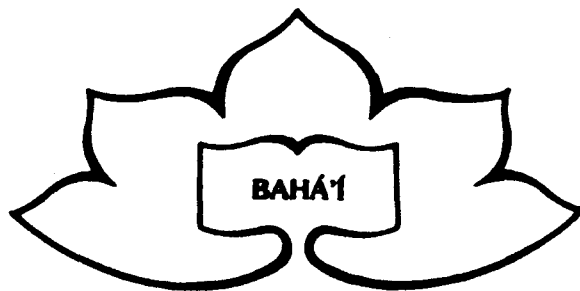


IMMORTALS

IMMORTALS

by

DIPCHAND KHIANRA



BAHÁ'Í PUBLISHING TRUST, P.O. BOX 19, NEW DELHI-110001

Copyright © National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, 1988

ISBN 81-85091-17-X

**Cover photograph: Raja Rani Temple, Bhubaneshwar
Courtesy of the Archaeological Survey of India**

Phototypeset at Rakmo Enterprises & Printed at Thomson Press



The Hand of the Cause Mr. A.Q. Faizi and Mrs. Gloria Faizi

A Humble Tribute

Dear Mr. Faizi: Many eminent teachers of our Faith have come to India, but you have a special place in our hearts. Your gentle, inspiring words will always remain a precious memory and guide us through all the weals and woes of life.

Dear Mrs. Faizi: You are a great teacher of this Cause and your distinguished services in India are too well known to be recounted. Through your love for our people, you have now made India your home. May we be able to return this love.

This book is respectfully dedicated to you both. Please accept my humble tribute.

—Dipchand Khianra



The Hand of the Cause Mr. A.Q. Faizi and Mrs. Gloria Faizi

Acknowledgement

The first person I wish to thank is my dearly loved sister, Mrs. Gloria Faizi, who has sympathized with my aspirations to serve the Faith and has constantly encouraged me to write something of abiding value.

I am indebted to the spiritual heirs of Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí, Firaydún Yazimaydí and Jamshíd Jamshídí, for making available to me some of his diaries.

I offer my grateful thanks to Mr. H. Fatheazam for writing a masterly preface to this book; to my spiritual brother, Mr. A. Nakhjavani, for his never failing encouragement; to Counsellor B. Afshin for raising up my spirits during moments of despondency; and to my son Kumar for having preserved the papers and documents which I needed for this book.

—D.K.

Editor's Note

It should be brought to the attention of our readers that in this book Prof. Khianra mentions only a small number of those who served the Bahá'í Cause in this country in its early stages. There were many valiant workers in the Faith of whom future historians will, no doubt, write numerous accounts.

Contents

Preface	1
Narayenrao Rangnath Shethji (Vakíl)	7
Jashodaben Shethji (Vakíl)	27
<u>K</u> husraw Bimán (<u>T</u> hábit)	39
Muḥammad-Riḍá <u>S</u> hírází	61
Isfandíyár Ba <u>k</u> htíyárí	79
Pritam Singh	109
Kay <u>k</u> husraw Rúzbi híyán	131
Mawlaví Muḥammad ‘Abdu’lláh Vakíl	145
Mihrabán Rustam Bulbulán	155
Shyamdulari Bhargava	161
Dawlat Vajdí	167
<u>G</u> hulám-‘Alí Ibráhímji Kurlawala	171
<u>S</u> háh Bahrám Mu’bidzádiḥ	181
Gawhar Ḥakímíyán	205
Mullá Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Kitábí	213
Dawlat-i-Írán	219
Appendix I	227
Appendix II	230
Appendix III	237
References	240

Preface

India has been, in the past, a magnificent treasury of Divine Revelation. Her influence in the world of thought and her quickening impact on the spiritual growth of man is undeniable. Who can ignore or minimize the importance of Hinduism and Buddhism in the process of an ever-advancing civilization which man, by the supreme design of God, is destined to bring forward from age to age? These two great religions appeared on Indian soil, and hosts of devoted followers kept the flame of faith burning in their hearts. It is no wonder, therefore, that in this great Day of God, when the promise of all ages has been fulfilled, and the Manifestation of the Divine Essence has appeared, the people of India are once again playing a significant role.

When the Báb declared His Mission, an Indian, known as Sa'íd Hindi was one of the first who recognized Him, and was the only non-Persian member of the Letters of the Living—the first eighteen devoted souls who, with the Báb, Himself, comprised the first Váhid of the Bábí Dispensation.

Such a golden link with the spiritual regeneration of man was strengthened at the time of Bahá'u'lláh, Who despatched teachers to proclaim His Cause among the peoples of India.

Later, at the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, the Indian subcontinent became a beacon of light, and constituted one of the first important bases of the Administrative Order of the Bahá'í dispensation.

Many great souls arose from the Indian soil to become the harbingers of the springtime of God. Their dedication in serving the newly-established Faith produced great results. Their

vision, brightened by the creative Words of God, in building a shelter in which diverse people of every caste and creed can live in love and harmony, is progressively coming into being.

The stories of these heroes, whose names have adorned the annals of the Faith in India, need to be told. And who can tell these inspiring accounts better than Professor Dipchand Khianra who, himself, is one of the distinguished sons of India, and a stalwart of the Bahá'í Community in that subcontinent.

I have had the signal honour of learning a great deal from my fellow believers, such as Professor Khianra, during the happy and rewarding days when I was in India, and I look forward with much eagerness to reading the book which Professor Khianra has written about great Indian believers. I wish to express, with great humility, my gratitude for the soul-stirring experiences I have gained by being associated with the beloved Indian people—an indebtedness which will forever burn brightly in my heart.

—Hushmand Fatheazam



Narayenrao Rangnath Shethji

“Beloved Vakíl”¹

1886–1943

“You are the first believer among the Hindu nation. You must proclaim the Cause of God, spread the divine teachings and make the people ready to receive and realize the Truth.”²

Narayenrao Rangnath Shethji, better known as Vakíl,³ was born in a well-known Hindu family in Nawsari. His parents were very religious and God-fearing. They were kind-hearted and of charitable disposition. The family had a temple beside their house in which prayers were offered and devotional songs chanted every morning and evening. The religious atmosphere must have had a great influence on young Narayenrao who grew up to be a godly and pious man. He was the third of five sons born to his parents, but his father showed special affection towards him.

Vakíl received his B.A. degree in 1908 from the famous Elphinstone College in Bombay, and became a graduate in Law of the Bombay University in 1911. He was an advocate of

¹ from the Guardian's cable dated May 6, 1943

² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words to Vakíl, recorded in his diary

³ This is the name by which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called him as he was a lawyer by profession.

the Bombay High Court, and one of the senior lawyers of Surat where he practised for thirty years. During this time he showed the noblest traits of character and became known for his honesty and integrity. People from different towns and cities came to him for advice and benefited from his services. But there were distinct conditions before he would agree to represent them in Court. Their case had to be genuine. If they had been wronged in any way, he would defend them, otherwise he would not take on the case.

Once a man came asking for his help whose father-in-law had died leaving much property. He was now trying to take away all the dead man's wealth for his wife, leaving nothing for her brothers. He told Vakíl that he knew how this could be done, and promised him a rich reward if he would agree to help him. Vakíl immediately asked him to leave his office, saying, "I am here to defend the rights of the oppressed, not to work for the benefit of tyrants."

There was another man who had paid him a large sum of money to fight his case but, as the case proceeded, it became clear to Vakíl that the man had lied to him. He called him to his office, returned the money and asked him to engage another advocate.

These and similar stories found their way to magistrates and judges, and they were so impressed by Vakíl's character and honesty that he was respected by them all. He was always fair towards his opponents; he was loyal to the laws of the land but would never yield in matters of conscience. No one questioned his integrity, and there was a stamp of veracity on cases presented by him. He was appointed as Assistant Government Pleader because of his detached outlook and at one time he was elected as a City Father at one of the Municipal elections.

While studying in Elphinstone College, Vakíl came in contact with a fellow student, M.R. Shírází. The two had much in common and soon became good friends. They were different from the frivolous youths around them and spent most of their



Narayenrao Vakíl

free time on serious matters. Shírází had been introduced to the Bahá'í teacher, Mírzá Maḥram, who was living at the Bahá'í Centre, a few minutes' walking distance away from Elphinstone College, and he was becoming interested in the new Faith. On their morning walks Shírází would discuss what he had heard from Mírzá Maḥram with Vakíl who was soon attracted to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Then he met Mírzá Maḥram himself and learned much from that great teacher of the Cause.

Vakíl had been raised as an orthodox Hindu, a devotee of Lord Krishna, and it was not easy for him to accept another religion. But, as he was a seeker of Truth, he finally realized that Bahá'u'lláh was the return of Lord Krishna and had come to bring unity among people of different religions. When he was completely convinced he told Mírzá Maḥram that he considered himself a Bahá'í. Mírzá Maḥram said he had to put him to a test. Vakíl should prove his faith by teaching it to his friends and relatives and, if he found it difficult, he could bring them to Mírzá Maḥram at the Bahá'í Centre. In this way



Narayenrao Vakíl

Vakíl was encouraged to teach the Faith from the very beginning and continued to do this throughout his life. To him, giving the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to others was a part of his Faith, an essential duty which he would never neglect.

Vakíl became a Bahá'í in 1909. In 1910 there was a large exhibition in Allahabad which included an all-India Religious Conference. The conference was held on the banks of the Jamuna, near its confluence with the Ganges,¹ and thousands of people had gathered there from every part of India. Siyyid Muṣṭafa Rúmí was to represent the Bahá'ís at the conference and read an address; but he developed a sore throat and was not able to do any reading, so the Bombay Assembly requested Vakíl to read the address in his place. Rúmí was also to go to Allahabad from Madras, but Vakíl had never met Rúmí and wondered how he would recognize him. When he arrived in Allahabad he went to see the exhibition and, despite the large crowd of people there, he immediately caught sight of someone whom he felt sure would be the friend he was looking for; and indeed it was. The two men were instinctively drawn together as though they had known each other all their lives.

Vakíl's address made a strong impression on the audience and created a great stir among the delegates. Here was a young man endowed with an attractive, magnetic personality and hailing from a noble orthodox Hindu family, expounding the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and announcing the advent of a New World Order! Vakíl's speech hit the headlines in the newspapers, and those who heard him took the news with them to all corners of India. The distribution of Bahá'í pamphlets, too, had a lasting effect and brought many inquiries.

The most important event in Vakíl's life, next only to his having accepted the Faith, was his pilgrimage to the Holy

¹ These are the two most sacred rivers of India, and a dip in either is considered sufficient to wash away the life-long sins of a Hindu.

Land where he attained the sacred presence of the Master. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had invited him to visit the Holy Land, and he left for Haifa on March 10, 1914, in the company of his dear friend, Shírází.

Vakíl was allowed to stay in Haifa for twenty-seven days, during which time the Master showed him unlimited favours. A number of pilgrims, including some from Persia and America, were already there and they mixed like members of the same family.

It is clear from the diary he kept while in the Holy Land, that Vakíl had a highly devotional temperament. He prayed for everyone: his parents, his brothers, his friends—even those who had passed away—for the people of India; and he requested the Master to pray for them too. A number of times he begged ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to pray that he might be confirmed in serving the Cause and in guiding others. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá showered special benedictions on him. Here are some of the things He said to Vakíl:¹

“You will be eternally confirmed.”

“From India I have received many letters praising and commending you. Now I see with My own eyes that, praise be to God, those praises and commendations are not only fully manifest in you but . . . you are greater than the picture portrayed in the letters. . . . From our first meeting you have become very dear to Me. Are the members of your caste investigating, searching, or are they satisfied with their old customs? . . . I hope that when you leave this Holy Spot you will become the cause of their guidance and, God willing, your very breath shall have a great effect on their hearts! You will go away

¹ Vakíl kept a diary while on pilgrimage. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to him through a translator, and Vakíl probably wrote down what he heard from memory when he left the Master’s presence.

from here with a new fire enkindled in your heart and a new power impelling you to go forward in the path of God.... You must raise the call of the divine Kingdom all over India, and summon the people to the Paradise of Abhá.... I am very pleased with you and I love you very much. You have a radiant face and a luminous heart.”

“We shall soon hear that you have become a new creation... people will testify to your faith and courage.”

“Do not look at your own weakness, but look to the confirmations of God. Consider the clay, how insignificant it is; yet, blessed by the rains, it produces beautiful flowers.”

“You are a tree planted by the hand of Providence and watered by the vernal rains of Divine bounty.... You will bear luscious fruits from which all the people of India will benefit.”

“Bahá’u’lláh has crowned you with a crown of jewels. You will awaken multitudes.”

“Erelong your father and others will glory in your name because of your connection with the Cause of God.”

The Master then recounted how He had once seen people kissing the stones in a certain place because they thought that their Prophet might have, at one time, stepped on one of them. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also spoke of a letter containing two or three lines and said to be written by Peter, the first disciple of Jesus Christ. This letter was sold for a very large sum of money even though no one was sure of its authenticity because paper does not last for two thousand years unless it is parched, and the paper on which this letter was written was not parched. The Master said that Peter, during his own days, was scoffed at and humiliated and no one would have given five paise for his letter, but now he is glorified in the eyes of the world.

While Vakíl was on pilgrimage, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote a Tablet to his parents which reads in part as follows:

“Praise be to God that you have a son like Mr. Vakíl who

will, erelong, rise to glorious heights for he will become one of the chosen in the Court of God, and receive heavenly confirmations. I pray that this drop may become a sea, and this atom a mighty mountain. This plant will grow through the showers of grace until it becomes a tree bearing rich fruit; and this lamp will become a radiant light which will illumine the whole of India.”¹

Vakíl supplicated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to visit India. The Master said:

“India must become a magnetic centre of spirituality so that I may be drawn to its shores. If the fragrances of God waft incessantly over the people of India, it will attract Me.”

Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said to Vakíl that He would send him to India instead of Himself, with special spiritual power.

Vakíl asked the Master how it would be possible for him to serve the Cause if he continued with his profession as a lawyer. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

“You must show that you are a Bahá’í by your character and conduct. People must see that you are different from others. Do not become too much engaged in your work; devote some of your time to business and some to the Cause.”

The Master also told Vakíl to spend his holidays going on teaching trips.

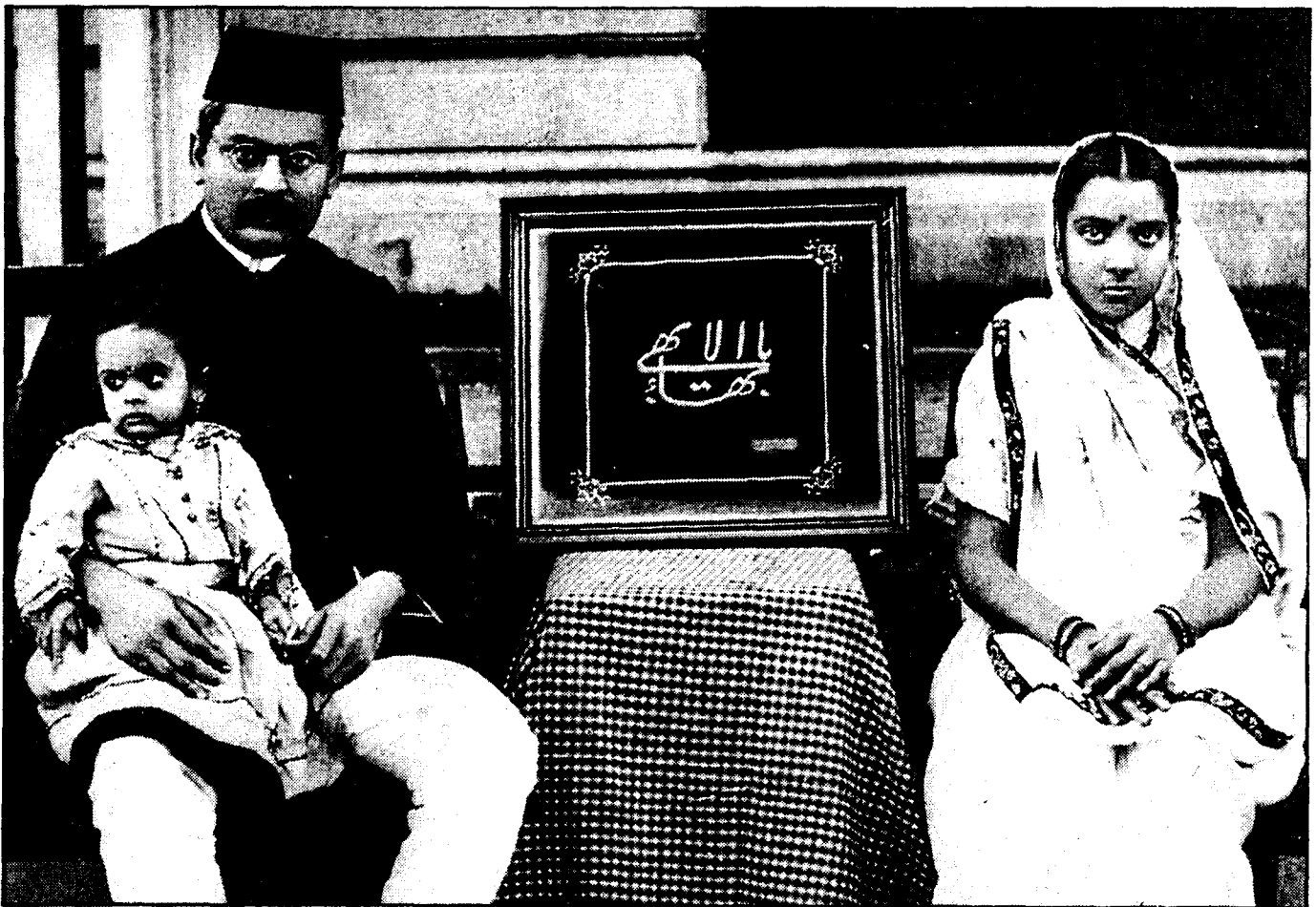
One day ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to Vakíl, who was a pure vegetarian, on the food God has intended for man to eat. He said:

¹ This and other quotes given here from the Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Vakíl are free translations from the Persian.

“It is manifest that in the creation of God, man is not endowed with carnivorous teeth; his food consists of nuts, vegetables and other produce of the vegetable kingdom. Now through the practice of long ages of meat eating man has subverted this divine plan.... The sustenance of man is fruits, grains, and fresh vegetables.”

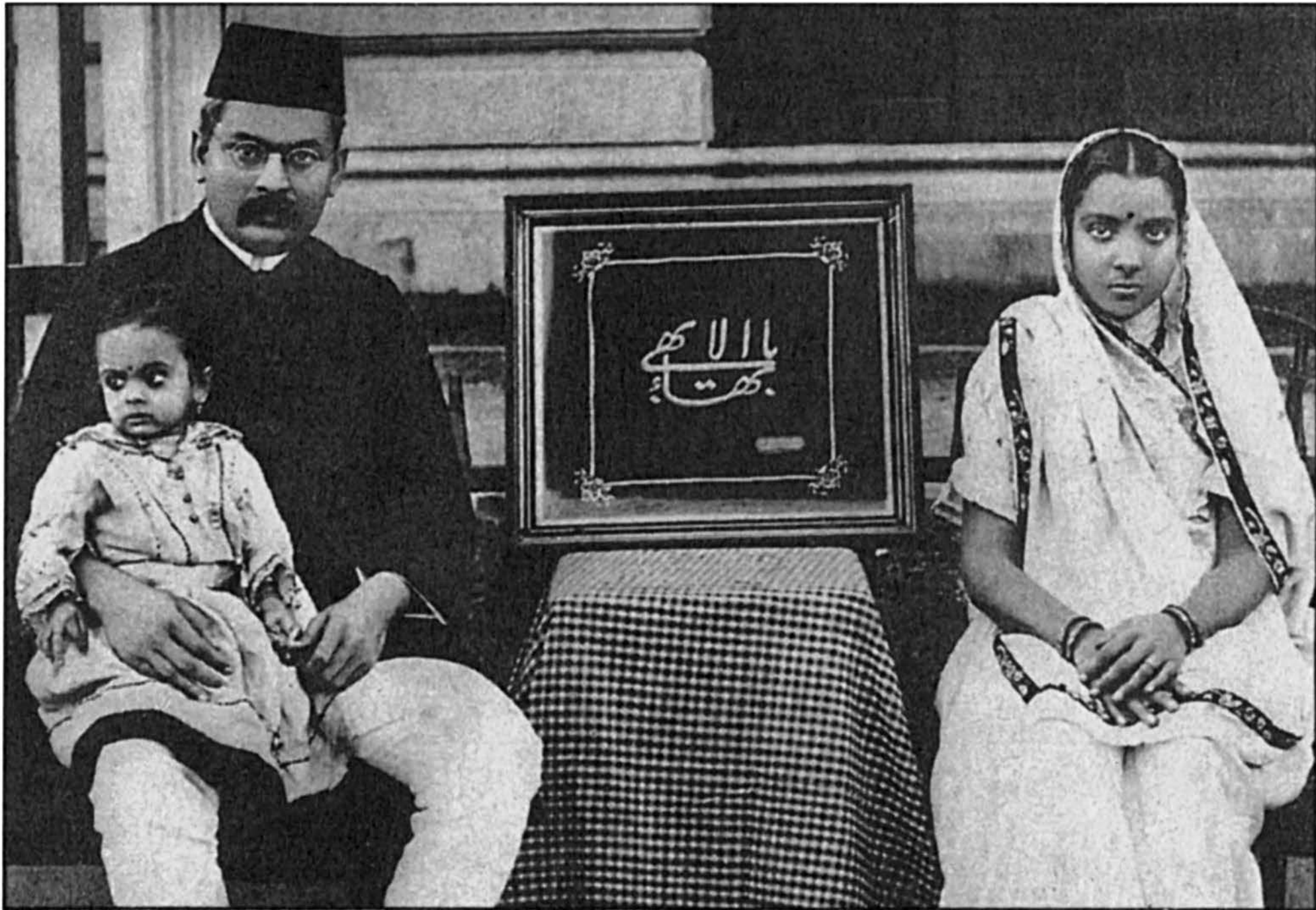
Vakíl was betrothed to be married to a young girl by the name of Jashodaben who was a staunch Hindu. While on pilgrimage, he asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about his marriage. The Master replied:

“Marry the girl to whom you are betrothed and I pray that she may become a Bahá’í...”



