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ḤOJJATIYA

ḤOJJATIYA, a Shiʿite religious lay association founded by the charismatic cleric Shaikh Maḥmud Ḥalabi (q.v) to defend Islam against the Bahai missionary activities. Ḥojjatiya exerted considerable, albeit indirect and unintended, influence on the education and world-view of the lay elite leadership of the 1979 Islamic revolution. The association was founded in the aftermath of the coup d'état of 1953 (q.v.). The explicit goal of Ḥojjatiya was to train cadres for the "scientific defense" of Shiʿite Islam in the face of the Bahai theological challenge (author's interview with Maḥmud Ḥalabi, July 1994). Bahai missionaries (*moballeḡ*s) argued that Shiʿa's awaited savior (Mahdi, also referred to as Ḥażrat-e Ḥojjat [qq.v.]) had already emerged and that Islam had been superceded by the Bahai faith. Ḥojjatiya sought to defend the Shiʿite position based on both Islamic and Bahai texts. Ḥalabi's own sensitivity to this controversy stems from a personal encounter. As a seminarian he and his colleague Sayyed ʿAbbās ʿAlawi had been approached by a Bahai missionary, who had succeeded in persuading the latter to convert. Alarmed by this experience, Ḥalabi abandoned the normal course of his studies and immersed himself in the study of Bahai history and original texts with the intention of composing a comprehensive Islamic response to the Bahai challenge. Ḥalabi's original plan to train a group of seminarians to discharge these duties was rebuffed by the clerical establishment in Qom. Ḥalabi then embarked upon recruiting a corps of volunteer lay disciples adept at both substantive arguments and debating skills. This is the group that came to be known, after the Islamic revolution, as *Anjoman-e ḥojjatiya* .

Although the primary stages of Ḥalabi's project evolved in his native Mašhad, he met with little enthusiasm there. It took him six months to recruit and train his first serious student (author's interview with Maḥmud Ḥalabi, May 1978). Ḥalabi's decision to move to Tehran proved a strategic success. The first circle of his students in Tehran were comprised of religious merchants and professionals (author's interview with Ḥosayn Tājeri, June, 2002). They, in turn, succeeded in recruiting from a talented pool of ardent students from religious as well as secular high schools. By the late 1960s the second generation of Ḥojjatiya recruits had entered universities and embarked upon modernizing and standardizing the management of the association. Therefore, the early 1970s witnessed organizational reforms within the association that reflected increasing complexity and division of labor. Graduates of the basic instruction on Shiʿite and Bahai history and theology were recruited in specialist teams of operations. The latter included: The Guidance Team (*Goruh-e eršād*), that was charged with debating Bahai missionaries, persuading Bahais to return to Islam, and neutralizing the effects of Bahai missionary activity on those exposed to it. The Instruction Team (*Goruh-e tadris*) along with the Authorship Team (*Goruh-e negā-reš*) jointly worked to standardize instructional material and levels. These came to include basic instruction (*pāya*), the intermediary training (*viža*), and the graduate training (*naqd-e Iqān*; q.v.). Most of the instructional material was distributed, in typed and copied form (poly-copy) in classes that met weekly in private homes across the country. They were retrieved within a week so that no copies would leave the provenance of the association. Students were instructed not to share or discuss the material with outsiders. The public speaking team (*Goruh-e soḵanrāni*) organized weekly public gatherings in various venues that featured trained Ḥojjatiya speakers discussing Shiʿite theology, critiquing Bahai positions, and fielding questions. The intelligence team, named the Investigation Team (*Goruh-e taḥqiq*) operated, in three distinct regiments, as a fifth column within the Bahai ranks and succeeded in thoroughly penetrating the Bahai hierarchy. Unbeknownst to Bahai's, some members of the Ḥojjatiya had advanced to the rank of prominent Bahai missionaries (author's interview with Aṣḡar Ṣādeqi, June 2000). There were, also, smaller service-providing units within Ḥojjatiya such as the bureau of contact with foreign countries, bureau of libraries and archives, and bureau of publications. Thus, the most salient specialists in the association were known, in the jargon of Ḥojjatiya, as: polemical activists (*mobārez*), public speakers (*soḵanrān*), instructors (*modarres*), and intelligence operatives (*mo-ḥaqqeq*). Most full-fledged Ḥojjatiya members carried out at least two of the above duties in the course of weekly meetings. Bahais, reacted

