



ŞOBĤI, FAẒL-ALLĀH MOHTADI

ŞOBĤI, FAẒL-ALLĀH MOHTADI (b. [Kashan](#), 1276 Š./1897; d. [Tehran](#), 17 Ābān 1341/8 November 18 1962), Persian school teacher, who is best known as a children's storyteller, collector of folktales, broadcaster, and [Bahai](#) apostate (photographs at [Anonymous](#), [Bolukbāši](#), and [Zia](#)).

Şobĥi was born in Kashan to a Bahai family. His paternal grandmother, Ĥājiya 'Amma Kānom, was the paternal aunt of [Baha'-Allāh](#)'s third wife and had been a [Bābi](#) from the earliest days of that movement. She was forced to leave Kashan and move to Tehran when it became known that she had gone to 'Akkā (Acre) to visit the Bahai leadership there. The rest of her family also moved to Tehran. There, Şobĥi's father Moĥammad-Ĥasan Mohtadi and his mother, whom he does not name, separated, and Şobĥi was very unhappy subsequently with his stepmother. He attended the Bahai Tarbiat school in Tehran. In about 1916-17, he assisted Mirzā Mahdi Aĥawān Şafā on a journey propagating the Bahai faith in Azarbaijan, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, following which he lived in [Ashkhabad](#) for a time before returning to Tehran in 1918. In late 1919, Şobĥi travelled to Haifa to visit 'Abd-al-Bahā'. Bahai accounts write of him at this time as a rather immature and rude young man who had the temerity, for example, of arguing with and abusing [Ebn Aşdaq](#), a senior Bahai, on the journey to Haifa (Solaymāni, p. 110; Fāẓel Māzandarāni, p. 860). 'Abd-al-Bahā' asked him to remain and be a secretarial assistant. He acted in this capacity for two years alongside several other secretaries (*monšī*) and secretarial assistants (*kāteb*), until his actions caused his services to be terminated, and he left for Iran a short time before 'Abd-al-Bahā's death in



1921 (Şobhî, *Kāṭerāt*, 2005, pp. 169-33, 275-386; Fāzel Māzandarāni, p. 871-73).

Şobhî was strongly opposed to Shoghi Effendi's leadership of the Bahai community and began to speak out about this among the Bahai community in Iran. This, as well as his association with 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Āyati, a Bahai apostate, led to warnings from the Bahai elected council in Iran and eventually to his expulsion from the Bahai community in the spring of 1928 (Şobhî, *Kāṭerāt*, 2005, pp. 200-91; Shoghi Effendi, pp. 48-49). For the next three or four years, he made a number of approaches to be readmitted to the community but never fulfilled the conditions of a public repentance that were laid down for this. Shortly afterwards, in 1933, he published the first of his refutations of the Bahai faith, *Ketāb-e Şobhî*, and over twenty years later, in 1956, he published another anti-Bahai tract, *Payām-e pedar*, which repeats much of the material in the first book. In both of these books, he provides little in the way of substantive intellectual or doctrinal arguments against the Bahai faith. Rather, he bases his rejection of the religion on the accusation that the leading adherents of the religion that he met did not live up to the teachings that they propagated to others. He accuses many of them of vices and moral failings. It is notable that he largely exempts the Bahai leader 'Abd-al-Bahā' from his accusations.

After his expulsion from the Bahai community, Şobhî was employed by Yahyā Dawlatābādī as a teacher at the latter's Sādāt School, and he later taught at the American High School in Tehran. In 1931, he visited the head of the Kowṭariya branch of the Ne'mat-Allāhi Sufi order, Moḥammad Ḥosayn Maḥbub 'Alīšāh, in Marāḡa and was initiated into this order. In 1933, he began to teach Persian language and literature at the Higher Academy of Music (Honarestān-e 'ālī-e musiqi) in Tehran, where he remained until his death except for a short break in 1937-38, when he taught at the Law College (Dāneškada-ye ḥoquq).

On 26 April 1940, a few days after Radio Tehran (later named Radio Iran) began broadcasting, Şobhî delivered the first of his children's stories, which became a regular program at noon on Fridays (and sometimes also in the evenings). He would often chant some verses from Rumi's *Maṭnawī* and then proceed to tell a story. The program was very popular with children (and many adults), and he continued with it for 22 years (until cancer of the larynx stopped him shortly before his death), thereby becoming one of the most well-known radio personalities in Iran. At first, the main source of his stories was a collection compiled by Şādeq Hedāyat, whom he visited regularly. There has been a debate about whether Şobhî plagiarized Hedāyat's work (see



HEDĀYAT, ŞĀDEQ iii), but what is certain is that the two of them had a falling out in 1948 with Hedāyat stating that Şobĥi had launched a vitriolic attack on him (Hedāyat, p. 131). Later, Şobĥi relied on his listeners to send him stories, and in this way he was able to collect a great deal of folklore from around the country. On the back of this work, he became the first to publish collections of Persian folktales rewritten for children (see Bibliography), an endeavor which Ulrich Marzolp (p. 210) considers to have been valuable but not rigorous or academic. His books contained illustrations by Layli Taqipur and Moĥsen Waziri Moqaddam.

Şobĥi did not marry and lived alone with a simple lifestyle that was described as “dervish-like” and in a simple, spartan room with a *kaşkul* (an oval bowl carried by dervishes, suspended from the shoulder) and two *tabarzins* (halberd) attached to the wall against which he sat. His storytelling for children on radio was continued after his death by Mawlud ‘Āṭefi and others, and then for 24 years after the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79 by Moĥammad-Rezā Saršār (i.e., Rezā Rahgoḍar), who also wrote a book about Şobĥi. Şobĥi’s work in collecting folktales and broadcasting them on radio was also continued on a much more rigorous and academic basis by Abu’l-Qāsem Enjavi (d. 1993) and the Markaz-e farhang-e mardom (Center for popular culture) that he founded (see [FOLKLORE STUDIES i. OF PERSIA](#)), at Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting.

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