Vakíl with Jashodaben and Sushila

Back in India, Vakíl married Jashodaben and gave her full freedom to follow her own beliefs and worship as she wished. In time they had two lovely daughters, Sushila and Kapila.



Vakíl with Jashodaben and Sushila

Vakíl wrote to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá several times and received beautiful Tablets from Him. The Master always blessed him and said he would become as a shining light in India. In one of His Tablets, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

“Praise be to God that you have found the path which leads to God and have attained to that which is the desire of the holy ones. I beseech God that you may remain steadfast and unshakable because steadfastness is the quality of the faithful.

“As long as a tree is not firm and its roots have not penetrated deep into the earth, it does not yield any fruit. As long as the foundation of a structure is not strong, it cannot become a lofty edifice.”

In 1920, when the first Convention¹ of the Bahá’ís of India was held in Bombay, Vakíl and Shírází were among the chief organizers, and Vakíl handled much of the work which had to be done in English.² In 1922 the Convention elected an executive committee and Vakíl was elected its auditor. When this body became the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of India and Burma in 1923, Vakíl was elected as its chairman. He continued to occupy this post, except for one year, until the day of his demise in 1943.

When the Master passed away, Vakíl’s sense of loss was acute. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had been a father to him, as well as his Lord and Master, and now he felt orphaned. Yet he was gradually consoled by the beloved Guardian who kept in constant touch with him and encouraged him to attain great heights of honour in the service of the Cause. If ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

¹ In those early days this term was applied to yearly conferences where Bahá’ís came together from all over the country.

² A sample of the letters which Vakíl sent to the Bahá’ís is given in Appendix I.

had been a father to him, Shoghi Effendi was his true brother.

In the year 1929 Vakíl, accompanied by his wife and two daughters, went on pilgrimage a second time. The Guardian showered his love and kindness on the family. Jashodaben was shown every consideration and left free to follow her own conscience and worship as she wished. One night, while sleeping in the Mansion of Bahá'u'lláh in Bahjí, Jashodaben had a most wonderful dream which did not leave any doubt in her mind about the station of Bahá'u'lláh. The meaning was clear and she became a firm believer in Him.¹

Vakíl's eldest daughter, Sushila, who was nine at the time of her pilgrimage, has said:

“We had been receiving letters from the beloved Guardian regularly and frequently. He was very fond of my father and, what was more, he trusted him very much. Whenever he needed any information about this country, he directly asked my father to provide it....

“One day, with a most enchanting smile on his handsome face, the beloved of our hearts said to my father, ‘Mr. Vakíl, your future home must be in Haifa. You should come and stay here....’ For some hours every day he would keep my father near himself...

“Then one day came the moment of parting. Our vision was completely blocked by tears.... Words would not come out. At last we three (Mrs. Vakíl and her two daughters) hid our faces in the lap of the Greatest Holy Leaf² and broke down. How she loved us! How she kissed us! How she comforted us! What a depth of love was there in those unbreakable ties!

“The same was our father's condition and Shoghi Effendi was trying to comfort him. At the moment of departure the

¹ See p.27

² the sister of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

beloved Guardian said to my father, 'Come here every year, so that you will have a complete change of environment. From the physical world you will come into the world of the spirit.'

"Shoghi Effendi called us 'my family' and whenever anyone went on pilgrimage he would ask, 'How are my family members?' Whenever Amatu'l-Bahá, Rúhíyyih Khánum¹ comes to India she makes enquiries about my sister and myself by saying, 'Where are the members of my family? How are they?'"

Vakíl and his family left the Holy Land with heavy hearts after a stay of thirty-eight days and journeyed back to India, meeting Bahá'ís in many places on their way.

To the end of his life, Vakíl continued to have regular correspondence with the Guardian who was his constant help and inspiration. Under the guidance of the Guardian, he developed his full spiritual potential and became a shining light as the Master had predicted.

He was constantly helping to deepen the understanding of his fellow believers or giving the new Message to others. He gave much time to organising the affairs of the Faith and keeping the whole community united by constant contact and correspondence. For fifteen years Vakíl disseminated all kinds of Bahá'í news through his letters to the farthest corners of India. As soon as he received any piece of information which would be of interest to Bahá'ís in India, he would have it typed and circulated. His theory was this: "A man cannot reach all places at one and the same time but his letters can." Many are the people who have maintained files of these letters, and future historians will find them very interesting and informative.

Vakíl's practice as a renowned lawyer in Surat brought him

¹ the wife of the Guardian

a very good income. He lived in a large, comfortable house and owned a hack Victoria.¹ This had belonged to an Englishman who was going back to his country and who wanted to sell his carriage to Vakíl as he knew the horse would be looked after properly.

Vakíl observed the Bahá'í Holy Days with befitting dignity. He invited the notables and elite of the city, as well as others, to a gathering at his beautiful house and spoke to them about the importance of the occasion. He also made extensive teaching tours all over India, giving the Message of Bahá'u'l-láh wherever he went. Sometimes he took his wife and daughters with him to visit Bahá'ís in other towns, and thus close and lifelong friendships were established with other Bahá'í families in India.

Among those to whom Vakíl spoke of the Bahá'í Faith was the Maharaja of Mysore. He was originally allowed an audience of ten minutes but the Maharaja became so interested in what he heard that he sat listening to Vakíl for over an hour. The beloved Guardian was very happy when the news was conveyed to him. On October 15, 1940, his secretary wrote:

“Your meeting with... His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore... has been noted with feelings of highest satisfaction and gratitude by the Guardian.”

In the same year Vakíl travelled as far as Nepal and met Col. Raja Jai Prithvi Bahadur Singh, Raja of Bajang (Nepal) who gave Vakíl a statement concerning the greatness of the Bahá'í Faith which was later published in *The Bahá'í World*.

People everywhere knew and respected Vakíl as a Bahá'í and he would often receive letters enquiring about the Faith from different parts of India. His love reached out to everyone

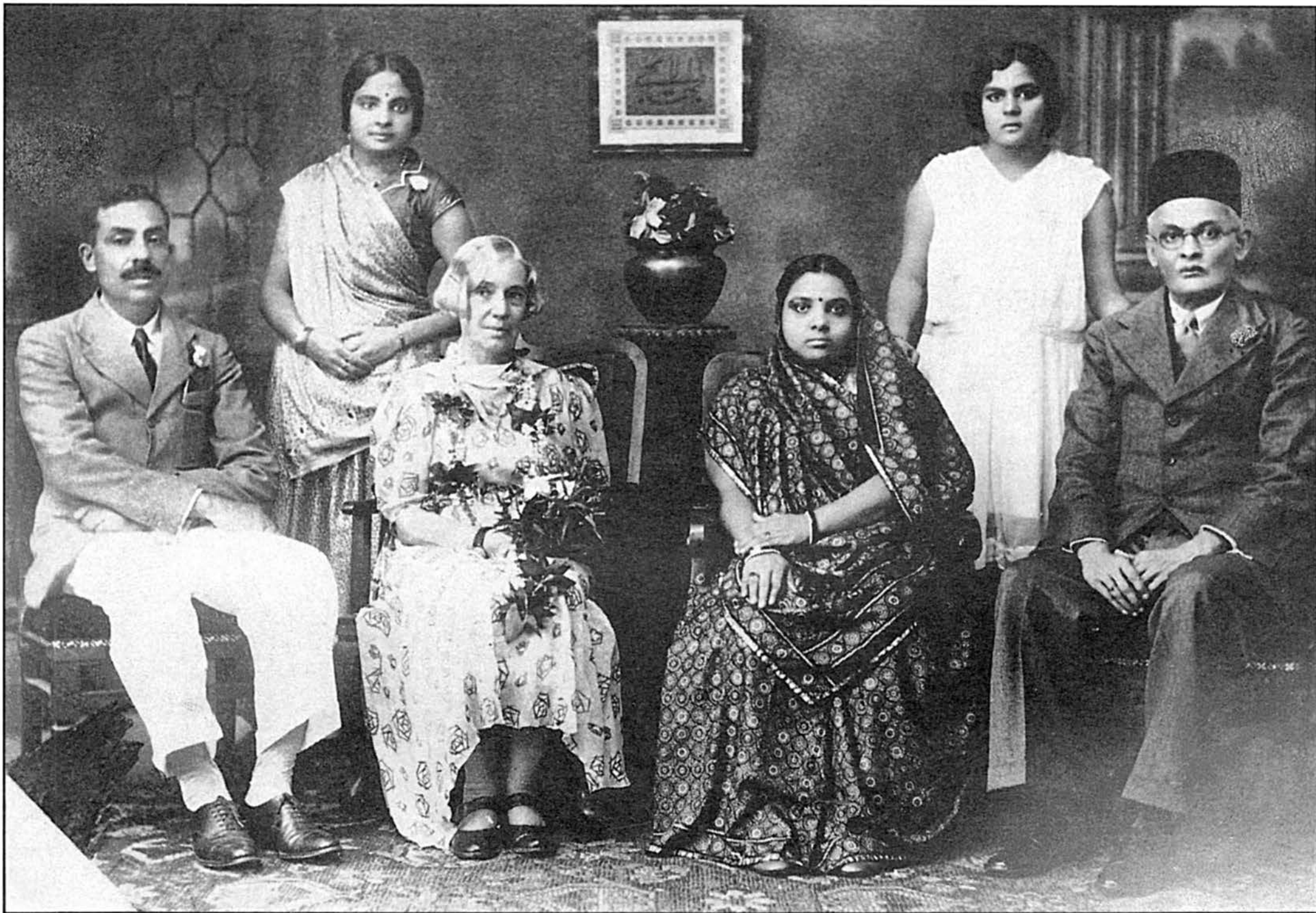
¹ This was a carriage drawn by a horse which only the rich could afford.

and all those who came in touch with him responded to his kind nature and were filled with admiration for this first Hindu to recognize the station of Bahá'u'lláh.

Vakíl was very generous with contributions to Bahá'í funds. He always set aside a portion of his income for the Cause. Apart from that, whenever it was necessary for Bahá'ís to collect money for a special undertaking, Vakíl would be the first to donate a generous amount. Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí, who was the National treasurer for many years, said Vakíl would contribute to the funds for every occasion—on the nine Holy Days, at the time when his daughters sat for exams, and later in thanksgiving because they had passed their examinations. Bakhtíyárí writes:

“I can never adequately recount the noble traits of this great man. His purity, his saintliness and his generosity were beyond description. Once he sent me two money orders by telegram in one day for the National Fund. Not long after that I met him at Convention and asked why he had not sent both donations together as it would have been cheaper for him. He explained that a client had paid him his fees in the morning, out of which he had taken what he considered to belong to God and had sent it. Then, when another client paid his fees in the afternoon, he decided to send the second amount as he did not wish to go to bed that night without giving what was God's due.”

Vakíl did not keep well towards the end of his life, but he would not slacken his pace of service. The Guardian, who loved him dearly, was very much concerned about Vakíl and asked him to take care of his health. Then one day Bakhtíyárí received a letter from the Guardian in which he said that Vakíl was drawing closer to God day by day. He also received a telegram from Vakíl's wife saying that her husband was in a critical state of health. Bakhtíyárí rushed to Surat from



Bakhtiyarí and Martha Root visit Vakíl and his family in Surat

Karachi. He found that his dear friend had been unconscious for the past few days and the doctor had no hope of his recovery. Bakhtiyári went closer to the patient's bed and greeted him in a loud voice: "Alláh-u-Abhá!"¹ To everyone's astonishment, a smile appeared on Vakíl's face and he softly murmured his reply: "Alláh-u-Abhá!" Then Bakhtiyári chanted the Tablet of Aḥmad² for him and he slowly started to speak a few words. He was well enough to get out of bed in a few days and the doctor who attended to him, Dr. Tayyibji, could not understand how such a thing was possible. He said, "I have now seen with my own eyes the effect of the Words of Bahá'u'lláh. I had no hope that my patient would ever regain consciousness."

A few days later, instructions were received from the Guardian that the National Spiritual Assembly should find a building for its administrative headquarters in New Delhi. Vakíl told Bakhtiyári to leave for Delhi immediately and start looking for a suitable place. Bakhtiyári was still concerned about his friend and did not want to leave him so soon, but Vakíl would not hear of it. The Guardian's instructions, he said, had to be instantly obeyed. Bakhtiyári said, "I will take the first train after lunch." Vakíl replied, "You will go now!" Such was the degree of his obedience to the Guardian of the Cause.

Vakíl obeyed the institutions of the Faith, too, without any delay. He would say, "Service to the Cause is like justice, and justice delayed is justice denied." An example of his instant obedience was demonstrated as far back as 1920 when it was resolved at the first Convention that Vakíl should undertake a teaching trip to the North. He set out on his trip on

¹ God is Most Glorious

² The Tablet of Aḥmad is one of the powerful Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh. It is often read by Bahá'ís at times of difficulty.

January 1, 1921, one day after the Convention was over.¹

Vakíl attended the Convention which was held in Poona on the 27th, 28th, and 29th of April, 1943, and was once more elected as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly for that year. When the Assembly met for its first session, however, Vakíl was not well enough to attend. His fellow members said special prayers for him, and then they received the sad news. Beloved Vakíl left this mortal world on May 2nd, 1943.

The Guardian's cable to the Bahá'ís of the Indian subcontinent reads:

“Share fully poignant grief Indian Baha’i community passing its distinguished champion firm pillar able teacher administrator beloved Vakil. Concourse on high acclaim his pioneer historic service. Advise hold befitting memorial gatherings recognition tribute his high station.”²

Innumerable meetings were held in memory of Vakíl throughout the length and breadth of India and Burma as well as in other countries. His wonderful qualities, his sacrifices and achievements, his great love for the Cause of God and for his fellow believers were all remembered. Telegrams and letters of condolence from people who loved and respected Vakíl—non-Bahá'ís as well as Bahá'ís—poured in for the bereaved family. Members of the National Spiritual Assembly travelled to Surat to pay homage to their dear brother and assure his family of their love and sympathy.

I quote below parts of an appreciation written in memory of Vakíl by Amarsingh Vansia, B.A., LL.B., who had worked with Vakíl for a number of years and who was one of his many non-Bahá'í admirers:

¹ Vakíl's reports on this teaching trip are given in Appendix II.

² *Bahá'í World* Vol. IX, p. 637



Narayenrao Vakıl

“.... A home more pious, sweet, quiet and loving than that of Mr. Vakil’s could be hardly found.

“The spark of intelligence in him as a lawyer attracted many clients for him. In a court of law he was always fair and just to his opponents, yet never yielding in his convictions. His integrity was beyond reproach.

“A thorough gentleman with winning and charming manners, he was of a rather retiring temperament.... He often used to say that the tongue is a unique gift from God and it is a cardinal sin to use it indiscriminately. He was never found in angry or perturbed mood during the ten years of my very happy association with him.

“His world was always in terms of Baha’ism. He was a Baha’i not for outwardly clinging to a particular Faith, but in his every action and thought he was a true Baha’i. His whole life was in tune with the best principles and tenets of the Faith. He was really a favoured man of God and was always found near to Him....

“I must admit that my knowledge of different Faiths hardly



Narayenrao Vakí

entitles me to give a comparative view... but what little I have seen in Mr. Vakil as a Baha'i it is a perfect Faith—a Faith in which all that is best in other Faiths is centralised....

“I would not be surprised if the whole world in times to come were to follow the principles of Baha'ism in one form or other.”

Vakíl left a permanent impression on the Bahá'í world and on the heart of Shoghi Effendi. Whenever anyone went to the Holy Land from India, the Guardian invariably talked about dear Vakíl. He would ask the Bahá'ís to visit Vakíl's family on his behalf and assure them of the unfailing protection of Bahá'u'lláh. He always said, “I regard this family as my own.”

The high regard and affection which Shoghi Effendi had for Vakíl can be seen from the various letters addressed to him by the Guardian. Here is an example of what the Guardian wrote to him:

“Dear and prized co-worker:

“I wish to ... reaffirm my deep sense of gratitude for all that you have done and are now accomplishing for the spread and consolidation of our glorious Faith. The seeds you have so patiently been sowing will no doubt germinate and yield an abundant harvest. Perservere in your great work. I pray that your dear daughters may be blessed and aided to reinforce and carry on the work you are so energetically and devotedly achieving.

“Your true and grateful brother,
Shoghi”¹

Vakíl received a vast number of letters from Shoghi Effendi,

¹ dated April 19, 1941

all of which were carefully preserved by his family and handed over to the National Bahá'í Archives of India. They will always be an eternal testimony to the high station of this great Indian Bahá'í.

When the Guardian heard of Vakíl's passing, he wrote the following to his daughters:

“I have just heard the very sad news of the passing of your dearly loved father. This is a great loss to the Bahá'í community in that land and indeed to the Bahá'í world. His exemplary devotion, his indefatigable efforts, his shining faith, his unswerving fidelity, his zeal, his magnificent achievements, in both the administrative and teaching spheres of Bahá'í activity have enriched the annals of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. I personally greatly loved and admired him. The Beloved, I assure you, was pleased with him and will now bless his soul in the great Beyond. I will pray for him from the depths of my heart.”¹

On June 23, 1943, he wrote again:

“The passing of your very dear and distinguished father has deeply grieved me, and I hasten to assure you and your dear mother in person of my heartfelt sympathy in the severe loss which you and the Cause have sustained through his death. His services and the memory of his life and works, which so clearly exemplified the spirit of the Cause, are however imperishable. I truly feel proud of the standard he has set, the work he has accomplished, and the contribution he has made to the progress and establishment of the Faith in India. I will supplicate the Beloved to bless his soul, to cheer your hearts, to enable you to follow his inspiring example.”

¹ dated May 5, 1943

Jashodaben Shethji (Vakíl)

1904 – 1966

“I pray to God that she may attain endless favours...”¹

Jashodaben was the beloved wife of Narayenrao Vakíl. She was only thirteen when she was married and she became a mother at the age of fifteen. She had two beautiful daughters, Sushila and Kapila, who were nine and seven when their father took them all with him on his second pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Jashodaben had always been a great devotee of Lord Krishna and, although she loved her husband and was a good wife to him, she did not share his beliefs.

While in the Holy Land, she spent much time with the Greatest Holy Leaf who was the kindest and sweetest person she had ever known. There was a woman there who knew Gujarati and translated for her and her children.

Jashodaben continued with her own prayers and worship of Lord Krishna until one night when the Guardian sent the family to sleep in the Mansion of Bahá'u'lláh in Bahjí. Before going to bed, Jashodaben said her prayers as usual and put the Holy Book Bhagavad Gita with a picture of Krishna under her pillow. That night Jashodaben had a beautiful dream. She saw a holy Figure in white standing by a cupboard from which He

¹ a free translation from a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed to N.R. Vakíl

took out beautiful jewelled crowns, one after the other, and gave them to her to put in another cupboard in the room. Every crown was more beautiful than the other, and the holy Figure said to her that these were the crowns of Krishna which now belonged to Bahá'u'lláh. Then she saw Krishna and Bahá'u'lláh together. Krishna took off his crown and gave it to Bahá'u'lláh, and Bahá'u'lláh gave His *Taj*¹ to Krishna. Bahá'u'lláh then looked at Jashodaben and said, "There is no difference between Us; We are the same."

The next morning Jashodaben woke up very happy and narrated her dream to her husband. Vakíl's joy was boundless because he knew that the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá had now come true and his wife had become a Bahá'í.²

Even before she was a believer in this Cause, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had mentioned Jashodaben in His Tablets to her husband. Once He wrote:

"Extend, on My behalf, this affectionate message to the revered maid-servant of God, thy noble wife, and say unto her, 'Offer thanks to God that thou hast such a husband who abides in My heart and who has made thee self-sacrificing in the Path of God.'"³

In another Tablet to Vakíl the Master said:

"... give greetings of the Kindgom of Abhá to the maid-servant of God, your respectable wife. I pray to God that she may attain endless favours..."

In 1919, 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed a Tablet to both Vakíl and his wife in which He said:

¹ *Táj* literally means crown. It is a headgear which Bahá'u'lláh used to wear.

² See p.14

³ All quotes from Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá given here are free translations from the Persian.



Jashodaben

“O two candles of Divine Love!... I pray in the Court of Oneness for you to be guarded and protected under His guard and protection, and to be helped in propagating the verses of Unity and assisted in guiding others, so that you may lay a foundation of everlasting life in this perishable world and kindle a light in this darkness of the physical kingdom...”

It is clear from this Tablet that Jashodaben was supporting her husband in his services to the Cause even before she was a Bahá'í herself.

Jashodaben became very attached to the Greatest Holy Leaf. Her daughters, who had vivid memories of their beautiful pilgrimage and had often heard their mother speak of those days, have recounted some of the things which happened:

One night Jashodaben thought to herself, “I should like to cook some Indian food for the Greatest Holy Leaf.” The next day, the Greatest Holy Leaf asked her affectionately, “Would you like to cook some Indian food for me?” Later, she praised



Jashodaben

the food and said that in future everyone would become vegetarian.

On another day, the Greatest Holy Leaf told Jashodaben to ask her for a boon. Jashodaben said, "My revered mother, I want to have a faith that nothing can shake, so that I can withstand the tests of life. I want to live for Bahá'u'lláh and teach His Cause to others." The Greatest Holy Leaf said her wish would be granted. Then she asked Jashodaben what else she wanted, for she would be granted any boon she asked for. Jashodaben answered, "I want nothing else, only that I and my children may remain firm in our faith to the end of our days." The Greatest Holy Leaf was very pleased with her and conferred on her a great honour by giving Jashodaben her own name—Bahíyyih.

Parting with the Greatest Holy Leaf was extremely difficult for Jashodaben. She wept as though her heart would break. The Greatest Holy Leaf took her in her arms and consoled her. Then she put a ring on Jashodaben's finger which had the Greatest Name engraved on it.¹

Sushila has very kindly written down for me some of her own recollections of their pilgrimage. She says:

"We were staying in the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. One morning, I was standing near the flower-beds admiring nature's handiwork when all of a sudden I beheld beloved Shoghi Effendi!... Light was radiating from him and I was spell-bound. He came near me and I held out a rose to him. He graciously accepted it, saying, "Thank you so much. I am happy to receive this rose." Then he slowly walked away....