to the emergence of Ḥojjatiya by adopting a more defensive and reserved posture and by avoiding open debates and confrontations. This response further emboldened the Ḥojjatiya members and reassured them of the effectiveness of their approach (author's interview with Manṣur Pahlavān, August 2001). The organization steadily grew and by the early 1970s had spread throughout Iran and a few neighboring countries such as Pakistan and India. Indeed, in certain parts of Iran, Ḥojjatiya grew disproportionately to the Bahai threat and bred resentment among other Islamic organizations, that intended to mimic its success or to recruit from the same pool of talented religious youths (account of Hāšem Āqājari about his involvement with Ḥojjatiya).

Between the early 1950s and early 1970s a great number of the future elite of the Islamic revolution were trained, usually as a transitory stage in their ideological development, in pedagogic and practical venues provided by Ḥojjatiya. Beyond Ḥojjatiya's explicit and stated objectives, a sense of dedication, engagement, and accomplishment akin to a Jesuit zeal electrified successive generations of its members. Along with ʿAli Aṣḡar (ʿAllāma) Karbāsčiān's ʿAlawi High School, Ḥalabi's Anjoman-e Ḥojjatiya signified traditional Shiʿite Islam's attempt to acclimatize itself to the modern environment and to utilize its resources for the propagation of its worldview (see, e.g., Abdolkarim Soroush's [pp. 5-6] account of his encounter with Ḥojjatiya). Ironically, in its attempt to confront the Bahai challenge, Ḥojjatiya emulated a number of Bahai idiosyncra-cies such as the practice of secrecy with respect to the workings of its bureaucracy and access to its original literature, the lay hierarchical nature of the organization, and the unhindered access to modern means of communication and implements. For example, long before Ḥosayniya-ye eršād, the first modern Islamic lecture hall, was inaugurated in the north of Tehran, Ḥojjatiya's public gatherings had become the first Islamic organization to replace rugs and pulpits with chairs and lecterns. Members of Ḥojjatiya, unlike their traditional brethren, were clean-shaven and groomed for success in the secular educational and professional world (author's interview with Aḥmad Qandi, June 1997). Ḥojjatiya, under the leadership of Ḥalabi, had succeeded in acquiring necessary religious dispensations and written permissions for usage of a portion of tithes (*sahm-e emām*) from Shiʿite grand Ayatollahs. These resources were spent for logistical purposes only, as the entire body of the Ḥojjatiya was comprised of volunteer members.

From the very beginning the activities of Ḥojjatiya attracted the attention of the security apparatus of the Pahlavi regime. Based on documents published after the Revolution, the leadership of Ḥojjatiya was pressured to formally register the association as a non-profit, philanthropic organization—hence the title, Anjoman-e Ḵayriya-ye Ḥojjatiya Mahdawiya—and to promise to abstain from political activities. The latter pledge came to haunt the association after the Revolution of 1979 (Bāḡi, p. 78; Aḥmadzādeh, pp. 27-28).

