



## BAVĀNĀTĪ

**BAVĀNĀTĪ**, MĪRZĀ MOḤAMMAD-BĀQER, also called Ebrāhīm Jān Mo‘aṭṭar and known as Mr. Bakir of Persia, Persian man of letters, poet, instructor of Persian in London, and self-styled prophet. He was born in Šeydān in Bavānāt, Fārs, most likely between the years 1230-35/1814-20 and died in 1310/1892-93 (Aḥmad; Shaikh Mofīd, s.v. Mo‘aṭṭar; Šo‘ā‘-al-Molk, p. 445). He left his home village at the age of twelve and went to Shiraz, where he received traditional education and learned English. Possessing an inquiring mind and a restless nature, he soon delved into a variety of beliefs and faiths, professing to several during the course of his life. He was raised a Shi‘ite but early in his youth followed the path of a dervish and affected the title *Ḳodā‘ī* (Godly); later he gravitated to Christianity, calling himself *Mazhar-e ‘Īsā* (The manifestation of Jesus; *Mer’āt al-faṣāḩa*, cited in Afšār, p. 11); then he adopted atheism only to convert to Judaism later; finally he devised a religious system of his own, an amalgam of Christianity and Islam, which he branded Islamo-Christianity. He devoted most of his energy, time, and money to elaborating his religious system in Persian poems written “in the most bizarre style” and in countless tracts and leaflets in English, which he often distributed on the streets of London, for which he was once severely beaten by the mob (Browne, 1893, pp. 12-13; Pīrzāda, p. 2 10).

After spending years traveling the world and having mastered several languages (including Hebrew), Bavānātī found himself employed for a time as translator at the British consulate in Būšeher (Bushire). In Būšeher he befriended the young Jamāl-al-Dīn Asadābādī (see *afgān*), who had stopped



there in 1272/1856-57 on his way to India. Bavānātī's anti-Islamic statements had forced him to flee from Shiraz, and on his way to Būšeher, in Borāzjān, his life had been saved by Asadābādī (Afšār, p. 12; Keddie, pp. 24-25). Around 1880 he went to London and began teaching Persian. Among his students in London were the two brothers Ḥosaynqolī and 'Abbāsqolī Nawwāb Šīrāzī and Edward G. Browne; in Iran Mīrzā Ḥasan Khan Mošīr-al-Dawla and Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan Mo'tamen-al-Molk Pīrnā were reported to have studied with him (Ādamīyat, quoting the son of Bavānātī). Toward the end of 1884 his daughter's poor health forced him to leave London for Beirut, where he stayed for a few years before he returned to Iran.

Bavānātī kept his ties with Sayyed Jamāl-al-Dīn Asadābādī and, in 1307/1889-90, for this association and on the charge of atheism was imprisoned in Tehran; he was freed through the intervention of Mīrzā 'Alī-Ašgar Khan Amīn-al-Solṭān. Three of his letters (one in Arabic and two in Persian) to Sayyed Jamāl-al-Dīn have survived and are to be found in the Majles Library (published in Afšār, pp. 14-18). He is also the author of a versified commentary on twenty-six *sūras* of the Qur'ān, entitled *Rawzāt-e landanī wa fawḥāt-e anjomanī kenāyat az Qor'ān-e mo'aṭṭar*; the autograph manuscript is partly preserved in Cambridge (Browne, 1932, pp. 2-4) and partly in the library of the University of Tehran. Scattered fragments exist of his poetry, which, generally of very poor quality and almost incomprehensible, is filled with fantastic amalgams of bizarre imagery with all sorts of random allusions to history, mythology, legendary lore, political events of the time, mystic visions, etc. His most famous works to be published in England were the *Šomaysa-ye landanīya* and *Sodayra-ye nāsūtīya* (1882). His work can also be seen in an English-Persian dictionary compiled by A. N. Wollaston (London, 1889) on which he collaborated. He may also be the author of *Meftāḥ al-'erfān fī tartīb sowar al-Qor'ān* (Browne, 1932, p. 292).

Bavānātī was totally dedicated to the preaching of his so-called Islamo-Christian religious system. He did not care for money, avoided the company of the wealthy and the powerful, but at the same time, given to extreme loquacity and an uncontrolled bent toward argumentation, he often offended everybody around him by insulting their most cherished beliefs. Browne had characterized him as "a most remarkable and eccentric individual, impossible not to respect and like" (1893, pp. 12-15; *Press and Poetry*, p. 168).



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