"It was wonderful to watch and listen to the Guardian chanting a prayer. The whole world was forgotten; one soared to the Abhá Kingdom....

¹ Kapila has preserved this precious ring.

“I remember hearing Shoghi Effendi say to my father, ‘Vakíl, I can see a great future for these two sweet daughters of yours. They will render great services to the Cause of God. Look after them well.’ To the end of his earthly life, my dear father would repeat these sweet words to us....

“Never-to-be-forgotten were those nineteen days... the kind eyes of the Greatest Holy Leaf, full of feelings of love and mercy; the inspiring and heart-warming words of the Guardian. After our pilgrimage, came the Beloved’s never-failing letters which were to be our greatest comfort and will always be our most precious treasure.

“Whenever I think of the Beloved, I am reminded of the words of the Gujarati poet:

‘Wherever I gaze, I come across
Some sweet remembrance of yours;
Wherever I find a flower bed
My mind goes back to you.’”

Concerning her mother, Jashodaben, Sushila says:

“She lived her life as a staunch Bahá’í and faced every situation with the utmost faith in Bahá’u’lláh.... She was the right hand of my father.... When father developed heart trouble she would chant the Tablet of Ahmad and the Healing Prayer for him with great emotion.”

After Vakíl passed away his brothers, who had never sympathized with his religious ideas, tried to win back his family to their own beliefs. Jashodaben and her daughters would not be influenced by them and, although most of their property was taken away from them, they clung to their Faith. Sushila writes:

“If my father made connections with Bahá’ís, my mother

kept them up for almost a quarter of a century afterwards. She was careful that we answered every letter addressed to us whether it came from the Beloved Guardian, or the National Assembly, or individual Bahá'ís. She lavished her attention on us two sisters and gave us the best education available in Surat. She sent us to Bahá'í Conventions and conferences.

“It is really a surprise to us how our mother ran the house, looked after our many guests and kept all the Bahá'í activities going.

“After my father's demise, the greatest comforter of our family was Shoghi Effendi. He gave us strength and advice. It was because of his guidance that we could teach and open our house to all who wanted to hear of the Faith. Thirty-three years ago this was not done. Our dear mother always encouraged us to teach and helped us in every way she could.”

Kapila has also recounted some of her sweet memories of Jashodaben. She says:

“My mother had no love for worldly wealth and glory. At the time of contributing to the Funds, if she had no money, she would take off a piece of jewelry and give it. Thus everything that belonged to her was given away in contribution.”

Kapila recollects that one day Jashodaben saw the milkman drenched in the rain when he came to the door. She brought him a towel with which to dry himself; then she gave him a hot cup of tea before she sent him away.

Sometimes children would come to visit Jashodaben—a few little boys and girls. She would sit with them and ask them to say any prayers they had learnt at school. She herself would chant a Bahá'í prayer for them, then give them sweets.

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Surat was formed after Vakíl passed away. Kapila remembers that Bahá'ís from other



Jashodaben, Sushila and Kapila, with Bahá'í friends in Surat



Jashodaben, Sushila and Kapila, with Bahá'í friends in Surat

places, came to Surat at that time and helped them in their Bahá'í activities.

There were many Bahá'í gatherings in their home and up to fifty people would attend these meetings. The two sisters, encouraged by Jashodaben, would organize everything and Sushila would give a speech.

Sushila was a very good writer in Gujarati and some of her short stories have been published in magazines. She also translated Bahá'í literature from English to Gujarati, and composed poetry and Bahá'í songs which she chanted in their gatherings.

Jashodaben, who had received no formal education, also composed beautiful Bahá'í poems which she would chant to herself and which even now sometimes appear in the *Bahá'í Samachar* of Gujarat.

In 1953, Kapila married Khudádád Hákímíyán, son of Jamshíd Hákímíyán and Gawhar Khánum,¹ and went to live in Bombay. After four years when Sushila was married to Sachi Chatterjee and went to Calcutta, Kapila and her husband came back to Surat to look after Jashodaben as she was getting old.

Jashodaben was much loved and greatly admired by her sons-in-law who were both devoted Bahá'ís.² They thought of her as a saint and considered it a privilege to serve her. She died a happy woman on December 7, 1966. The last words she uttered were "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!"³

The following cable was received by the National Spiritual Assembly from the Universal House of Justice after Jashodaben passed away:

¹ See p. 205

² Khudádád Hákímíyán served as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly for many years. Sachi Chatterjee became an Auxiliary Board Member in 1960.

³ O Glory of the Most Glorious!

“Grieved news passing Mrs. Vakil. Assure relatives friends prayers Shrines progress her soul.”

The Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land sent this telegraphic message:

“Kindly convey Mrs. Vakil’s family deepest sympathy passing mother steadfast devoted believer. Her exemplary loyalty Faith worthy emulation all. Praying Shrines bounties departed soul.”

Jashodaben was a sweet, simple lady who played a great role in the life of her husband, her children and the Bahá’í community of Surat. To her husband she was a loving companion who helped and supported him in his Bahá’í activities. To her children she was a wonderful mother who nurtured them in the love of God and constantly encouraged them to serve His Cause.

Sushila continued to serve the Faith to her last breath.¹ She was a capable person and everyone relied on her. She served as the secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Calcutta for many years. Her parents had been famous for their hospitality, and Sushila followed their example; her home in Calcutta was a centre of Bahá’í activities and always open to guests.

Sushila went on a number of teaching trips, and accompanied her husband on his tour of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

I once asked Sushila who had impressed her more than anyone else in her whole life. Without a moment’s hesitation, she said, “Shoghi Effendi. I have never seen a halo of radiance around any face as I have seen around his. Though I met our

¹ She passed away in 1982.



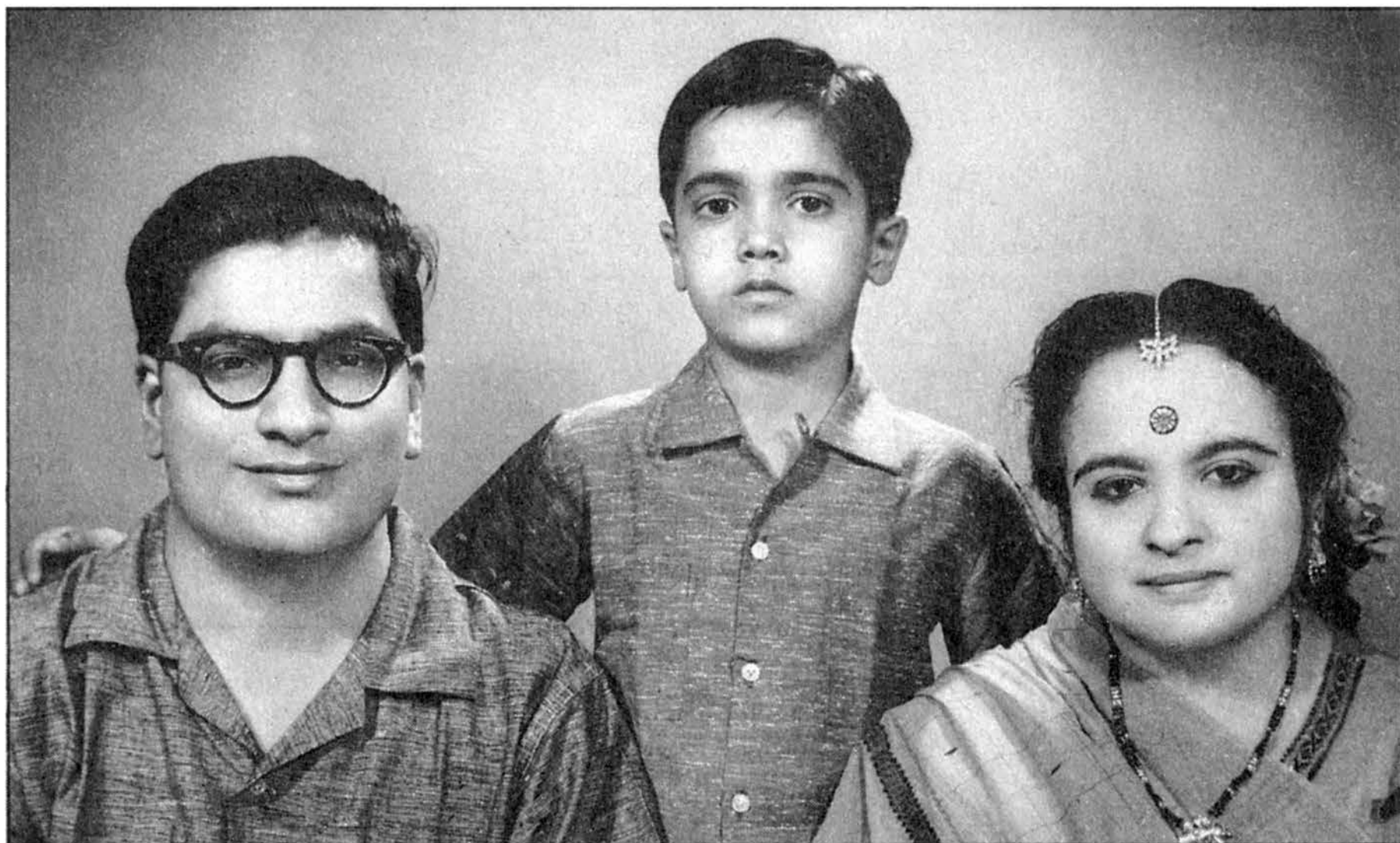
Sushila with Rúhíyyih Khánum



Sushila with her husband and adopted son



Sushila with Rúhíyyih Khánum



Sushila with her husband and adopted son

beloved Guardian half a century ago, and I was only nine at that time, his blessed face is as fresh in my memory as though I had seen it but yesterday.”

Once, when Amatu'l-Bahá, Rúhíyyih Khánum was visiting Calcutta, the Bahá'ís had gone to receive her at the airport. They stood in a line and Sushila, who was very modest, stood at the end of the line. As soon as Rúhíyyih Khánum saw her, however, she went straight to Sushila, took her in her arms and said, “Shoghi Effendi loved you, and I love you too.”

Kapila is still serving the Cause with her husband in Surat. After her mother passed away, Kapila went on many teaching trips and travelled with her husband to Burma, Ceylon and Pakistan to meet the Bahá'ís of those countries. She has also served on the institutions of the Faith in India, and was at one time elected on the National Spiritual Assembly.

One of Kapila's great contributions to the Faith was that for years, and almost single-handed, she edited *Bahá'í Samachar*, which is a circular that comes out every month and reaches Bahá'ís all over Gujarat. In this way she followed in the footsteps of her noble father who circulated Bahá'í news to his fellow believers a generation before her through the letters he sent out to every part of India.

I give below an extract from one of the letters which the Guardian wrote in answer to Sushila and Kapila's letter as early as 1941. These letters were the source of their inspiration throughout their devoted life of service to the Cause of God:

“May the Almighty spirit of Bahá'u'lláh guide and sustain you both, and enable you to lay a firm foundation for future Bahá'í youth activity, and fulfil the hopes and wishes of your dear parents for your future service in the Divine Vineyard.”¹

¹ dated June 19, 1941



Kapila and her husband visit Bahá'ís in Burma in 1955
Kapila is seated first on the left; her husband is standing fifth from the left.



**Kapila and her husband visit Bahá'ís in Burma in 1955
Kapila is seated first on the left; her husband is standing fifth from the left.**

Khusraw Bimán (Thábit)

1832?–1936

“Know thou the worth of this kindhearted man. He is an inmate of the divine Threshold and foremost among the friends of God. He is esteemed in this assemblage, and admired and respected by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Day and night his thoughts centre round serving the Faith of God and scattering heavenly perfumes....”¹

Not many people in this land have been fortunate enough to serve the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh as ardently as Khusraw Bimán. He was a most zealous worker and an enthusiastic champion of this glorious Cause, and one of its prized teachers. His own family and occupation, material wealth and social position were all secondary matters to him. His first concern was the Faith of God and if anything came in the way of his spiritual work, it was always put aside. He was an ardent lover of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the mere name of the Master put him in a state of rapture. It brought a smile to his lips and tears to his eyes. It created a yearning in his heart to visit his Beloved and bask in the sunshine of His presence.

¹ from a Tablet revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for Khusraw’s wife, quoted in *Navíd-i-Jávíd* p. 74

Khusraw was born in a Zoroastrian family in one of the villages near Yazd, in Írán, around the year 1832. Only the Persians themselves know the amount of degradation and insult the Zoroastrians were subjected to in their country at that time. They were forced to wear a special type of clothing. They could not ride a donkey through the market-place, nor were they allowed inside the house of a Muslim or a public eating-place. If a Zoroastrian was riding and came upon a Muslim priest, it was binding on him to get down from his donkey as a mark of his own inferiority. On a rainy day he was not to come out because if his wet garments touched those of a Muslim, the Muslim would consider himself defiled. The homes of Zoroastrians had to be far away from respectable localities. They were obliged to build unattractive houses in order to display poor taste and create an unpleasant environment. A Muslim would wash the coins he accepted from a Zoroastrian, and he seldom spoke to him without hurling an abuse. And these were only some of the degradations they were subjected to.

Khusraw had not been to any school. From early boyhood he had taken on his ancestral occupation—farming. In the harvest season the produce of the farm would be taken to the city where Muslim merchants would underweigh it and then buy it at a low price. The farmers, though always suspicious of these merchants, were at their mercy.

One day Khusraw weighed his produce before setting out from his village and then took it to one of the merchants in Yazd. But when it was put on the scales there, it actually weighed more! Khusraw was astonished. Such a thing had never happened before. He expressed his surprise to other farmers there. One of them said, “This merchant is a Bahá’í, so he is honest and God-fearing and kind to the poor.” This was Khusraw’s first contact with Bahá’ís. Up to that day he had heard nothing but contemptuous words about the followers of this religion from both Zoroastrians and Muslims. What he

now experienced was something quite different from his expectations.

On another day he went to visit the dastur¹ of the Zoroastrians in Yazd. The priest happened to be ill and requested Khusraw to go and bring him a certain doctor saying, "Since this physician is a Bahá'í, he is more reliable and fair-minded than the others." When the doctor came he showed great kindness towards the patient and his family. He sat down and had tea in their home, and he spoke of human beings as brothers and members of one household. Khusraw was greatly impressed by the words and conduct of this Bahá'í.

We are not sure of the date of Khusraw's birth or the exact day on which he set foot on Indian soil. We learn from his autobiography, *Navíd-i-Jávíd*,² that he came to India around 1884. From this date till the day of his death on 31st of December, 1936, he spent some fifty-two years in India. Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí, who met Khusraw only a few days before the close of his earthly life, states in an article that he found him hale and hearty and walking erect inspite of his age of 103 or 104 years.

On coming to India, Khusraw worked outside Bombay for the first four years or so before he took over a restaurant in Apollo Street, Fort, Bombay. This was the beginning of a settled career in his life.

Khusraw continued to have correspondence with his relatives and friends in Írán and, sometimes in their letters, they would make mention of Bahá'ís. One of his friends once wrote in moving language about the martyrdom of two Bahá'í youth in Yazd. He said:

"While I was sitting in my shop, two Bahá'í youth were

¹ a Zoroastrian high priest

² *The Eternal Glad-Tidings*

taken to be martyred by a crowd of people armed with sticks and clubs. There was a great excitement in the street and abuses and curses were being hurled at the young men from all sides. My attention was drawn to these two spiritual youth. Their faces were radiant with an inner light and, as they passed by my shop, I heard one of them say to the other, 'Come brother, let us hasten to our death so that these poor people may be able to go back to their work and not be put to inconvenience on our account.' There was no trace of hatred for their enemies in their hearts.... You, who are in Bombay, must investigate this Faith for it is no simple matter."

Near the shop of Khusraw lived Hájí Siyyid Mírzá Afnán,¹ a prominent Bahá'í who ran a prosperous export business. The family of the radiant Báb, it should be known, had a branch of business in the port of Búshíhr in Írán, and they imported goods from India.² The Afnáns in Bombay showed generous hospitality to all the Bahá'ís who passed through this city on their way from Írán to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, China or Japan. In those days Bahá'í literature was also printed in India through the office of the Afnáns.

One evening, as Khusraw was sitting in his restaurant, he received an order to send refreshments to the residence of Mr. Afnán. Khusraw could have sent the things with a servant but he chose to take them personally. He found a number of people assembled in the house. They welcomed him with respect and showed him so much kindness that he was overwhelmed. He had never expected to be treated like this in the house of such important people. On another occasion, when there was a gathering of Bahá'ís in the house of the Afnáns,

¹ The relatives of the Báb are known as Afnán.

² If research were made, letters in the handwriting of the Báb might be found among the papers belonging to some of the merchants of Bombay.

and Khusraw was also present, he was given a seat by the side of the host, and he was further impressed to see that there was a Bahá'í from Jewish background in that assembly, full of love for his new Faith. That spiritual gathering had a profound effect on Khusraw.

When he sought permission to return to his shop, the host would not hear of it. "You are our honoured guest," he said, "you must dine with us." His kindness was disarming and Khusraw forgot all about his business that evening. At dinner Mr. Afnán seated Khusraw and the Bahá'í from Jewish background on either side of himself. He said to them, "Consider the greatness of this age. Although I am a Siyyid, a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad, and you are from the followers of the holy Prophets Moses and Zoroaster, we have forgotten all differences and associate with each other in perfect love and friendship. This is the day of unity. All the prophets of old were eager to witness the brotherhood of mankind; and Bahá'u'lláh has now ushered in this Day of days. We who are privileged to live at such a time should value it and arise to serve the cause of unity."

Khusraw went home in great excitement. Life for him had now acquired a new meaning; it had received a new direction. He felt as if he were a new man. He said to himself, "How very fortunate am I that I have received this great bounty and divine guidance. I should now hold on to it and shape my words and deeds according to these teachings which emphasize the value of forbearance, noble deeds and kindness towards all members of the human race. I must try my utmost to remove the prejudices which have enveloped the world and separated man from man. The religion of God comes to unite mankind. Should it become the cause of separation? Having no religion at all would be far better than making religion a cause of disunity."

But Khusraw needed a greater understanding of his newly-found Faith. According to the beliefs which had been im-

planted in his mind and heart from early childhood, only some thousands of Zoroastrians living on earth will enter the eternal paradise because they are special people in the sight of God. Khusraw could not yet fully grasp the meaning of a Universal religion or comprehend that the foundation of all religions is the same, whereas Bahá'u'lláh had taught the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of mankind.

Khusraw went to 'Andalíb, the great teacher and poet who had newly arrived from Írán, and put his questions and doubts before him. He said, "I am from the Zoroastrian community and it is our belief that from the time of His Holiness Mahábád to His Eminence Sásán the fifth, prophets appeared in every age and they were confirmed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. According to us, no other guidance would come from God until the time of Sháh Bahrám."¹ 'Andalíb said to him, "Please tell me one thing. Were these prophets deputed by one God or by many gods?" "By one God," was Khusraw's reply. 'Andalíb went on to ask, "When God sent a prophet, confirmed Him with the Holy Spirit, and through Him revealed divine laws, established a social order and assured the well-being of humanity, why did He then send other prophets?" Khusraw confessed he did not know. "The reason," said 'Andalíb, "is that, after a lapse of time, the priests mixed their own interpretations with the Words of God. They established ceremonies and rituals which gradually supplanted the teachings given by God, and these innovations became more important than the original spiritual teachings. With the passing of time, customs and traditions increased and the pure religion of God was completely forgotten. There was a need for God to renew His guidance and send another prophet. So

¹ Bahá'u'lláh is Sháh Bahrám, the One promised in Zoroastrian Scriptures. Khusraw is concerned about the mission of Christ, Muḥammad and others Who appeared before Bahá'u'lláh.

the Sun of Truth rose again and again and illumined vaster and vaster horizons. Now the same Sun has appeared from a different horizon and illumined the whole world with its radiance. From the day of Mahábád till eternity prophets will continue to come and, even though they do not appear from the same place, the spirit of Their teachings is the same. Each one of Them is guided by the same Holy Spirit.”

Khusraw said, “The Prophet Zoroaster went to King Gush-tásp, imparted the Faith of God to him and he, in turn, directed Isfandíyár to go to different places and spread the teachings of Zoroaster. Why has such a thing not happened at this time?” ‘Andalíb replied, “Those who do not believe in Zoroaster say that it was the earthly and material power of King Gushtásp, not the spiritual might of Zoroaster, that caused the spread of His Faith, and that is why the teachings of Zoroaster remained confined within the boundaries of Írán. Now reflect: Bahá’u’lláh was opposed by the two greatest Muslim kingdoms of the time, that of Írán and Turkey. Írán represented the power of the Shí’ihs, and Turkey the might of the Sunnís. These two great powers conspired together against Bahá’u’lláh and kept Him in bondage for forty years. They banished Him from place to place—to Baghdád, Constantinople, Adrianople, and, finally, to ‘Akká.¹ Despite all this, the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh spread throughout the entire globe and brought about love and understanding among the different peoples of the earth. No one can say that Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings were propagated by any earthly power. God wanted the whole world to know that He is the All-Powerful and that no one can stand against His Will. The kings, the ministers, and the priests who opposed His Faith all met their doom disgracefully.”

¹ This was a prison-city to which unwanted people were sent from all over the Turkish Ottoman Empire. ‘Akká is now part of Israel.

Khusraw was much impressed by what he heard and continued to visit ‘Andalíb for guidance and deepening. ‘Andalíb gave him a copy of a Tablet from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, revealed in answer to a Zoroastrian priest who had asked Him certain questions. When Khusraw had studied the Tablet, ‘Andalíb asked him if he had found anything objectionable. Khusraw said, “I did not read the Tablet with a view to finding fault. I read it in a spirit of investigation and found it most educative and inspiring.” ‘Andalíb told him he had followed the path of a true seeker because it is impossible for a prejudiced person to distinguish truth from falsehood.

Khusraw now started teaching the Faith to others. He was very keen that the Zoroastrians whose days of abasement, Bahá’u’lláh had said, was over should hear of the Bahá’í Faith. He talked to everyone he knew. Instead of responding favourably, however, the Zoroastrians began to avoid him. But Khusraw was not discouraged. He kept on with his teaching work and the first person who accepted the Message was the pious Zoroastrian priest Hurmuzyár Khudábakhsh.

