shaikh 'Abd-al-Salām I.

Recorded history starts with Shaikh 'Abd-al-Salām II (1882-1914), who was probably the most formidable Kurdish tribal leader the Young Turks had to face. To the dismay of the Ottomans, he had largely succeeded in overcoming his Zebārī rivals. When in 1913 he hoisted the banner of revolt against Süleyman Nazif (Solaymān Naẓīf), the *wālī* of Mosul, he was defeated but able to escape to Urmia. Upon his return to Iraq he was captured and hanged in 1914 (according to other sources in 1916).

'Abd-al-Salām II was succeeded by his brother Shaikh Aḥmad Bārzānī (1889?-1969) as the religious leader of Bārzān who harassed first the British and later the Hashemite monarchy. Apart from intermittent skirmishes with his Naqšbandī rivals, he challenged the authority of the mandatory power in 1919-20 by acts of violence. In the 1920s Shaikh Aḥmad demonstrated his



religious eccentricity by proclaiming himself the incarnation of the divinity, which his followers accepted. In 1931 and in 1933 the Iraqi government was forced to take measures against him, but he evaded punishment by crossing into Turkey, where he stayed until a 1935 amnesty allowed him to return. However, he was obliged to reside first in Kirkuk and later in Sulaimaniya. The situation in the Second World War enabled him and his younger brother Mollā Moṣṭafā Bārzānī (1904-79) to escape from seclusion to Bārzān by way of Iran in 1943.

Mollā Moṣṭafā's strength was due to the military capabilities of his tribe and his own leadership as well as the support of the nontribal rural and urban population, especially the Kurdish intelligentsia and the middle class. From his tribal seat in Bārzān he pressed the government to promise improvement of cultural and social services. When these promises were not honored, serious fighting ensued. Outnumbered, he had to retreat and make his way to Iran. After having failed to reach an agreement with the Iranian government concerning political asylum, Mollā Moṣṭafā and his armed followers rallied to the emerging army of the Mahābād Republic (an autonomist Kurdish movement centered in Mahābād), where he was made one of four generals. The collapse of the Kurdish Republic in December, 1946, marked the beginning of a twelve-year uneventful asylum in the Soviet Union which he reached after a forced march with a small band of followers.

The overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in 1958 offered Mollā Moṣṭafā the chance to return triumphantly to Baghdad. For two years Kurdish influence under General 'Abd-al-Karīm Qāsem grew, not least because of internal power struggles and Kurdish support of army units loyal to Qāsem. The political honeymoon between Qāsem and Mollā Moṣṭafā was, however, of short duration because of increasing government interference in Kurdish affairs. When the Qāsem regime began to assert its authority over Kurdistan in earnest, Mollā Moṣṭafā returned to Bārzān. By 1961 the deteriorating political situation had led to open war with the disgruntled Kurds. The nine-year war ended in 1970 with a cease-fire and an agreement on granting the Kurds autonomy, and Mollā Moṣṭafā emerged as a charismatic Kurdish leader. But the reprieve was to last only four years, characterized by further clashes, repression, and Arabization of Kurdistan, as well as the internationalization of the Kurdish problem. In his old age Mollā Moṣṭafā was reduced to a pawn in the Iran-Iraq border disputes, in particular over the Šaṭṭ-al-'Arab issue. When Iraq and Iran settled their differences at the expense of the Kurds in 1975,



Mollā Moṣṭafā had to seek refuge in Iran, never to return to the political scene. He died in 1979 in the United States

Mollā Moṣṭafā's youngest sons, Edrīs (1944-87) and Mas'ūd (b. 1946), have played minor roles in the Kurdish movement since the late 1960s. At the fifth congress of the Ḥezb-e Demokrāt-e Kordestān-e Īrān (Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran; KDPI) in Ādar, 1360 Š./December, 1981, the Bārzānīs were reprehended for siding with the Islamic Republic against the autonomist movement of the Iranian Kurds (*Gozāreš-e Komīta-ye Markazī be-Kongra-ye panjom-e Ḥezb-e Demokrāt-e Kordestān-e Īrān*, 1360, p. 19). In May, 1983, the Turkish government carried retaliatory measures against Bārzān in response to an attack by armed "terrorist" groups who had killed a number of Turkish soldiers. These measures were largely a reaction to the activities of Edrīs and Mas'ūd Bārzānī. The same year the Iraqi government forcibly transferred the entire Bārzānī tribe, mostly women and children, to an unknown place (Kurdish Students in Europe, *Saddam Hussein in the Light of Koshtapa Events: A Genuine Report on the Situation of the Barzani Kurds under the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein*, March, 1985). A cousin of Mas'ūd, Moḥammad-Ḳāled, was later used by the Iranian government to found a new Kurdish Ḥezb-Allāh party (van Bruinessen, p. 24).

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