The Islamic revolution caught Ḥojjatiya by surprise. The initial reaction of the leadership toward the Islamic revolution was one of skepticism and suspicion. This caused many defections in its ranks (author's interview in July 1999 with Mehdi Ṭayyeb, a primary leader of defection). With the success of the revolution Ḥojjatiya, under the leadership of Ḥalabi, attempted to placate the revolutionary leadership but was rebuffed. Ayatollah Khomeini, despite his earlier affirmation of the association (Dar rāstā-ye feqāhat, pp. 9-13), allowed open criticism of its apolitical nature and its "conservative bias" in interpreting Islam (Rafsanjāni, p. 366; Ḵazʿali, pp. 9-10). Finally, five years after the Islamic revolution, Khomeini publically threatened Ḥojjatiya with violent suppression in thinly veiled words. Ḥalabi, responded by terminating all of the activities of the Ḥojjatiya in a terse notice published in a number of newspapers (*Keyhān* and *Eṭṭelāʿāt*, 5 Farvardin 1362 Š./25 March 1984). The announcement was followed by a widespread campaign to purge Ḥojjatiya affiliates from decision-making, academic, and educational bodies throughout Iran.

The animosity between Ḥalabi and Khomeini is traceable to their distinct casuistries concerning the meaning of Messianism in Islam (*mahdawiyat*). Inasmuch as Islam shares the Judeo-Christian Messianic tendencies (Sachedina, pp. 1-2) one may draw a parallel between the Judeo-Christian and the Islamic brands of pre-millenarianism and post-millenarianism (see "Millenarianism" in *Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of World Religions*, Springfield, Mass., 1999). The quietist conservative interpretation of Ḥojjatiya is akin to a pre-millenarian world-view that, while advocating the ardent and pious practice of "awaiting" the savior, discourages active revolt in order to hasten the appearance of the "Mahdi" or any attempt to build the promised Islamic utopia in the absence of the awaited one. The revolutionary activism of Khomeini, on the other hand, is reminiscent of the post-millenarian tendencies in Christianity and Judaism in that it advocates taking an active role in bringing about the just Islamic society prior to the appearance of the Mahdi in

order to hasten his coming. A telling incident illustrates the aforementioned contrast: in the months following the success of the 1979 Islamic revolution, the gatherings with Ḥojjatiya affiliation had adopted the slogan of "O Mahdi, make your appearance" (*Mahdi biā Mahdi biā*). In response, the pro-Khomeini crowds composed a slogan of their own "O God, O God preserve Khomeini until Mahdi appears; preserve him even alongside Mahdi" (*Ḵodāyā, Ḵodāyā tā enqelāb-e Mahdi, ḥattā kenār-e Mahdi, Ḵo-meyni rā negahdār*).

In the years since the termination of the Ḥojjatiya activities, the origins, nature, and goals of the association have been publicly debated with varying levels of accuracy and objectivity. Its detractors from the left and the right have played a pivotal role in perpetuating views that vastly exaggerate and distort the organization's influence and agenda through spreading myths and conspiracy theories about Ḥojjatiya. The pro-Khomeini religious establishment (both organizations such as the Revolutionary Guards and individuals such as Shaikh Ṣādeq Ḵalḵāli (*Ḵāṭerāt,* pp. 195-96; *Anjoman-e Ḥojjatiya, nasli maʾyus az ḥarakat wa enqelāb*, pp. 122-34) have repeatedly maintained that the Ḥojjatiya's line remains alive and continues to pose a threat to the revolutionary cause in Iran. The secular critics (namely the Tudeh Party and its ideological allies) have claimed that the association, despite its obvious fall from favor, has been the true power broker behind the scenes. They have used the title Ḥojjatiya as a euphemism for all they deem retrogressive, authoritarian, bourgeois, and pertaining to an agent of imperialism in post-revolutionary Iran (see "Māfiā-ye Ḥojjatiya"). However, the original members of the association have largely declined to join the debate, perhaps for reasons ranging from a pious penchant for secrecy to a genuine fear of reprisals.

As the leaders of Ḥojjatiya were committed to a non-violent, persuasive strategy in dealing with Bahais, the Association did not take part in persecution of Bahais in post-revolutionary Iran. For all Ḥalabi's animus against Bahais, he was a disciplined pacifist. He was distraught by violence and repeatedly warned his followers: "This is not the way, this is not our way" (interview with Nāder Fāżeli, 2003).

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