Hurmuzyár was very suspicious at first and argued a great deal. He would not touch any food or drink offered to him by Khusraw, either at the restaurant or in his house. Referring to this later, he said, “I had been told by people that Bahá’ís put a magic drug in their food and drink so that anyone who eats or drinks with them falls under their spell and accepts their Faith. After investigation I came to know that they have no magic drug. It is their sincerity and devout faith and their reliance on the Manifestation of God that attracts souls.”

Hurmuzyár was so fired with the spirit of his new Faith that he left for the Holy Land on pilgrimage. When he returned, Khusraw welcomed him and requested him to recount his experiences. In reply he said, “Only those who go and see for themselves can understand the glory of the Holy Land and the greatness of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, otherwise no tongue can describe it.”

By the close of the nineteenth century, Khusraw had moved from Bombay to Poona and opened the National Hotel. His name as a Bahá'í had become known to everyone in the city. Since he was teaching the Faith day and night, and speaking to every Zoroastrian who came his way, the members of this community were infuriated. They decided that he had given up the religion of Zoroaster and should therefore be excommunicated. However, the High Priest in Poona said such a drastic step should not be taken until he had had a personal talk with Khusraw. He called Khusraw to him one day and said, "It is being stated that you have given up your faith in Zoroaster and there is a strong feeling that you should be excommunicated. But I want to hear from yourself your views on the teachings of Zoroaster." Khusraw said, "These teachings gave a new spiritual life to the people of that time and inspired them to be just, generous, forgiving and magnanimous. But Zoroaster also said that, after the passing of a fixed period of time, the tree of His Faith would be withered and in need of rejuvenation. Now God has once more unlocked for us the doors of His bounty and grace." The High Priest was pleased and said, "Now I know that you have not lost your faith in Zoroaster. I am glad I spoke to you." The two parted as good friends and Khusraw later gave the priest Bahá'í literature to read.

Khusraw's efforts at spreading the message of the Bahá'í Faith aroused the antagonism of the Persian Muslims as well. They too raised their voice against him. His discussions with the Persian General Consul of those days is most interesting. One day this gentleman addressed Khusraw in a gathering where a number of Muslims were present. He said, "People are complaining that you have left the religion of your ancestors and have accepted a new Faith." Khusraw said, "Do you mind if I speak frankly, Your Honour?" The Consul replied, "Not at all, go ahead." Khusraw said, "Your ancestors also did the same thing when they gave up the religion of their forefathers, the Zoroastrian Faith, and accepted a new religion,



Khusraw Bimán with his wife and children

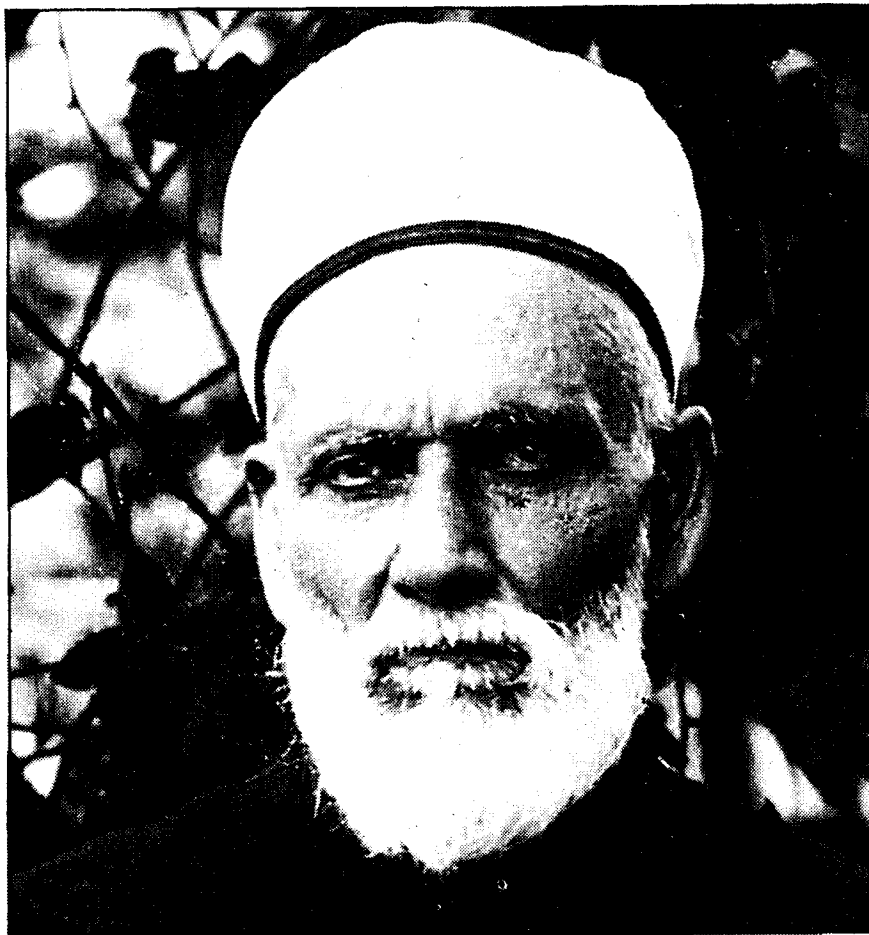


Khusraw Bimán with his wife and children

Islám.” “But,” objected the Consul, “Islám was brought by Muḥammad, the Messenger of God.” Khusraw said, “And now the divine Message is brought to us once more by Bahá’u’lláh, the Glory of God.” The Consul said, “Muḥammad has miracles to His credit.” Khusraw replied, “So has Bahá’u’lláh. Whereas you have only heard of the miracles of Muḥammad, and have accepted them because of what others have said, thousands of Bahá’ís who have visited Bahá’u’lláh have personally witnessed His miracles, and have been willing to offer their lives for His Cause....” Khusraw went on to say, “When I accepted the Bahá’í Faith, I came to believe in all the religions of the past. You should try to guide those who do not believe in Islám and its Prophet.”

In the year 1902, Khusraw felt an urge to go to the Holy Land and meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the beloved of his soul, the One to Whom he had poured out his heart for years, Who he had frequently seen in dreams and in Whose presence he now longed to forget everything pertaining to this world of dust. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had granted Khusraw permission to go on pilgrimage whenever it was possible for him to leave India. So now he was on his way. He left Poona for Bombay to arrange for a sea passage. He bought the ticket and began to prepare for the journey as the ship would be leaving that same week. All of a sudden he received a telegram from Poona asking him to return for an emergency. Back in Poona he found that one of his children had had a fall from the roof which had resulted in a bone fracture and the whole household was in a state of shock and turmoil. Khusraw thought of postponing his trip but his wife and family members asked him to proceed on his pilgrimage, assuring him that they themselves would manage things. So he left for the Holy Land trusting his family to the care of Bahá’u’lláh.

Khusraw always spoke about his blissful days with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “Those few days,” he would say, “were days of real life for us who were on pilgrimage. The Beloved was eloquent. He



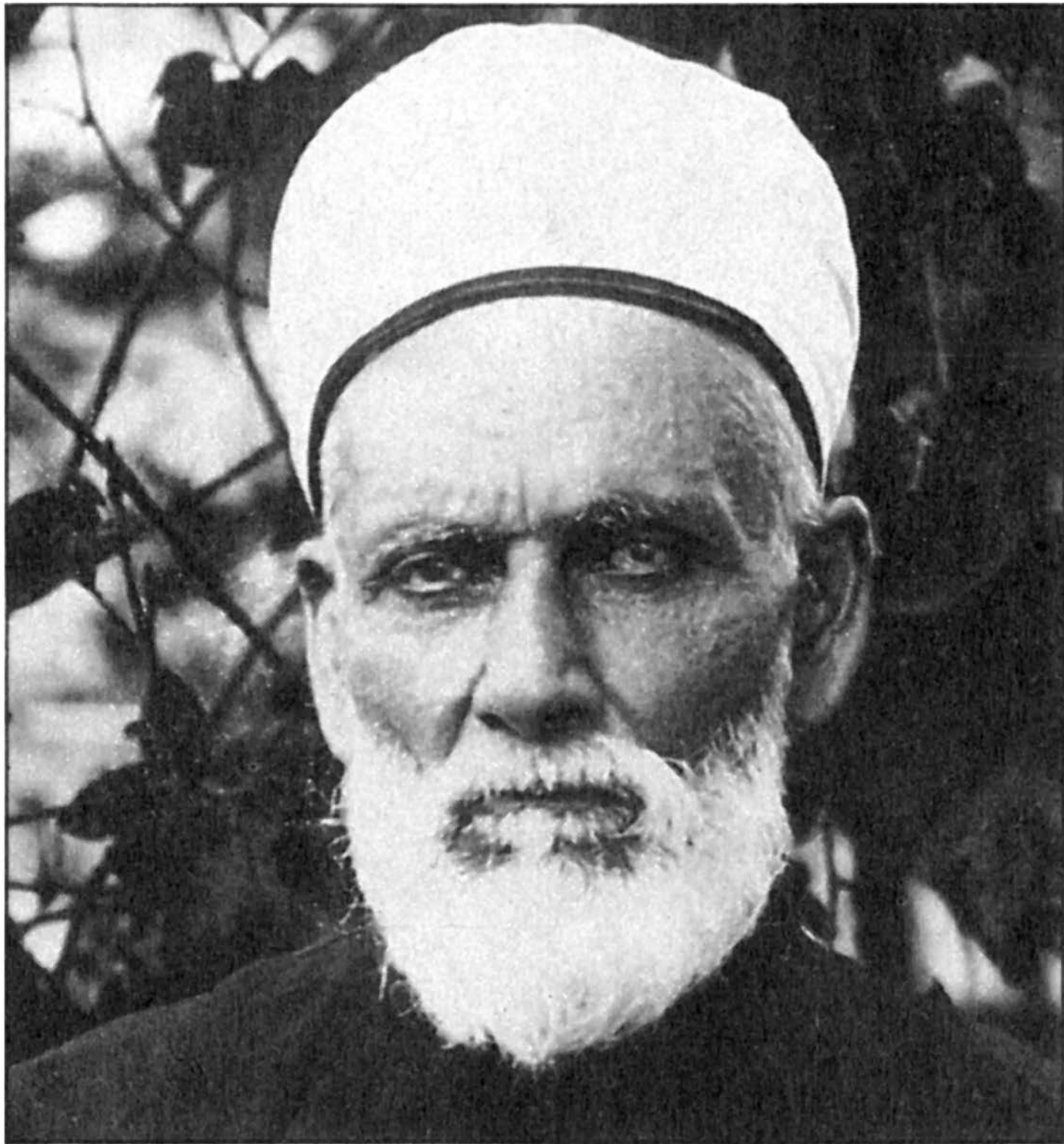
Siyyid Muṣṭafá Rúmí

called us to Him every morning and evening. At lunch he delighted in serving food to us with His own hands. He Himself did not eat except very little of the simplest food, yet the best available meals were served to His guests.”

While in the Holy Land Khusraw was allowed to give a feast to which the Master Himself was kind enough to come.

There were other pilgrims in the Holy Land at that time. Among them was Siyyid Muṣṭafá Rúmí from Burma who was spirituality personified. Lua Getsinger, the great teacher of the Cause whom the Guardian called the “Mother Teacher of the West” was there too. Her great passion was to travel around the world and give the message of this Cause to the thirsty millions of humanity. Lua was eager to read the Words of Bahá’u’lláh in the original language, so ‘Abdu’l-Bahá requested Siyyid Muṣṭafá to spare an hour or two a day to teach her the Persian language during his stay in the Holy Land.

When the time came for Khusraw to leave for India, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said to him:



Siyyid Muṣṭafá Rúmí

“You should be sincere towards both friends and enemies. You must show love and kindness to the opponent as well as to the well-wisher. If you talk to someone about this Cause and he shows enmity and prejudice towards you, even then you must love him with all your heart. You should show as much love and faithfulness to him as he shows hatred and prejudice towards you. Then, God willing, enmity will be changed into brotherhood and love. This dark world will receive heavenly illumination, and this satanic abode will be changed into a paradise.”

Back in Poona Khusraw carried on his usual life. The National Hotel had become well-established and many people of high social standing came and stayed there. Khusraw gave the message of the Bahá'í Faith to each and every one of them. One would often find priests and learned men from the Muslim, Christian, Parsi, or Hindu communities coming to argue about religion with him, but Khusraw, an unlettered man, was a match for them all. Observing his life, we understand how God guides and gives victory to His chosen ones, and how “the blind receive sight and the deaf hearing”.

One of Khusraw's valuable contacts was Sir Adamji Peerbhoy, the great Bohra leader, industrialist and philanthropist. He was attracted by Khusraw's sincerity and arranged meetings between Bahá'ís and Bohra priests. The priests said they wanted written replies to their queries from the Bahá'ís and this was done. The answers to the questions they put forward were sent by registered post and acknowledgements were received, but there was no further response. Sir Adamji was disappointed and, referring to the priests, he said to Khusraw, “Their lights are all extinguished.”

Khusraw made a second pilgrimage to the land of the Beloved. His visits to 'Abdu'l-Bahá brought blessings to other people as well as to himself because:

1. Khusraw was permitted to make a gramophone recording

of the voice of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He decided to go to Europe to meet the Bahá’ís there and bring the instruments needed for making the recording. Khusraw’s visits to the Bahá’í communities of France and England during this trip were like a spiritual tonic to the Bahá’ís he met there. Then he came back to record the voice of the beloved Master in the Holy Land. Unfortunately, this first attempt was not successful but when Khusraw’s son, Suhráb, went on pilgrimage the Master permitted him to make a second recording. Years later, when a professional recording of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s voice was done in Paris, He remembered Khusraw and said, “It is because of my love for Khusraw Bimán that I have consented to have my voice recorded.”

2. Khusraw was inspired to write his own life story and, at his request, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged others to do the same. Among those who responded was Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí who wrote his famous autobiography *Bihjatu’ş-Şudúr*¹ which was published in India.

3. Khusraw requested ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that the Bahá’ís of the West be encouraged to visit India. The Master wrote a number of letters in this connection, as a result of which many American Bahá’ís came to this country.

The esteemed Hand of the Cause of God, Mr. A.Q. Faizi, once recounted an interesting story about Khusraw. He said:

“This story is more than half a century old. I had gone to Shíráz to visit the House of the Blessed Báb. A number of friends from other lands were also there, but the man who attracted the most attention was Khusraw Bimán from India whose enthusiasm and love for the Cause was felt by all. During our visit, when the garments of the Báb were being shown, Khusraw wanted to touch them. The custodian of the

¹ *The Delight of Hearts*

Some Western Bahá'ís who visited India



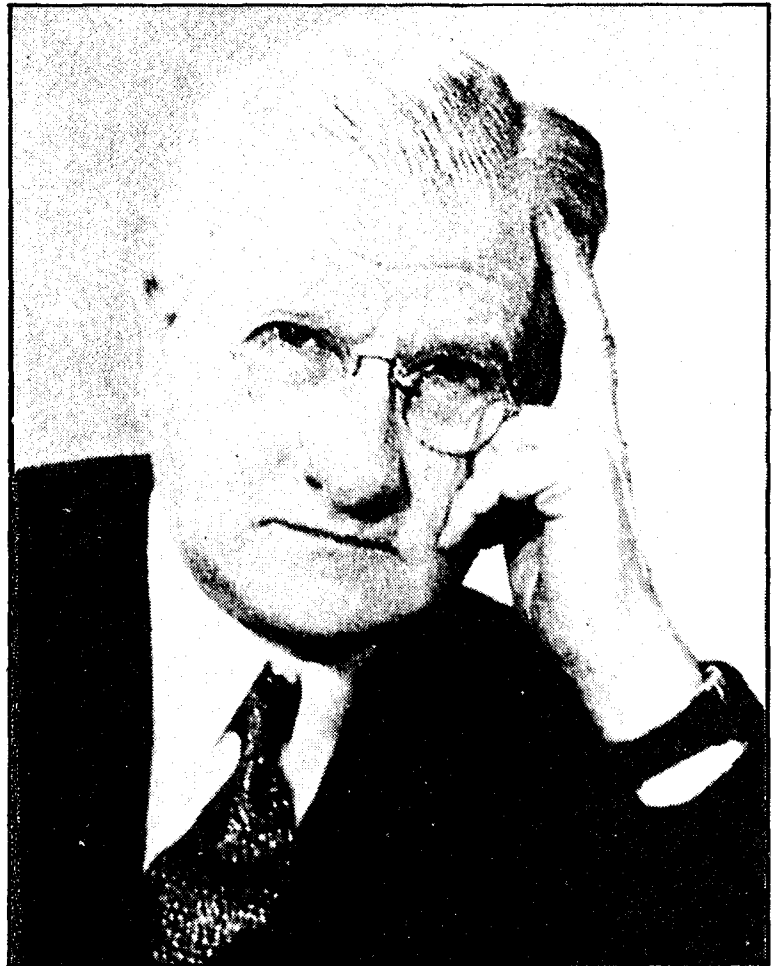
Martha Root



Keith Ransom-Kehler



Lua Getsinger



Siegfried Schopflocher

Some Western Bahá'ís who visited India



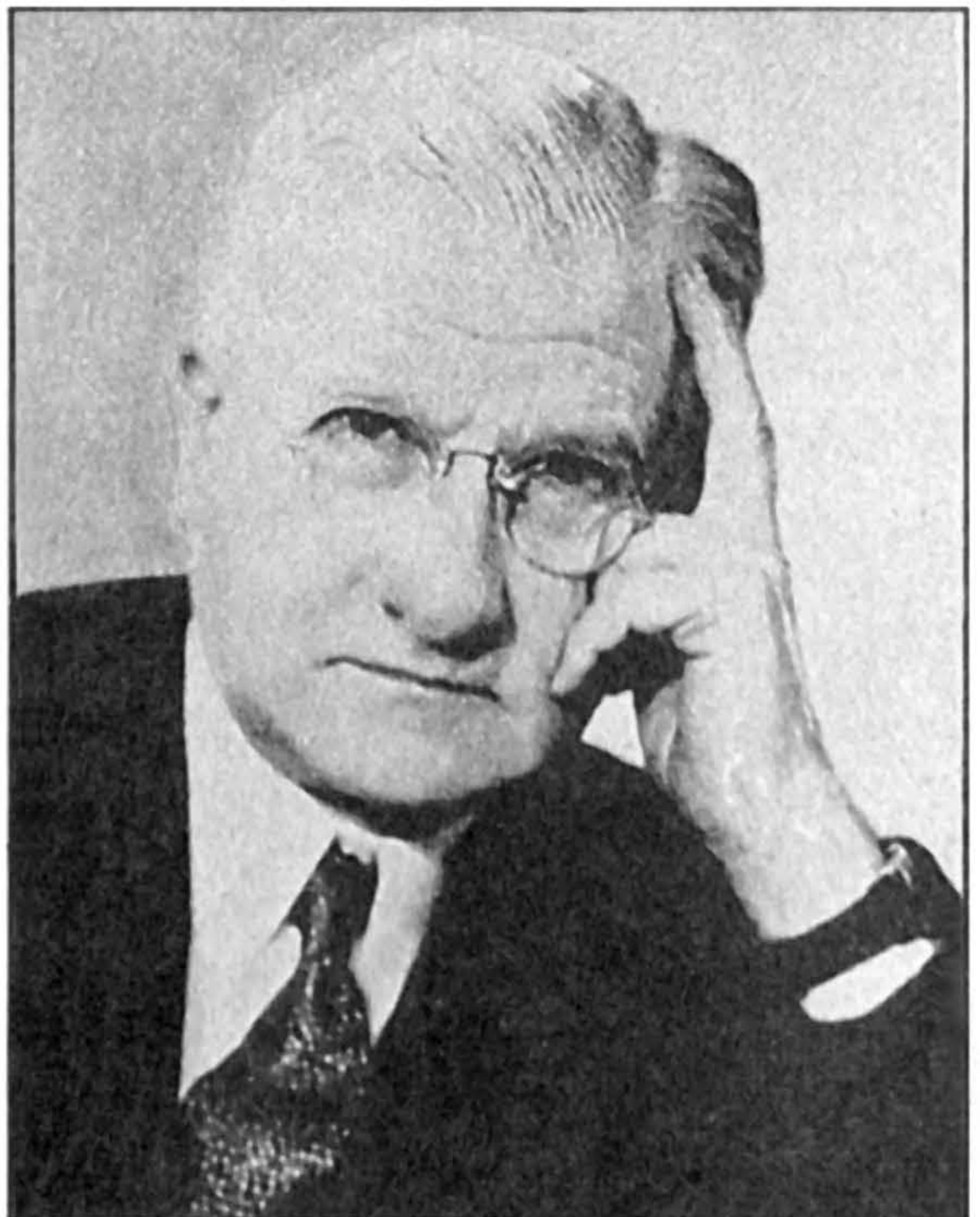
Martha Root



Keith Ransom-Kehler



Lua Getsinger



Siegfried Schopflocher

House of the Báb said, ‘Jináb-i-Khusraw,¹ these are not to be handled.’ He said, ‘I obey,’ and, clasping his hands behind his back, he bent down and kissed those blessed garments. We were all delighted at his ingenuity, and followed his example!”

Khusraw often wrote to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from India and received loving answers from the Master. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá even wrote to express His concern if He had not heard from Khusraw for a long time.

The Master appreciated Khusraw’s steadfastness in the Cause of God and called him “Thábit” which means steadfast. Khusraw took this as his surname and now all his family members are known by this name.

The news of the ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came as a terrible blow to Khusraw. After that his zest for life seemed to have left him. Yet he continued teaching the Faith and working for the Cause he loved so much. Under his management the National Hotel had acquired a reputation for excellence of service. People from all over India as well as other countries came to stay there, and Khusraw had ample opportunity for spreading the Message of Bahá’u’lláh. His contacts with other religious institutions were also continued. His children too were now grown up and serving on Bahá’í National and Local Assemblies and various committees.

Khusraw Bimán’s pure soul left for its eternal abode on December 31, 1936, when he was about one hundred and four years old. Bahá’ís from Bombay, Poona and places nearby, gathered in large numbers to show their gratitude for Khusraw’s unforgettable services to the Cause of God and to pay him their last homage.

A worthier epitaph for his tomb could not have been chosen

¹ *Jináb* is a term of respect.

than this quotation from one of the Tablets which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in his honour:

“O Khusraw...¹ every crowned head will pay tribute to you. Monarchs will eulogise you and will envy your state, saying, ‘Oh, that we too had been ever-ready in the service of the Divine Threshold like unto him, forgetful of all else save God!’”

* * * *

Khusraw had always attracted my admiration. I did not have the privilege of meeting him personally but his fame had often reached me and I felt a strong desire to write about him. So I approached his children and asked them to record their impressions of him for me. I give below parts of an account received from his daughter, Mrs. Shírín Rustamí:

“A friend requested me to write a few recollections of my father and I thought it indeed a privilege. So I have taken up my pen with pride to write, in my humble way, about the grand old man who was known as ‘Khusraw Bábí’.²

“The Zoroastrians looked down upon him, scorned, reviled and despised him; but this made him all the more enthusiastic and devoted to the Cause of God. Notwithstanding the severe tests which came to him, he remained faithful to his convictions and served us as a shining example for all times. He was the first Bahá’í to pioneer to Poona and remained there till his death.

“There was such a driving force and sustaining power in him

¹ Khusraw literally means king, monarch.

² The followers of the Báb were called Bábís, but uninformed people used the term for Bahá’ís as well.

as cannot be described. He was always on fire to convey the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to people of all descriptions and denominations; of all castes, creeds and nationalities. The only aim of his life was to spread the Light of Bahá as he had received it....

“An incident comes to my mind. It happened one day that my brothers and I were playing in some interior portion of our house while he was busy in the drawing-room teaching a Christian. He must have been disturbed by our noise, so he quietly walked in, took me by the shoulder and knee and threw me right onto a cot from a distance of six feet. He was not worried as to what might happen to me but was perturbed that he could not concentrate in his teaching efforts.

“I recall another incident: the late Dr. Coyaji visited a patient in the Hotel. As he was going away, my father accompanied him to the car talking about the Faith. Afterwards I told him that the doctor did not seem interested; he was rather worried about the patient. My father smiled and said, ‘We must not lose any opportunity that comes our way. Some day he may become a Bahá'í.’

“He loved Bahá'í visitors. He extended invitations to lecturers and teachers from overseas and from India to come to Poona, stay with him and deliver lectures on the Faith. He would spend lavishly... and invite his friends, the elite of society and others, to informal discussion gatherings. He would also hold public meetings either in the Hotel or in public halls. I remember the names of a few of his Bahá'í guests: Miss Martha Root, Mrs. Lua Getsinger, Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler, Mr. Schopflocher, Siyyid Maḥfúzu'l-Ḥaq 'Ilmí, Prof. Pritam Singh, Prof. Shírází of Karachi, and Mírzá Maḥmúd Zarqání.

“On the 31st of December, 1936, he passed away. His hearse was taken through Poona on the 1st of January. As it was New Year's Day a whole British regiment was marching with their band playing, but at the crossing when they saw the

hearse they stopped, paid their respects and started the band again, following the hearse. It was something unique and people came out of their houses to see what was going on. Then the news spread that the great old 'Bábí' had passed away....

"It was the fulfilment of my father's wishes that music be played after his death and that there be rejoicing for death is a 'messenger of joy'."

* * * *

Mr. Surúsh Yigánigí, one of the prominent Bahá'ís in India who is holding fast to his pioneering post in Bangalore, gave me a most interesting account of Khusraw's death which I would like to quote:

"It was my habit to go to the National Hotel every morning, have breakfast there and go to my shop after having a chat with Khusraw, usually about the Faith. A few months before his death, I said to Khusraw, 'Why do you go to the bazaar every morning? Let me do this for you. On my return I shall come to you as usual, have breakfast and then go to my shop.' He agreed and this became my routine. On the 31st of December, 1936, I was a little late reaching the National Hotel. I found Khusraw walking restlessly up and down the verandah. On seeing me he said, 'You have come at last! I am waiting to say Goodbye to you before I go to my eternal home. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is waiting for me.' After embracing me and saying his farewell, he lay down and covered himself with a blanket. I thought he was going to rest but I had hardly been in my shop for three quarters of an hour when his grandson, Jimmy, came running to me and said, 'Grandpa is dead! Please come right back with me.' What a shock I had! He himself knew he was going to die that morning but I did not believe him. I hurried back to the National Hotel. Khusraw was lying as I had left

him in a deep slumber. His face showed great calm and peace, and there was a smile of satisfaction on his lips.”

* * * *

In a tribute paid to Khusraw by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma we read:

“We regret to announce the death of Mr. Khusraw Bimán Thábit of Poona, a Bahá'í pioneer who passed from this life ... at the age of over a hundred years. Although attracted to the Cause in Írán, Mr. Thábit embraced the Cause after his emigration to this country during the middle period of his life, and was the first believer from the Zoroastrian community to accept the Bahá'í Faith on Indian soil.

“His faith was marked by an intense zeal and devotion which led him constantly to seek new channels of service to the Cause in support of whose institutions he was a stalwart champion.

“A generation ago, when the violators of the Covenant had made Bombay their stronghold and were seeking to undermine the faith of the believers, Mr. Thábit, who was then engaged in business in that city, remained immune from their pernicious influence and was unaffected by their perverse machinations. Until his last he was firm in the Covenant and submissive to the commands of the Guardian of God's Cause.

“So steadfast was he in his faith that he never wavered despite the fiercest opposition of the enemies during the early years of his acceptance of the Cause when he was almost alone in this city and against him were ranged powerful adversaries. An evidence of his firmness was disclosed on the death of his mother-in-law some thirty years ago. The command to enforce the Bahá'í laws had not been then issued by the Centre of the Covenant. The practices prevailing in the respective communities from which the believers hailed were being observed by

the friends. Mr. Thábit's former co-religionists considered it a good opportunity to harass him. They plotted to refuse his dead relative a place in the Tower of Silence (the Zoroastrian resting-place for the dead). Mr. Thábit heard of it. He approached the High Priest of the Zoroastrians in the town and described to him the situation. 'I will bury my mother-in-law in my garden,' he said; 'I should not be blamed later for having precipitated a cleavage within your ranks. Your co-religionists will have been responsible for this deed.' The High Priest prevailed upon the community to yield. They understood the resolute character of the man with whom they had to deal and, in later years, were careful to avoid pressing such matters to an issue.

"He thrice had the honour of attaining to the holy presence of the Master. During one of his pilgrimages to the Holy Land, he besought and received of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the permission, the boundless privilege, to record His sacred voice in the phonograph. This gracious permission was availed of by him with the result that five hundred double-sided records of the Master's voice were produced, in Íránian and Turkish.¹ A large number of these precious relics of the Master are today in preservation at the sacred Archives at Haifa....

"The manner of Mr. Thábit's death particularly impressed the non-believers. Although past a hundred years, he was not affected by any illness a year or two prior to his death. Even until the last, his physical constitution was unimpaired.... The non-believers on commenting on the manner of his death were, without exception, moved to observe that it must have been a pious life that had so peaceful and happy an ending....

"We are privileged to add to this obituary notice the following cable from Haifa, dated 17th January, addressed by our beloved Guardian to Mr. Thábit's two sons:

¹ Five hundred copies were made from the original record.

“Just heard passing dearly beloved distinguished father. Profoundly grieve irreparable loss. Ardently praying. Extend relatives deepest sympathy. Memory his historic services imperishable. Love. — Shoghi”¹

¹ *Bahá'í News Letter*, March 1937

Muhammad-Ridá Shírází

1888–1925

“May God loosen thy tongue to sing the praises of the Blessed Beauty.”¹

Many Bahá'ís, like cricket players, specialize in one thing. In the game of cricket, some are good batsmen, some excel in bowling, while others surpass in fielding; yet there are some who are all-rounders and good at everything. To carry the simile a little further, there are Bahá'ís who are good at studying their Faith, others who do well as public speakers or writers of books and articles, while still others go pioneering to carry the message of their Faith to distant places; but there are also those who are good at all these things. Professor Muhammad Ridá Shírází belonged to the last category. He was a scholar of the Faith and wielded a facile pen; he was a silver-tongued orator who spoke about the Cause at scores of public gatherings, conferences, schools and colleges; he gave contributions to the funds of the Faith with an open hand; and he made extensive tours to take the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to different parts of India and other countries.

Long before Shírází accepted the Bahá'í Faith in 1909, there had been Bahá'ís living in Bombay, some of whom were even born of parents who had accepted the Cause in the days of

¹ from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet to Shírází

Bahá'u'lláh. They were mostly devoted believers from Zoroastrian background and much loved by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They contributed generously towards the funds of the Cause, but they were neither learned nor sophisticated in any way. Most of them owned tea shops, and the long hours of work did not allow them the time to study their religion to the point of profundity or to develop a scholarly outlook. When Shírází, a young, educated man with a charming personality and an eloquence coupled with sincere devotion to the Cause of God stepped into their midst, they were delighted and welcomed him with open arms. Shírází had a special place in their gatherings and played an important role in the community—reading from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, giving speeches and directing projects undertaken for the progress of the Faith.

Shírází was a lad of fourteen when he came to Karachi in 1902 from his native town of Shíráz in Írán. Soon after that he was admitted as a boarder in the Sind Madrisatu'l-Islám. Out of consideration for his being a foreigner who did not know any language except his mother tongue, he was given a room near that of another student, Hishmatu'lláh, who came from Agra and could speak Persian. The two boys were classmates up to the fourth standard when Shírází got a double promotion and became Hishmatu'lláh's senior by one year.

Records state that Shírází passed his University Matriculation with distinction in 1907 and secured a University prize. Then he was enrolled in the famous Elphinstone College in Bombay where his intelligence, polished manners, good character and handsome personality soon won for him a high place. Yet he did not mix freely with all the students. He had a selected number of friends, and the one he was most attached to was Narayenrao Rangnath Shethji—later known as Vakíl¹—

¹ Vakíl was not yet a Bahá'í.

who was a year ahead of him in college. The two young men were to become life-long friends and help each other's spiritual development. Narayenrao Vakíl has said of Shírází:

“He had a noble personality and charming habits. He was generous to a fault and would sacrifice his own interests for the sake of others.”

One year after Shírází came to Bombay, Hishmatu'lláh also came to this city for further education and they stayed together at the Anjuman-i-Islám Hostel.

It was at this time that Shírází came in touch with Aḥmad Dárá, a scholar of the Persian language, who mixed freely with Bahá'ís. One day Shírází asked Dárá to tell him something about the Bahá'ís and their beliefs. He had heard many disparaging accounts about them but wished to find out about their true aims for himself. Dárá agreed to take him to the Bahá'í Centre. Thirteen years later Shírází published a most interesting account of his meeting with Mírzá Maḥram in the *Bahá'í News* of April and September, 1922, under the title of “The Logic of the Bahá'í”. He says:

“Years back, on account of the severe persecutions that prevailed in their country, Persian Bahá'ís met in secret and enjoyed the feasts of reason and flows of soul in their gatherings. But it was not possible for every one to be permitted in their circles. Their meetings were more guarded than even those of Freemasons, and their fraternity was not a matter of name. I had heard a good deal about them and that, too, mostly from their opponents. While a student at Bombay, after having come across an article in the *East and West* on their teachings, I one night implored of a friend, who had travelled far and wide and associated with various religionists, to tell me what he knew of the Bahá'ís. He, at first, hesitated but then consented to introduce me to the group of Bombay

Bahá'ís that I might investigate their beliefs for myself. Next morning, like a child eagerly awaiting a new toy, I woke up, dressed and got ready for the arrival of my friend. On that beautiful November morning of the year 1908, we set out for the Bahá'í Hall, in Forbes Street, Fort Bombay. We came to a four storeyed-building from the verandah of the top floor of which there peeped at us a venerable looking Persian gentleman of middle age, dressed in white raiments and a tall white fez with a small turban around it. After climbing seventy and two steps we came to an open spacious hall, decently furnished and decorated with Persian inscriptions and tablets. We were met and greeted by several gentlemen whose faces were not quite unfamiliar. The venerable old Áqá Mírzá Maḥram, bade us be seated. Tea was next served in small Persian tumblers, unmilked after the fashion in Persia. The presence of tea reminded me of what ignorant Persians, who being unable to understand the rapid progress of the Bahá'í movement, assert. They believe that Bahá'ís drug their guests and thus win them over. I, however, dismissed the thought from my mind.

“Áqá Mírzá Maḥram proceeded, ‘You have come to investigate the truth of our movement?’ I nodded. ‘If you wish to investigate the truth of a new thing,’ said Mírzá, ‘what should be your attitude and how will you proceed?’ ‘I shall proceed from the known to the unknown and shall have no preconceived notions. I shall enter into the enquiry with a mind free from bias and prejudice,’ replied I. ‘Bravo,’ said he, ‘now tell me if you believe in any one as a prophet.’ ‘Yes. I believe that His Holiness Muḥammad, Christ, Moses and many others have been Messengers of God to humanity, and we designate them “Prophets”’, said I.

“‘Tell me. How have you recognised them as prophets of God, as for example, by what reasoning have you admitted the prophethood of His Holiness Muḥammad?’ ‘He performed miracles, the Qur’án is a book of such a style that no one has



Prof. Shírází



Mírzá Mahram

yet been able to imitate a verse of, and the Qur'án bears evidence of His prophethood.'

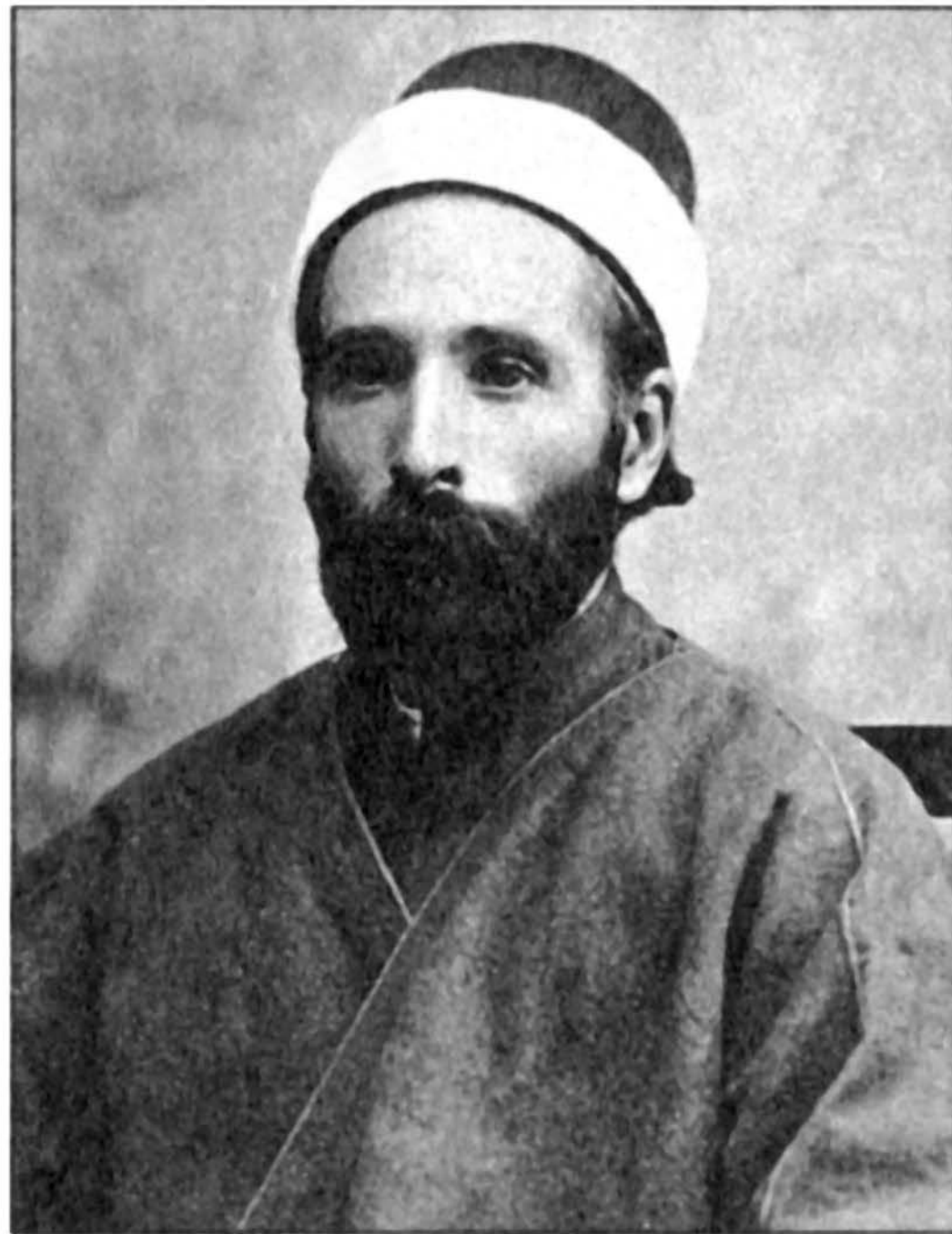
“‘You promised’ said Mírzá, ‘not to be carried away by preconceived notions. What you assert are mere hearsays. You have not logically believed in them. A próof must be universally applicable and good for all men and all times. This state of mind won’t do for our enquiry. You assert that the Prophet performed miracles, whereas non-Muslims refuse to believe in that statement. You say no one can write a verse to match with the composition of the Qur'án in point of eloquence and style, whereas Christian scholars of Arabic literature and eloquence point out rhetorical and grammatical mistakes in the Qur'án. That, is a proof, which leaves no doubt in the mind of the seeker.’

“I remarked that since Mírzá Şáhib¹ himself believed in the

¹ Şáhib is a term of respect.



Prof. Shírází



Mírzá Maḥram

prophethood of His Holiness Muḥammad, I would rather wish him to prove to me the truth of the Prophet. He proceeded: 'If a man claims to be a carpenter, what will you expect him to do? What is the function of a carpenter?'

“‘He must make me chairs, tables, teapots and I shall call him a carpenter. In other words he must do what carpenters have done.’

“‘And if he claims to be a doctor?’ ‘Well, he must cure sick men or produce his university diploma.’

“‘And supposing he claims to be a watchmaker?’ ‘He must repair my watch or make me a watch.’

“‘Well, then, if a man claims to be a prophet what would you expect him to do? What would be his function?’ asked Mírzá Maḥram.

“‘He must do what other prophets have done,’ said I. ‘If he does what any other prophet has done I will call him a prophet.’

“‘Then,’ said the venerable gentleman, ‘let us see what Prophet Muḥammad has done. Like His predecessors, Christ and Moses, He brought a set of teachings, which He said were not His but God’s; and He claimed to have been sent by God to guide mankind; whosoever heard Him opposed Him; He single-handed and alone, without any local or physical aid established His truth and executed the divine law which was for the good of humanity. Therefore He was God’s Messenger and was aided by God, for if He were not of God how would a weak, solitary, uneducated orphan, succeed against God and all mankind?’ I admitted that that was the best proof of the Prophet’s truth.

“‘If another person does what His Holiness Muḥammad has done, won’t you call him a prophet of God?’ said the Bahá’í.

“‘But’ said I, ‘there can be no prophet after His Holiness Muḥammad, the Seal of Prophets.’ ‘Tell me where has our enquiry led us? If another person does what His Holiness Muḥammad has done, what will you designate him?’

“Half-confounded and amazed, and quite unwillingly I gently said, ‘We must perforce call him a prophet.’

“‘Impossible! Impossible!’ I said to myself, when I had left the presence of the Bahá’í and of his invincible arguments. ‘How can I believe in the advent of another prophet after the Seal of Prophets, unless my past belief has been ill grounded?’

“But I was not aware that a keen desire was created in me for further and fuller investigation of the doctrines and teachings of the Bahá’ís.

“After a few days I made a surprise visit to the Bahá’í Hall and found the same old Bahá’í gentleman, namely Mírzá Maḥram, sitting there.

“No sooner I took my seat, than he said: ‘Our Master ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has taught us to beware of prejudice; light is good in whatsoever lamp it is burning. A rose is beautiful in whatsoever garden it may bloom. A star has the same radiance if it shines from the East or the West.’

“Then turning and pointing to the lamp in the centre of the hall, he said: ‘Tell me what is that?’ I said: ‘It is a lamp.’ He tokened towards another and said: ‘What is that?’ I replied: ‘This is a lamp also.’

“‘These are two different things; why do you call them by the same name?’ asked the Bahá’í. ‘Just because,’ said I, ‘they serve the same purpose.’

“‘Can you call one a lamp and refuse to apply the term to the other?’ said he. ‘We could not do that,’ said I.

“‘Well, Bahá’u’lláh has done what any other Manifestation of the past has achieved,’ added the Bahá’í. ‘He has come with a set of teachings which are from God; and single-handed and alone, without any local or physical help, He has united men of different creeds, tongues and countries. In other words He has founded Religion, once more, on earth. If we cannot look upon Him as a divinely inspired Teacher or Manifestation, pray tell me how can we have faith left for our old religions?’

“He then said: ‘In the year 1844, the Báb, or Herald,

appeared and said that He had come to pave the way for One “Whom God shall make manifest.” Then came Bahá’u’lláh or the Manifestation of God, He whom Christians, Jews and Muslims expected; and despite severe persecutions in Persia and Turkey, from the prison house of ‘Akká His words and teachings have spread in all countries. He left this world after forty years of exile and imprisonment and His wonderful Son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, carried on the work with a masterly hand. Under the leadership of the “Servant of Bahá”, Muslims, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, Shintoists, etc., have been united in love to such an extent as the world has never seen. This is the beginning of that golden age upon earth, “the age of universal peace and love”, when men shall come from the East and the West, from the North and the South, and shall sit together in the Kingdom of God.’

“When the Bahá’í said this, he fell in a deep meditation and one could feel that he was throwing his eyes on a far-off future—a future which the sooner we attain the better. Recovering from his meditation he said: ‘This is enough for today, more when we meet again. Better go and think over these words and come again to solve your difficulties.’”

Shírází had meant to continue this interesting account, but somehow only two instalments appeared in the *Bahá’í News*.

There were frequent meetings between Shírází and Mírzá Maḥram. Every time they met, Shírází would recount their discussions to his friends, Narayenrao and Hishmatu’lláh. In the beginning, the three young men would put their heads together to try to find arguments with which to refute what Mírzá Maḥram said, but they gradually became more and more attracted to the teachings of the Faith. Narayenrao Vakíl and Hishmatu’lláh too, began to visit the Bahá’í teacher and, before long, Shírází and his two friends were confirmed believers in Bahá’u’lláh and His divine Message. Shírází then wrote a letter to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, expressing his devotion to the Cause and

was honoured to receive the following reply:

“He is God!

“O thou who art steadfast in the Covenant! Render thanks to God that thou hast heard the call of the Kingdom, hast witnessed the glory of the Lord of Hosts and seen the dazzling Light from the Centre of the Celestial World.

“Praise be to God that thou art firm and steadfast. I hope thou wilt be confirmed to live thy life in accordance with the teachings of the Blessed Beauty. Upon thee rest the Glory of the Most Glorious.

— ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás’¹

After accepting the Faith, Shírází and his two friends began to teach it enthusiastically to others. Their professors and fellow students were the first to be given the new Message. Those staying at the Anjuman-i-Islám Hostel also heard about it and some fanatics among them started an agitation against Shírází and Hishmatu’lláh, demanding their immediate expulsion from the hostel as they were telling others that a Prophet had appeared after Muḥammad Who had brought new laws which differed from those of the Qur’án. Mírzá Maḥram consoled the two friends and said they could come and stay with him. This arrangement enabled them to have closer contact with their teacher, and they benefited much from it.

That same year Hishmatu’lláh left Bombay for Karachi, but Shírází and Vakíl continued the teaching campaign. They delivered public speeches and taught among the Theosophists, Brahmo Samajis, Arya Samajis, Christians, Jews and others. They pointed out the oneness of all religions and quoted the

¹ This is a free translation from the Persian. ‘Abbás is the Master’s name; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is His title.

Holy Scriptures. These religious communities, who could not tolerate each other, all became friendly towards the Bahá'ís.

In 1912, Shírází obtained his B.A. degree and the Government Diploma in Education, and returned to Karachi. He was employed as a teacher in his Alma-Mater, Sind Madrisatu'l-Islám and soon became a senior member of the staff. Then the post of Assistant Professorship of Persian fell vacant at the D.J. Sind College in Karachi, and Shírází was selected for the post out of a large number of candidates.

This was to be the most productive period in the life of Shírází, as well as an important time for the Bahá'í Faith in the province of Sind in general and the city of Karachi in particular.

Shírází had left Sind as a boy just out of school, and returned as a young man with a cultured mind and spiritual outlook, vast general knowledge, and a great gift for public speaking and writing. He had shaken off all prejudices, was full of love for everyone, and respected all religions as basically one. Before him lay the vast virgin territory of Sind, the land of súfís and saints where people were tolerant towards each other and enjoyed a sense of fellowship among themselves, and where the Message of Bahá'u'lláh had to be given. Shírází felt the protection of 'Abdu'l-Bahá around him and knew he would be enabled to teach the Cause of God. He considered it his responsibility to wage a crusade of teaching and his untiring efforts in Sind brought the Faith to the attention of innumerable people.

Shírází's teaching efforts were not confined to Sind alone. One of his teaching trips in 1912 took him to Multan, the land of Sa'íd-i-Hindí,¹ to Lahore, Patiala, Amritsar, Delhi, Agra, Lucknow, Benares, Allahabad, Calcutta and other places.

¹ one of the first disciples of the Báb

Since the Associated Press¹ had announced his teaching campaign, together with the international character of the Bahá'í Faith, he was welcomed everywhere. His public lectures, full of life and substance, were listened to with rapt attention.

When he returned from his tour, a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá was awaiting him which read in parts:

“May God loosen thy tongue to sing the praises of the Blessed Beauty.... Give the glad-tidings of the bounty of thy Lord Who inspired thee, tutored thee, gave thee knowledge, and confirmed thee in His Cause. He has raised His voice through thee in large gatherings and important assemblies, announcing the good news that the Sun of Reality has dawned....

“Arise with a resolution such as no power can withstand and let thy words flow as torrential rain from the divine Kingdom of Knowledge....”²

Encouraged by the loving favours of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shírází laboured day and night in the promotion of the Faith. He won the respect of many noble souls for the Cause of God. Among them was Mírzá Qalích Beg, the great man of letters in Sind who translated into Sindhi *The Seven Valleys* and the Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace at The Hague.

In 1914, Shírází and his dear friend Narayenrao Vakíl went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Master showered His favours on them and showed them great love and affection. There they had the bounty of witnessing the daily life of the multi-sided gem that was 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They saw Him associate with high and low, rich and poor, Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís. They witnessed the honours bestowed upon Him by

¹ a news dissemination service

² a free translation from Persian

the elite of society who came to Him for advice on important matters; and they saw the great love which the poverty-stricken and ailing had for Him who was their best friend and comforter in times of sorrow. Shírází stayed in the Holy Land for twenty-one days and came back to India on fire to redouble his services to the Cause of God.

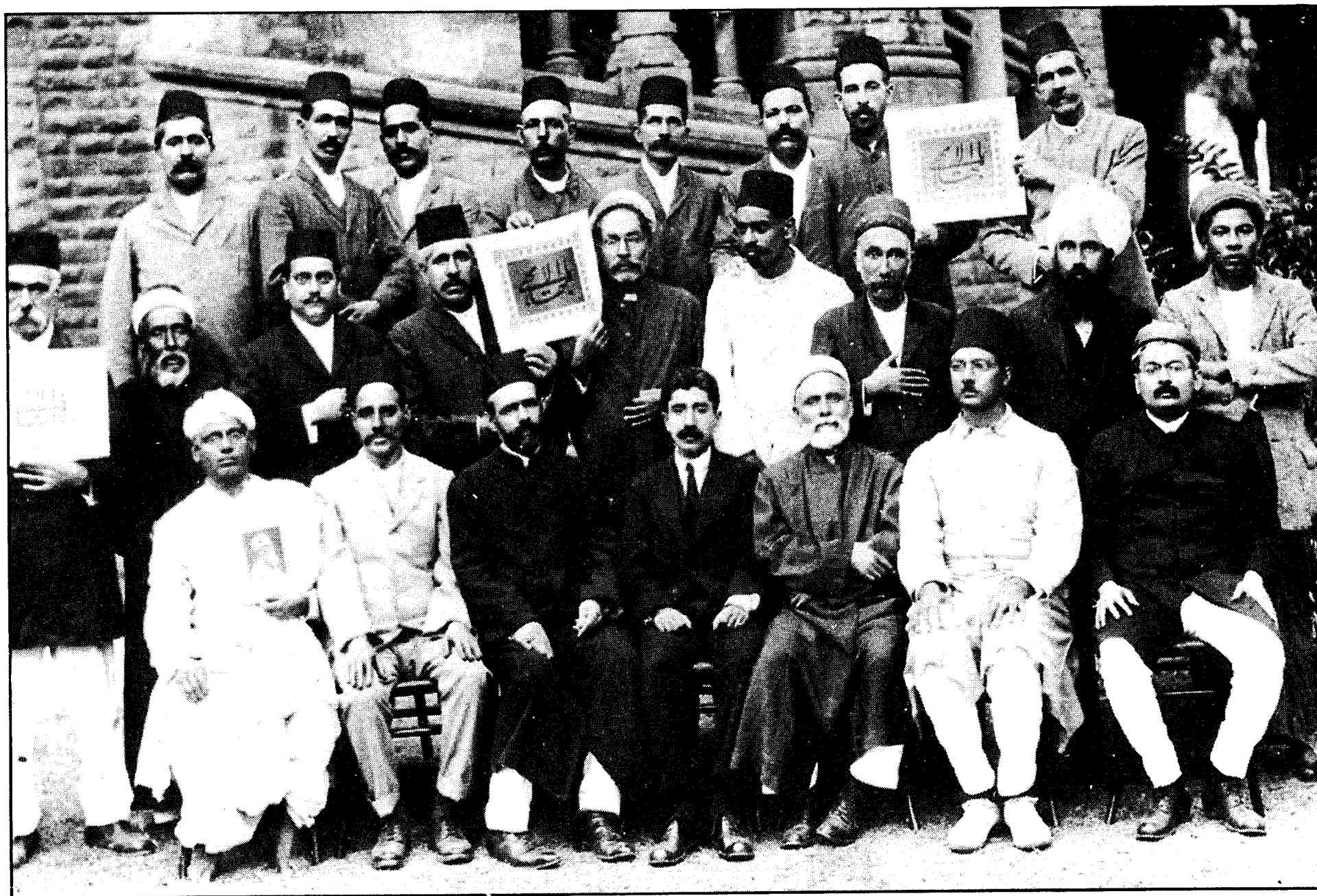
The Indian Bahá'í community was becoming stronger every day and new centres were springing up in all provinces. The first all-India Bahá'í Convention was arranged to be held in Bombay in the last days of December, 1920. Shírází and Vakíl played a leading part in organizing this important gathering and Shírází was elected as the president of that first Convention in India.

In 1921, Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí pioneered to Karachi and a close friendship was established between him and Shírází. They joined forces in the service of the Cause and together they achieved a tremendous amount of work. They rented a place for the Bahá'í Centre and started regular meetings. Among other things, Shírází started Esperanto classes¹ in the Centre. Many professors, teachers and students of colleges joined the classes and came to hear of the Bahá'í Faith as well.

A fortnight before His ascension, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to Shírází and invited him to go on a second pilgrimage to the Holy Land and then, if possible, to proceed from there to America. Shírází was able to leave Karachi on March 8, 1923. He was received with great love and kindness by the Guardian in Haifa, who gave him a letter of introduction to the Bahá'ís of America.

An account of Shírází's travels in America is covered in the

¹ Bahá'u'lláh had said that an auxiliary international language should be chosen and taught in all the schools of the world. When Esperanto was invented many Bahá'ís took a keen interest in it.



Delegates to the first Convention of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma
 seated from left: Zarqání, 3rd; Shírází, 4th; Rúmí, 5th; N.R. Vakíl, 7th
 middle row: Jamshíd Ḥakímíyán, 1st; Pritam Singh, 8th



Delegates to the first Convention of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma
seated from left: Zarqání, 3rd; Shírází, 4th; Rúmí, 5th; N.R. Vakíl, 7th
middle row: Jamshíd Ḥakímíyán, 1st; Pritam Singh, 8th

*Star of the West*¹ from which the following is taken:

“Prof. M.R. Shírází of Sind College, Karachi, India, first president of the all-India Convention of Bahá’ís, was introduced by a letter from Shoghi Effendi, expressing the hope that this friend would stimulate the teaching campaign in this country. The speaker among other things said:

“‘Let me greet you in the name of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, also many of the Bahá’ís in India and Egypt. The spirit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is with us tonight.

“‘The day of trying to unify humanity in a limited way is past. Neither family, tribal nor national unity has brought peace. The last stage of unity was begun sixty years ago. That same light must illumine all peoples. That same power must make all nations one. All mankind must love each other as brothers. When this height is attained there will be no more wars.’

“The professor described the Bahá’í Convention of India, which was like the Feast of Bahá’u’lláh. All men were invited. Many societies and advanced thinkers attended. ‘Henceforth,’ he said, ‘we must address ourselves to the hundreds of thousands who are waiting to receive the new day. Sect and schism must be removed. Unity and oneness are needed, without sect and division. We cannot organize the Spirit: but we can organize the workers in the Cause.

“‘Bahá’ís are those who give their lives, accepting prison or chains in the path of God. Service and sacrifice are needed now. Leave the rest to God. The past was too much occupied with individual salvation. Now we must consider the good of all.

“‘In this present scene there is a wonderful picture for each and all in the unity of so many diverse elements. A little candle lighted in each heart can brighten the whole world. The ignorant past forbade us to sit, eat and talk together. But now

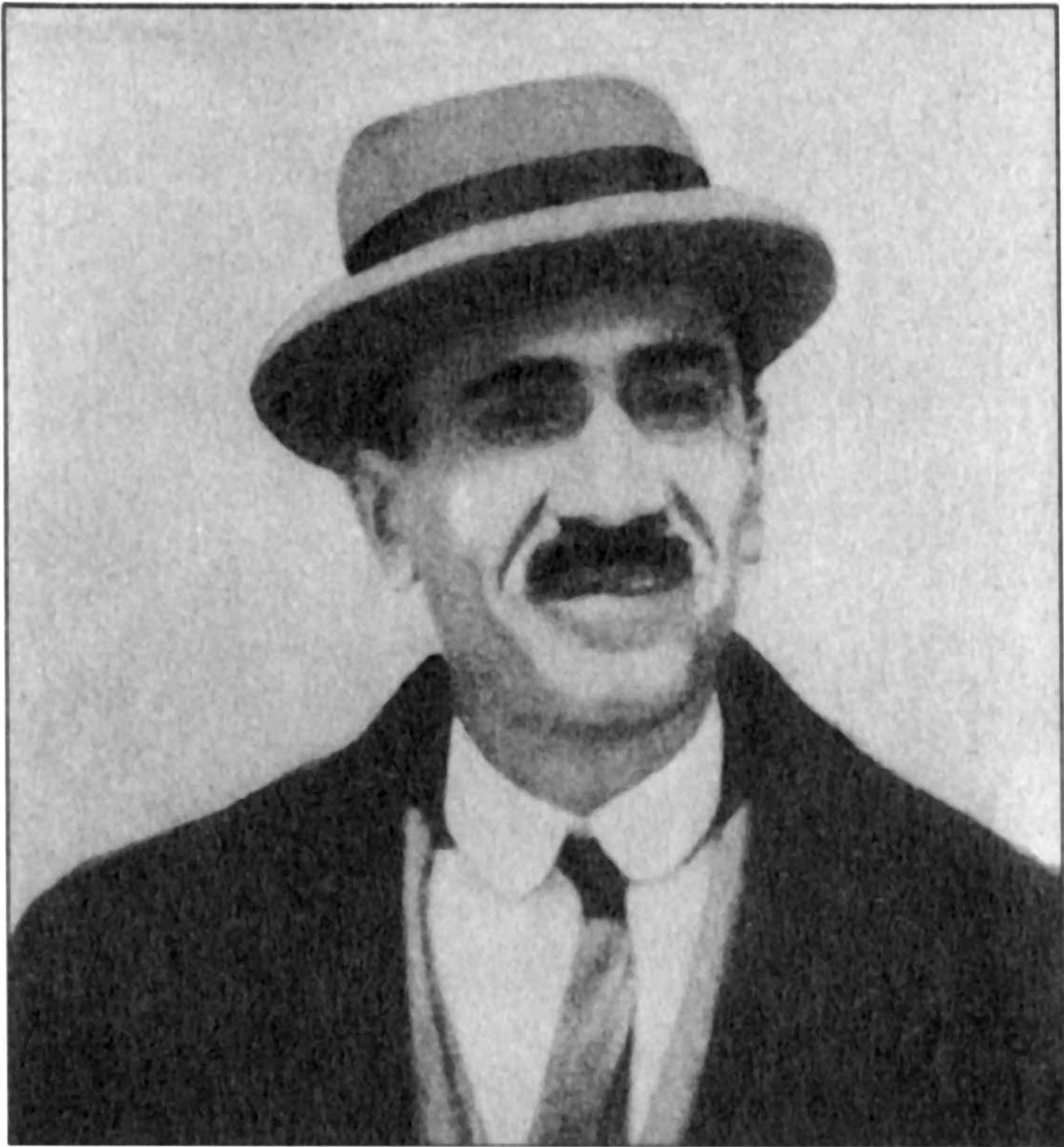
¹ June, 1923



Shírází in America

is the joy of union. This is a message from the East. May you all be happy in this joyous springtime!’

“Prof. M.R. Shírází. . . made two brief addresses in which he pled for the destruction of the idol of hate. The worship of this idol was due to the differences emphasized in, first, religions; second, nationalities; third, tongues. He decried the operation of the false spirituality which spreads the disease of pride and hatred, and welcomed the new, with its life and freedom. He contrasted that liberty which brought chaos through a riotous lack of control with the true freedom which comes from obedience to heavenly laws. He related an experience which he had with some religious teachers of the old order in India who showed their prejudices against him and expressed fear of being contaminated by his touch. They asked him to take away with him their cup which he had used for drinking, as they would have no further use for it since it had been used by one not of their Faith. He explained to them that souls who are really spiritual understand humility; that health



Shírází in America

as well as disease is contagious; that if it was true that they had great spiritual strength they should use it to elevate those whom they considered beneath them.”

Shírází continued his tireless efforts for the promotion of the Cause to the last day of his life. Though he died very suddenly at the prime of life, he accomplished more for the Faith than many who have lived long lives on earth. His devoted friend, Bakhtiyári writes about the sad, fateful day when Shírází went to swim in the Phuleli Canal and was drowned:

“We had both gone to Hyderabad (Sind) on a teaching trip and visited a few schools and institutes as well as some individuals in the morning. The afternoon was hot and Prof. Shírází, who was a good swimmer, wanted to swim in the Phuleli Canal to refresh himself. I accompanied him. He entered the Canal and dived in, but never came out. His body was found by fishermen two hours later.

“Throughout the night I sat near the body of this spiritual friend and brother who had attracted me to this part of India, had deepened me in the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh and to whom I was indebted in so many ways. Here, before me, lay dead a most promising Bahá’í in India, one who had been dear to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi... who was respected by one and all, whose word everyone trusted and who had cheered thousands of ailing and despairing hearts. My condition was indescribable.... I sat throughout the night, sometimes shedding tears, sometimes chanting prayers and invoking Bahá’u’lláh for the elevation of his soul....

“The next morning ... the news spread like wild fire and many of Shírází’s students, admirers and friends came to pay their last homage to him.”

The 20th of June, the opening day of college, is always a day of great excitement among the students. Boys and girls

meet after a long vacation of three months and a half. There are congratulations for those who have succeeded in the examinations and sympathies for those who have failed.

This excitement always mounted very high in D.J. Sind College, Karachi, where the students came from the homes of feudal lords and princes, or rich doctors, advocates, engineers and the like, as poorer families could not afford expensive education for their children. The boys who came to this college were known to be hard to control fun seekers. They would make it impossible for a speaker to deliver a full speech. People said it was easier to address students in Oxford than in Karachi.

Generally the highest intellectual of the city was invited to deliver the opening speech on the first day of college, otherwise the principal himself would do this. Prominent citizens also attended the inaugural function.

On June 20, 1925, however, the students of D.J. Sind were sad and silent. The usual merry sounds were missing. The death of Shírází had cast a gloom on both the students and the professors. The prominent citizens were invited as usual, and so were the members of the Bahá'í community. All the students gathered in the lecture theatre, which was packed to the utmost capacity. The Principal, S.C. Shahani, got up and said:

“I know why you are unusually quiet and why you are sad and depressed. The sudden and most unexpected demise of your beloved Professor M.R. Shírází has shocked you—one and all. I can see that. Yet, believe me, my shock is not less than that of any one of you. If you have lost a great teacher, I have lost a devoted colleague. Professor Shírází had endeared himself to all of us by his various qualities of head and heart and his erudition. He was always helpful to his students at any time, in college or at home. To his colleagues he was a loyal and dependable friend.

“He was an educator of young minds and hearts. What was

great about him was that he educated them, not only in academic subjects, but also in spiritual matters of life. Prof. Shírází was a Bahá'í. It was his desire that all should learn to be friends and brothers, cast off all prejudices and associate with love and amity. Our loss is all the greater because it came very much before its due time and too quickly and suddenly, so that we were not prepared for it.

“I can get any number of applicants for the post which now lies vacant in College, but Shírází's place will not be filled. I express my heartfelt sympathies to his family who have been stunned by the loss and to the Bahá'í Community of India, who have lost a spokesman, and a stalwart and sincere member....”

Shírází is an immortal who has left an everlasting name. May his shining example continue to inspire us.

Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí

“Strong pillar of the Cause of God”¹
1893–1975

*“O proclaimer of the Word of God! May the Almighty richly reward you and make you a shining light in the firmament of His knowledge, and a brilliant star in the horizon of His guidance.”*²

Isfandíyár Khudádád Bakhtíyárí served the Bahá’í Faith in India and Pakistan for almost six decades in every imaginable capacity. He was a true lover of Bahá’u’lláh, a firm believer in His teachings and, above all, a Bahá’í who, having generously given all he had, was still discontented and wished that he had more, much more, to offer in the service of the Blessed Beauty.³

Bakhtíyárí was born in the village of Narsíyábád of Yazd, in the year 1893, in a family of fanatical Zoroastrians. He had little formal education. After brief elementary studies he was made to join the family occupation of farming and, as he was intelligent and hardworking, he soon became a great asset to his family. From childhood he showed love for the Zoroastrian

¹ from the Guardian’s letter to Bakhtíyárí written in Persian and dated Dec. 14, 1947

² a free translation of a letter written by the Guardian to Bakhtíyárí in Persian dated Aug. 26, 1936

³ one of the titles of Bahá’u’lláh

religion and deep prejudice against other religions, especially Islám.

As a young man he frequently travelled between his village and Yazd. Once, while he was on his way to the city, he met another Zoroastrian who had become a Bahá'í and who was so enthusiastic about his new religion that he travelled from village to village to give its Message. When parting with Bakhtíyári, the Bahá'í said to him, "You are a sensible young man, therefore I will tell you something. You already know that Lord Zoroaster has promised the advent of Húshídar and Sháh Bahrám. Both of them have appeared—one under the name of the Báb and the other as Bahá'u'lláh."

For Bakhtíyári, this was an impossibility. How could Húshídar and Sháh Bahrám, the Promised Ones of the Zoroastrians, appear in Muslim families? After a year or so he went to attend a memorial meeting held at the home of a relative. A man known to be a Bahá'í was also there who refrained from joining the others in taking wine and read beautiful extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Bakhtíyári was so impressed that he decided to investigate the Bahá'í Faith from that day.

He began to associate with Bahá'ís and accepted the Faith around 1914, after which he underwent severe opposition and harassment from the fanatical Zoroastrians around him. A year later he married a Bahá'í girl, Sarvar Khánúm, and he came to India in 1917 accompanied by his young wife. They stayed with his elder brother who owned a restaurant in Bombay, and Bakhtíyári began to work with him. His brother was a staunch Zoroastrian; Bakhtíyári, on the other hand, was an enthusiastic Bahá'í who said his prayers regularly and with the utmost devotion. The elder brother could not tolerate this and finally one day he said, "As you have become an infidel, there can be no place for you in this house." Bakhtíyári and his wife immediately left his brother's place and went to the house of Sarvar Khánúm's maternal uncle, Bahrám Gushtáspí, a devoted Bahá'í.



Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí

In a letter he wrote to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at this time, Bakhtíyárí signed his name as Isfandíyár Khudádád. In replying, the Master addressed him as Isfandíyár Khudádád Bakhtíyárí. Isfandíyár took on the surname of Bakhtíyárí¹ from that day, and good fortune did indeed befriend him from that time onwards.

In the year 1920, Bakhtíyárí went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and attained the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This visit made a strong impression on him and he often spoke of it as the most heart-stirring event of his life. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the ocean of mercy and Bakhtíyárí was most receptive. The beloved Master showered His blessings on the young man. One day He said to him, “You must make great strides. You have a high destiny to fulfil in the service of this Cause.”

In 1921, in obedience to the Master’s wish, he pioneered to

¹ Bakhtíyárí literally means “befriended by good fortune”.



Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí

Karachi where Professor M.R. Shírází was the lone worker for the Cause. Shírází helped him to settle down, and together they started a Bahá'í Centre in a rented building. Shírází was a noble soul and a silver-tongued orator. He was in great demand as a speaker, and he took Bakhtíyárí with him everywhere. A close friendship sprang up between them, and Bakhtíyárí owed much of his knowledge of the Persian language and its literature to his learned friend.

When Shírází was drowned in Hyderabad on April 11, 1925, Bakhtíyárí was grieved beyond words. He made it a point to travel to Hyderabad on the 11th of April every year to offer prayers at the resting-place of his friend. One year he was away from Karachi and could not go to Hyderabad. That night he saw Shírází in his dream. He said, "Dear Isfandíyár, have you too forgotten me?" Bakhtíyárí would recount this incident with tearful eyes and add, "I was so ashamed of myself that I have never again failed to visit his blessed grave on the appointed date."

Bakhtíyárí opened a shop in Karachi which he called the "Parisian Restaurant". Through the blessings of God his business prospered and other friends joined him as partners. Bakhtíyárí did not show much enthusiasm for the work in the shop for his heart was not attracted to the wealth of this world. He spent most of his time teaching the Faith, contacting the prominent citizens of the city. One day in 1940 when he, his wife and I were going to the Bahá'í Centre, he said, "I am a merchant and it is my job to engage in that line of business which yields most profit. Now, on one hand there are the wordly gains, and on the other the spiritual gains. I have chosen the latter. If wordly gains really mattered, Zoroaster, Muḥammad and Bahá'u'lláh should all have been multi-millionaires."

What he believed he translated into deeds. I never saw him visiting the market to buy stock for his restaurant, nor did I ever see him sitting at the counter, collecting money from the

customers. When he was in the shop he would be usually found writing letters to fellow believers. He corresponded with a large number of people in different countries of the world and, although he had had no formal education, he wrote in beautiful literary language.

It was his habit to reply to every letter he received. So many people wrote to him that it is a wonder he could find time to answer everyone. The old courtier of the Nizam of Hyderabad, Nawab Sir Amin Yar Jung, was among those who corresponded with him. In 1965, when there was a war between India and Pakistan, we could not correspond across the border. Even then I continued to receive letters from Bakhtíyárí through Írán or England or one of the Gulf States. In one of my letters to him I quoted a verse from the Persian poem about the famous lovers, Laylí and Majnún who belonged to two warring Arab tribes:

“Though there be war among the Arabs,
There’s peace between Laylí and Majnún.”

Although he suffered from eye trouble for many years, Bakhtíyárí did not stop writing to his friends. Only during the last month of his life, when he was bed-ridden and his doctor had forbidden him to write or dictate any letters, did he discontinue this practice of a lifetime. Even so, he was kind enough to write at length to me about Narayenrao Vakíl as I had formerly requested him to provide me with information about the life of this great man.

Bakhtíyárí had a sharp memory and could recite hundreds of couplets from Háfiz, Sa’dí, Rúmí, Firdawsí and other Persian poets. He also knew many of the poems of famous Bahá’í poets and would quote a most appropriate poem or anecdote for every occasion. This endeared him in literary circles. I well remember two lectures he delivered on “Stories from Rúmí’s *Mathnaví*” in the Theosophical Hall in Karachi, which

was much appreciated.

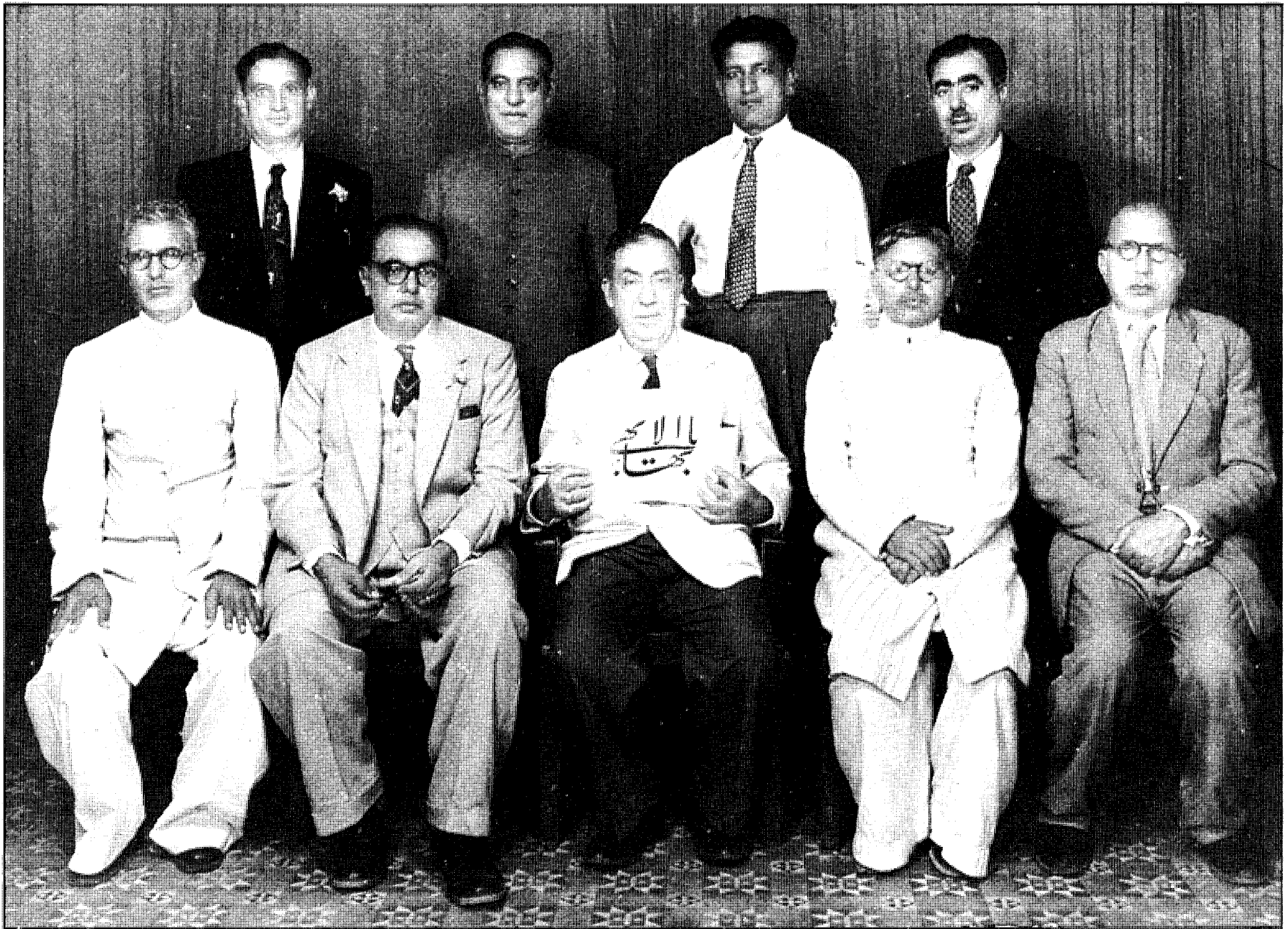
In November, 1921, the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá stunned the Bahá'ís throughout the world. Bakhtíyárí felt the blow severely and it was not until Shoghi Effendi took the affairs of the Faith into his hands, that his heart was relieved. Then he worked with redoubled zeal and vigour, having given his undaunted loyalty to the Guardian.

Bakhtíyárí had the bounty of going on another pilgrimage with his wife in 1953. He developed an indescribable love for the Guardian of the Cause. The Guardian, too, loved him dearly and often enquired after his health and well-being from pilgrims going to the Holy Land from the Indian sub-continent. Bakhtíyárí had many letters from the Guardian and it was a wonderful sight to see with what love and devotion, with what respect and humility he received them. He could quote from memory many passages from these letters.

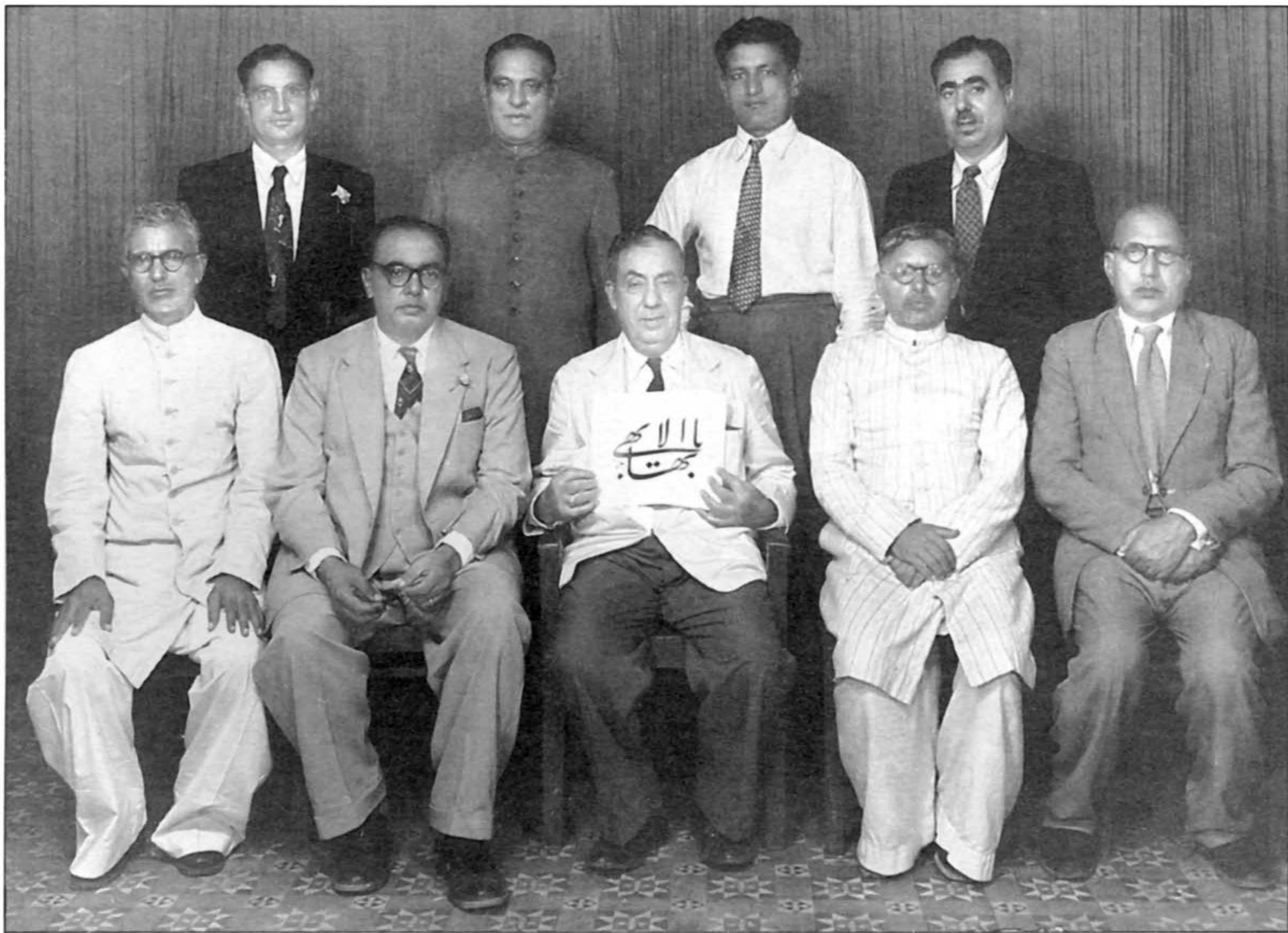
Bakhtíyárí was always in the forefront of Bahá'í activities. His participation in every National Convention gave moral support to the community, and he made it a point of duty to be present on those occasions. In one of his personal letters in which he writes about the Conventions in India, he says, "The first Convention I attended was in the year 1922. I went in the company of Prof. Shírází."

In 1923 the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma was formed and Bakhtíyárí was elected as a member. He served on this Assembly¹ until 1957 when Pakistan formed its own National Assembly. Then, as a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan, and later as an Auxiliary Board Member to the Hands of the Cause, he made every effort to make sure that the new Assembly worked efficiently

¹ The National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma became the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, Pakistan and Burma in 1948.



First National Spiritual Assembly of Pakistan: Bakhtiyari is seated in the middle.



First National Spiritual Assembly of Pakistan: Bakhtiyári is seated in the middle.

and was fully aware of the responsibilities it had to shoulder.

During his many years of membership on the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, Bakhtíyárí was generally elected as National treasurer. He often expressed his lack of knowledge concerning book-keeping and his inability to be a good treasurer but no one listened to him. A man of higher integrity could not be conceived, and he had to resign himself to the task. His election to this most responsible post was almost taken for granted. Out of nine votes that were cast, eight would be for him. As the National Assembly's budget could not pay for an assistant to the treasurer, Bakhtíyárí employed his own accountant to help him, and usually paid any deficits in the accounts out of his own pocket.

At one time Bakhtíyárí was planning to change his residence from Karachi to another city in India. He had a sum of Rs. 42,000 with which he hoped to start a business in his new home, but when he found that the National Assembly was in need of money, he decided to forget about his own plans. He put the entire amount into the National Fund and, as treasurer, issued a receipt for himself.

In the year 1947, the beloved Guardian instructed the National Spiritual Assembly to shift its headquarters from Poona to New Delhi, and to buy a suitable building for the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds¹ in the Capital. Concerning this important Centre the Guardian cabled:

“Advise take immediate steps purchase Delhi befitting building for national Haziratul Quds.... Urge friends arise unitedly contribute generously meet vital urgent need Faith present hour.”²

¹ the name of a Bahá'í administrative centre

² dated April 11, 1947



National Bahá'í Centre in New Delhi

Soon after a letter was also received from his secretary.¹ The postscript said:

“He wishes once more to impress upon your Assembly the great importance of immediately finding and purchasing and moving into a befitting Ḥazíra in Delhi. This will bring upon the entire community great confirmations.”

The National Assembly found three buildings: one was worth about Rs. 100,000, another Rs. 300,000, and the third Rs. 600,000. The Guardian advised the Assembly to purchase the most expensive one. The strength of the Indian Bahá'í community at this time was only seven hundred and they wondered how they could get the money for such an expensive

¹ dated May 8, 1947



National Bahá'í Centre in New Delhi

undertaking. The problem appeared beyond solution.

Bakhtíyárí travelled up and down the country, met the Bahá'ís everywhere and inspired the whole community to rise to the occasion and contribute generously. Finally, with much sacrifice on behalf of the friends, the needed sum was collected. As it happened, the owner of the property repeatedly created problems for the National Assembly, and it was chiefly through Bakhtíyárí's dignity and outstanding spiritual qualities that the deal was finalised. Today this palatial structure houses the National Office of the Bahá'ís of India.

Bakhtíyárí even had a hand in the purchase of the Temple land outside Delhi, and how happy he must be now that the only Bahá'í House of Worship in Asia is built on this plot of land.

The Ḥazíratu'l-Quds in Karachi, which had been the largest and most beautiful building owned by the Bahá'ís in this sub-continent, was another tribute to the untiring efforts of Bakhtíyárí who personally supervised the construction of that building and attended to the smallest details. It is indeed an imposing structure with beautiful gardens all around it, where many important functions have taken place.

During Martha Root's visits to India, Bakhtíyárí accompanied her when she went to visit Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Sir Muḥammad Iqbál, Sadhu T.L. Vaswani, popularly called 'Dadaji', the Maharajas of the States of Mysore, Travancore and Patiala, the Nizam of Hyderabad and many other Rajas, Ministers, intellectuals, philosophers and men of high social standing to whom she gave the Message of Bahá'u'lláh.

Martha Root left a permanent impression on the life of Bakhtíyárí himself. He learnt a great deal from her during their travels in India, and considered her his spiritual mother. Among other things, she taught him the lesson of detachment.

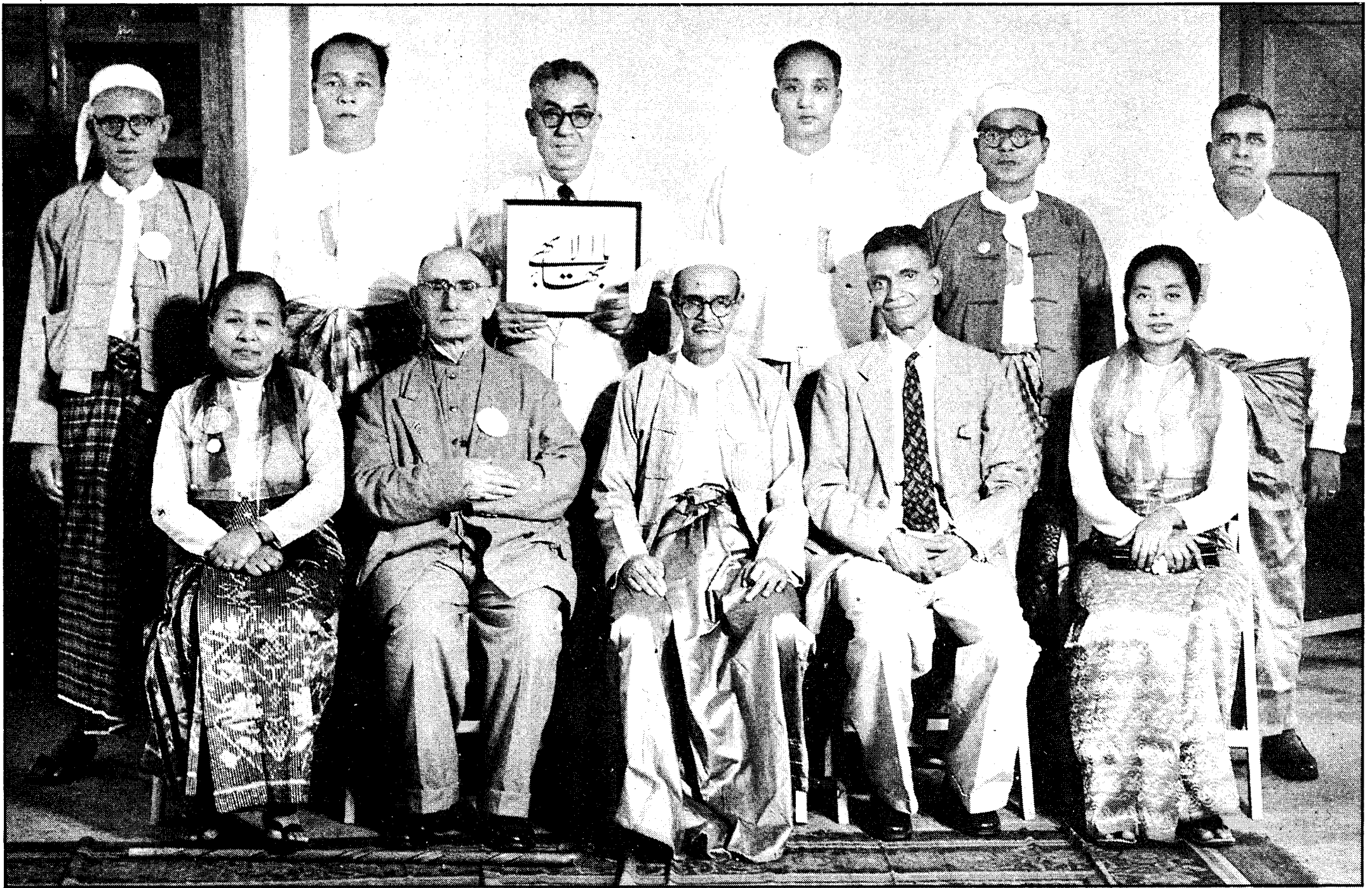
Bakhtíyárí went on teaching trips throughout India a number of times. He also travelled extensively in the company of the esteemed Hand of the Cause, Mr. Ṭarázu'lláh Samandarí, as



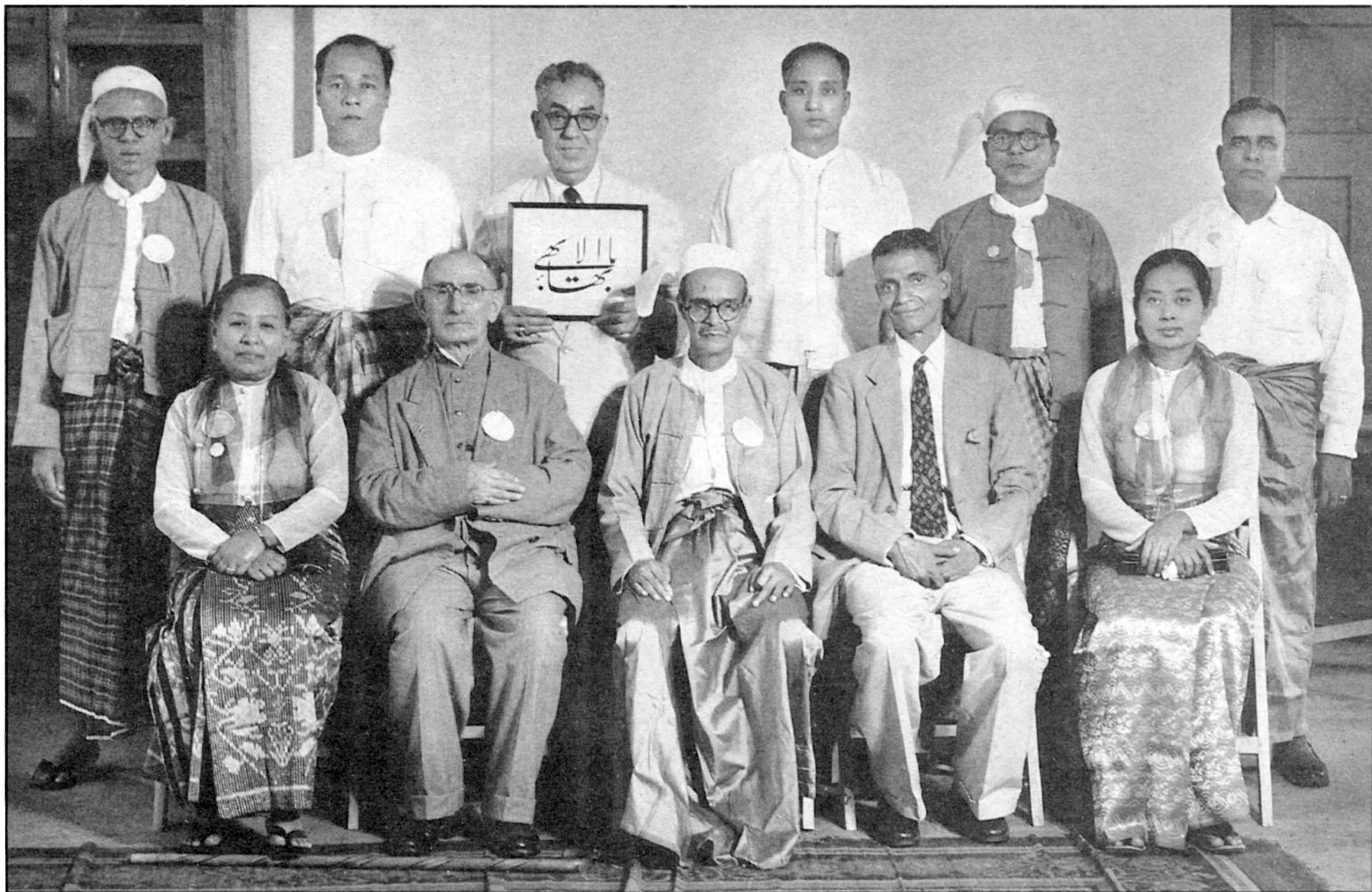
Local Spiritual Assembly of Karachi with Martha Root;
Bakhtiyari, in white coat, is standing behind Martha.



Local Spiritual Assembly of Karachi with Martha Root;
Bakhtiyari, in white coat, is standing behind Martha.



First National Spiritual Assembly of Burma with the Hand of the Cause
Samandarí seated 2nd from left and Bakhtíyaráí standing 3rd from left



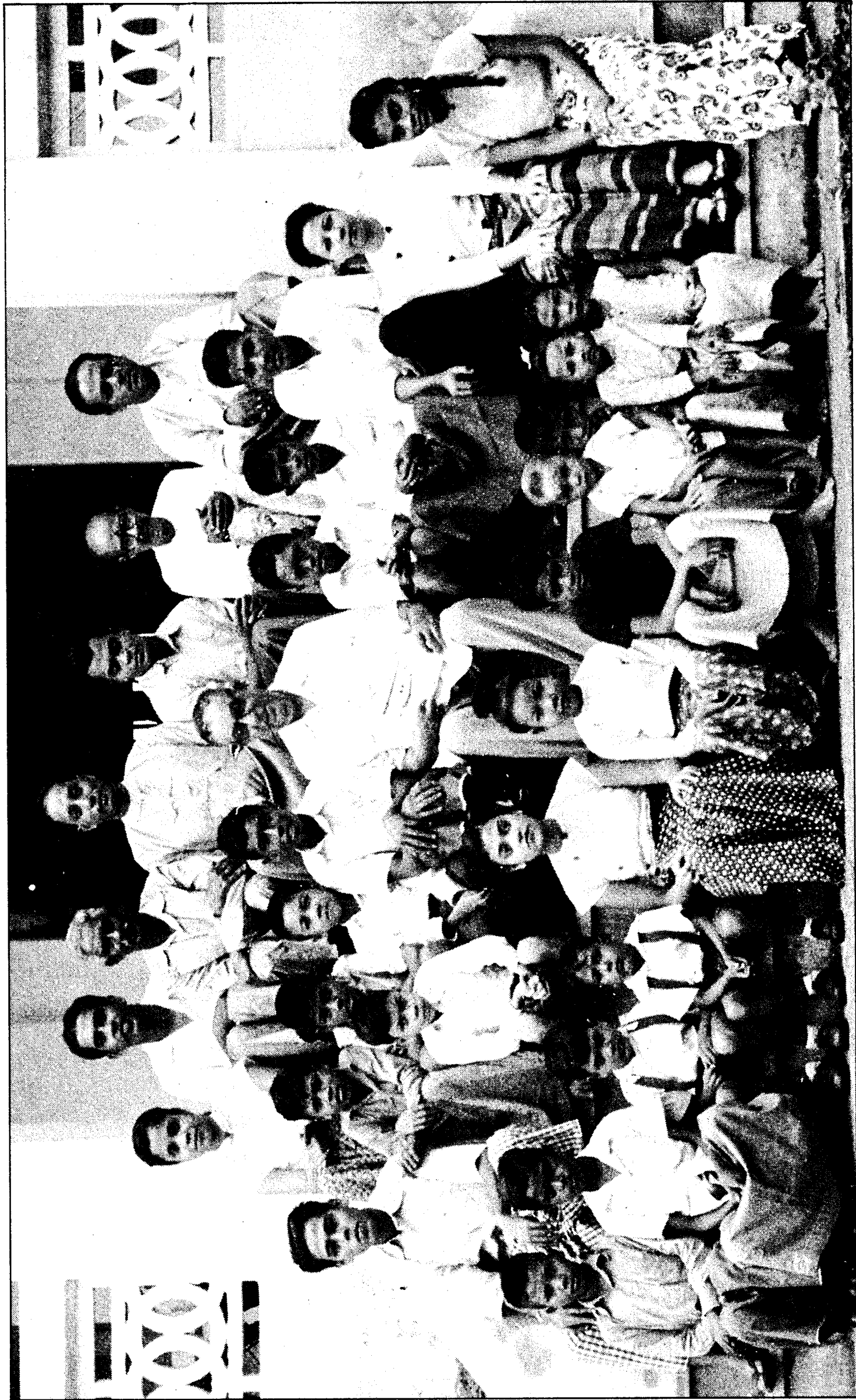
First National Spiritual Assembly of Burma with the Hand of the Cause
Samandarí seated 2nd from left and Bakhtiyarí standing 3rd from left

well as with many other teachers of the Faith from the East and the West, usually serving them as a translator.

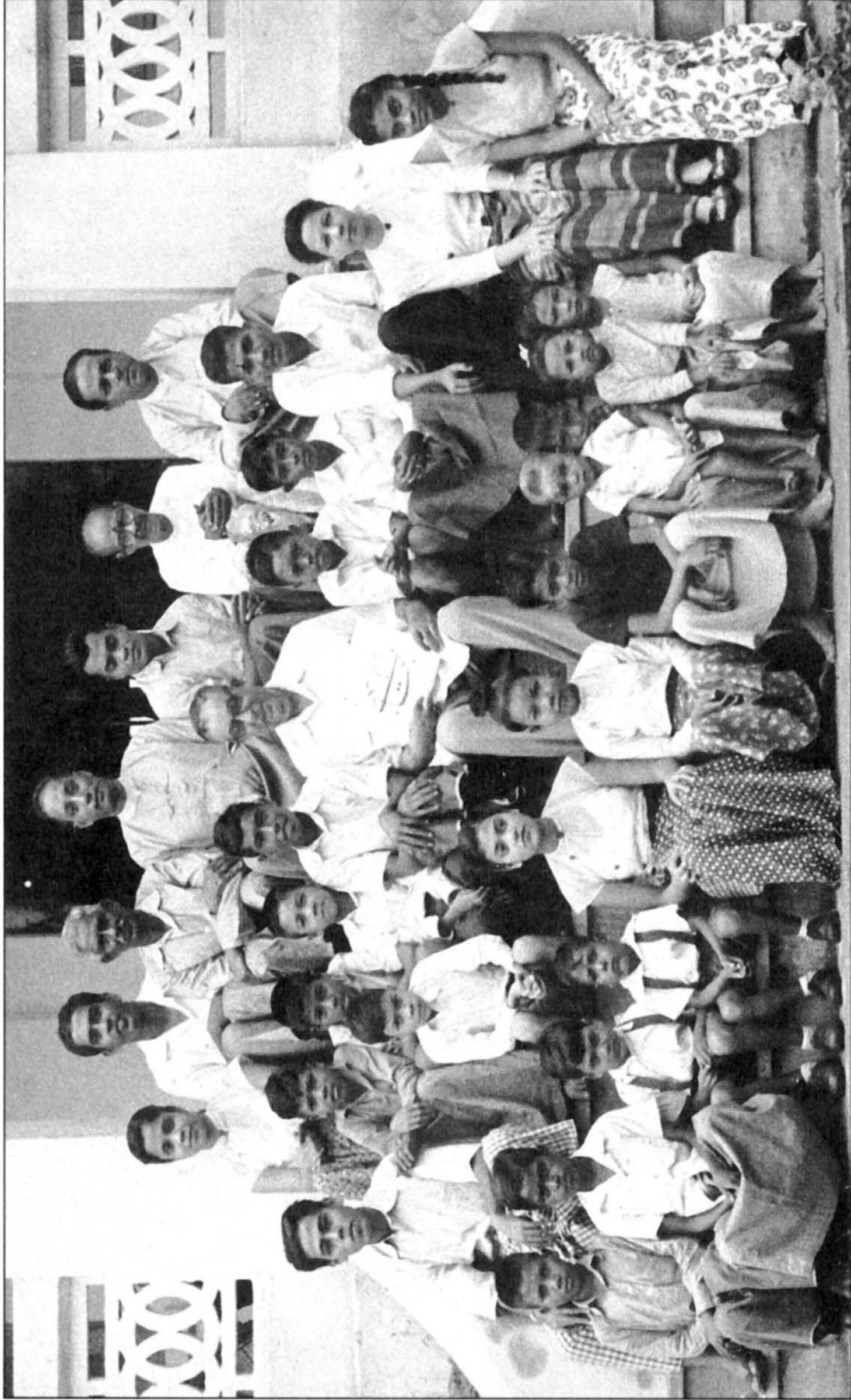
Once, when Bakhtiyári had just arrived at his home after a long journey with Martha Root, a telegram from the National Assembly was waiting for him. It said he should go back to Madras as soon as possible because something there needed his immediate attention. His dear wife was somewhat annoyed and asked if there were no other Bahá'ís left to attend to such matters. But Bakhtiyári, exhausted though he was by the long continuous months of travel, obeyed the Assembly and set out for Madras without loss of time. On such occasions he always remembered that the beloved Guardian had said the persevering one is victorious. And so he held fast to the cord of the Cause of God, and put his whole heart and soul into the task of promoting its interests.

Bakhtiyári was a true and faithful friend. In 1943, Narayen-rao Vakíl, the chairman of the National Assembly and one of the people extremely dear to the Guardian, fell seriously ill in Surat. When there was little hope of his recovery, a telegram was sent to his close friend, Bakhtiyári, who immediately went to see him. He found Vakíl unconscious and the physician who was holding his pulse pronounced his situation as hopeless. Bakhtiyári went close to the patient and greeted him in a loud voice: "Alláh-u-Abhá!" Suddenly it seemed as if, from the unseen world, a new life was released to Vakíl. A faint smile appeared on his lips and he slowly murmured his reply: "Alláh-u-Abhá!" Then Bakhtiyári chanted the Tablet of Ahmad and Vakíl felt even better. In a few days he was up and about and, after some time, felt well enough to attend the Convention in Poona.

When Vakíl passed away the Guardian was deeply grieved. He asked the Bahá'ís to look after Vakíl's family as if they were his own family. Bakhtiyári invited them to his home in Karachi and kept them there for some months until they had regained their strength and composure, and were ready to go



Bakhtiyári with Bahá'í children in Burma



Bakhtiyári with Bahá'í children in Burma

back to continue their Bahá'í activities in Surat.

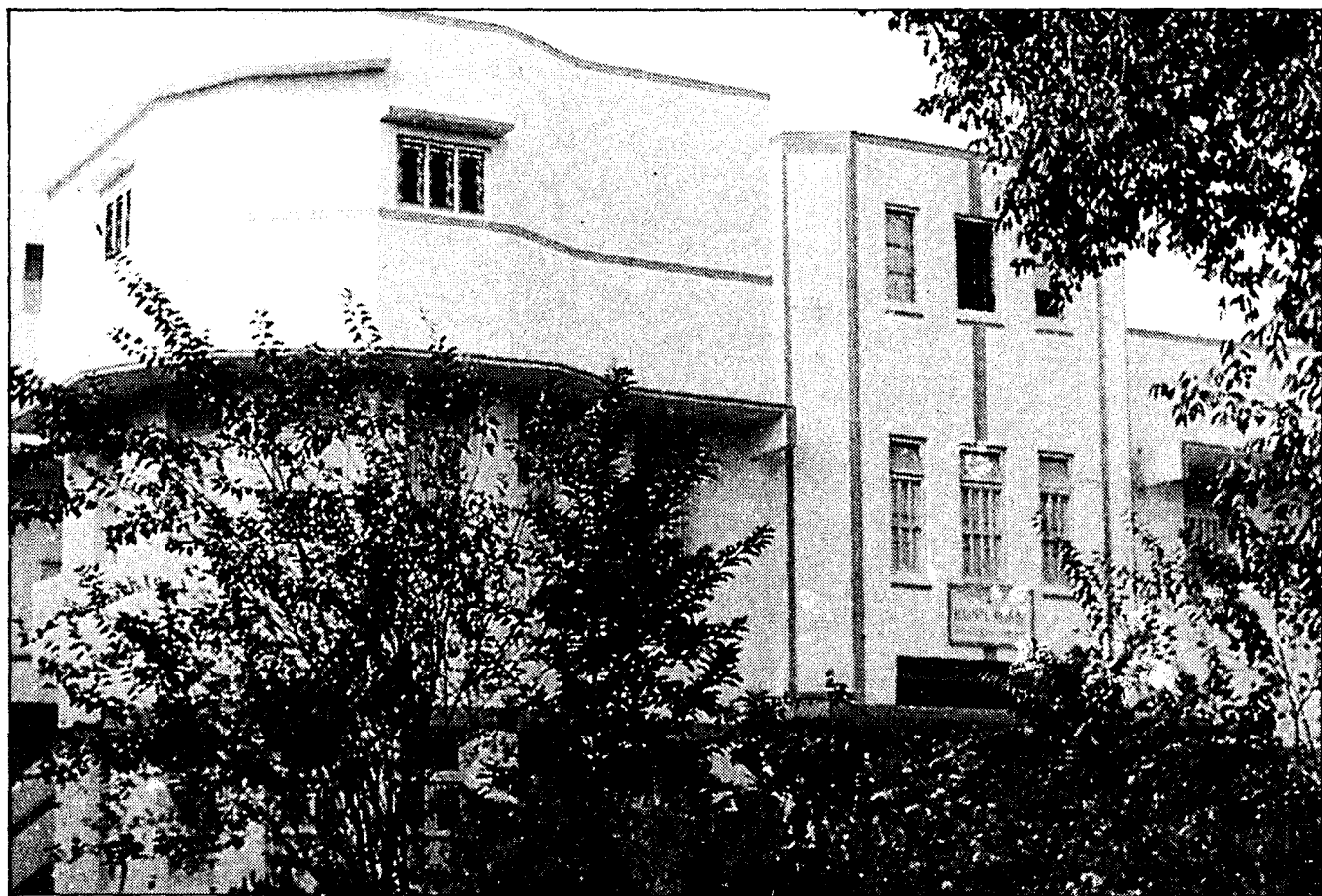
The home of Bakhtíyárí was always open to the friends. Mr. M.H. 'Ilmí, Prof. Pritam Singh, Mr. A.A. Radaví and others who constantly visited Karachi on teaching trips were always his guests. When the local Bahá'ís came to visit them, Bakhtíyárí himself received them at the door and welcomed them with his heart-warming smile. And he always had a fund of jokes, poems and anecdotes with which to entertain his guests. He was a brilliant conversationalist with a delightful sense of humour.

The Bahá'ís were not the only ones who came to his home. In that house one could find Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Parsis and Buddhists sitting together, each proud of Bakhtíyárí's friendship. "He is the ambassador of the Bahá'í Cause," they would say, "but he belongs to us as well."

Whenever Bahá'í visitors came to Karachi from foreign countries they were given Bakhtíyárí's address. He looked after them in every way and made sure they enjoyed their stay.

Bakhtíyárí loved children, but had none of his own. He always had toffees and sweets in his pocket for children and, whenever he visited the house of a friend, he would gather the children around him, give them sweets and teach them short prayers. That is how he earned the title of "toffee-giving uncle" among the children. The stamps he collected from the letters he received also went to the older children. Bakhtíyárí brought some of the children of poor Bahá'í families to his own home, sent them to school and saw to their upbringing; and these boys and girls are now doing very well in life.

He took great interest in the moral classes of Bahá'í children. For years he himself conducted children's classes. He would encourage the children to commit to memory Bahá'í prayers and Tablets in English and would himself also memorise them with his students. He paid special attention to the children's neatness and cleanliness. Every year on Naw-Rúz he would give them attractive presents. He always said, "Only



Dáru's-Surúr

when the gardener looks well after the seedlings does the garden prosper.”

Bakhtíyárí bought a plot of land in Karachi, adjacent to the Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, built a structure on it which he called *Dáru's-Surúr* (The Happy Home), and offered it to the Guardian as a gift from himself and his wife. The Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:

“Regarding the building *Dáru's-Surúr*, adjacent to the Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, your desire to offer it to the Guardian was known to him. He greatly appreciates your and Mrs. Sarvar Khánum Bakhtíyárí's pure intention and has instructed me to write:

““This intention is praiseworthy and this offer is esteemable and accepted. But the wish and desire of this servant is that it should be dedicated to the work of the Cause of God in that town and, since the Karachi Assembly is a registered body, it is best that this house be transferred to that Assembly's name.



Dáru's-Surúr

Should the National Spiritual Assembly decide to use the building for a Bahá'í kindergarten, it will be highly desirable and praiseworthy. If, however, the means for such an undertaking are not available at present, the building may be given over to the Local Assembly of Karachi to use for whatever purpose it deems fit.'"¹

Bakhtíyárí also played a leading part in opening a boarding house for Bahá'í children in Panchgani which has now grown into the New Era High School and is the pride of the Bahá'í world.

Bakhtíyárí was very fond of praying. He would pay much attention to his clothes and use perfume before starting to pray. Once I asked him if there was any special reason for this. He said, "When we go to meet an important person we put on our best clothes. How, then, should we dress when we go to meet Bahá'u'lláh?" He had a heavenly voice, and when one heard him chanting prayers, one felt as if the angels, too, would descend from heaven to listen.

I remember very well once, when he came to India from Pakistan in 1969, and we went together on a teaching trip to Gujarat, the friends in Broach had arranged a talk in the Parsi Girls' High School for us. There, Bakhtíyárí chanted, in Persian, one of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh beginning with: "These Parsis are old friends..." No one among the audience could understand the meaning, but the wonderful chanting kept everyone spellbound. And when it was finished we felt as if we were brought back to earth from heaven. At that time Bakhtíyárí was seventy-six years old but his voice was still strong and vibrant.

During our stay in Broach, we gave ten talks in schools and

¹ This is a free translation of a letter written in Persian and dated Oct. 27, 1941. Dáru's-Surúr is now a primary school.

colleges in one day. Bakhtíyárí came to all of them and felt no fatigue. Even later, at the age of eighty-one, he was still going about with Counsellor Dr. M. Farhangí, attending to the purchase of Bahá'í Centres and Institutes around the country.

I also remember the times when he had eye operations in Bombay in 1965 and 1969. Both Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís came to see him in large numbers. These people would sometimes start to gossip. To prevent this, Bakhtíyárí would request each Bahá'í who visited him to chant a prayer. During the days he stayed in the nursing home, that place became like a Bahá'í Centre.

It was through Bakhtíyárí's efforts that *Ad'íyyih-yi-Mahbúb*,¹ the popular collection of prayers and Tablets by Bahá'u'lláh was reprinted in Pakistan. In fact, for almost forty years Bakhtíyárí helped in getting Bahá'í books translated and published in the Indian sub-continent. He always kept small prayer books with him and whenever he met a spiritual soul, he would give a copy to him. In his personal library he had a copy of every book he could find which was published on the Faith, and this collection has been donated to the National Spiritual Assembly of Pakistan.

In those days—and circumstances are no better now—it was not possible to post Bahá'í literature to Írán. Only when the friends went there from India or Pakistan, could they secretly take a few books with them. Bakhtíyárí was entrusted with the task of sending Bahá'í literature to the believers in Írán—a task he faithfully attended to for about half a century.

One of Bakhtíyárí's great services to the Cause was to maintain a regular diary over a long period of years in which many events concerning the Bahá'í Faith in the Indian sub-continent are recorded. These precious documents are preserved and will no doubt be invaluable for future historians.

¹ *The Prayers of the Beloved*

He also wrote regular articles in both the Persian and Urdu sections of *Bahá'í Magazine* published in India.

In 1957, when the National Spiritual Assembly of Pakistan requested Mrs. Gloria Faizi to pioneer to Mount Murree, Bakhtíyárí decided to join her during the summer months. Murree is on the lower ranges of the Himalayas and extremely cold most of the year. Not many people can be found there during the cold season but for about four months when the weather is pleasant, the hotels and shops are opened and people crowd to Murree from the hot plains. Bakhtíyárí would be one of the first to come and one of the last to go back. When Mrs. Faizi had to leave Murree, Bakhtíyárí continued his summer visits to the end of his life. Though he was losing the sight in one of his eyes, and his blood pressure was so high that the doctor had said the altitude in Murree would be dangerous for him, he did not stop going. He looked at every problem from only one point of view, i.e. the Bahá'í point. If a thing was beneficial for the Faith, he would pursue it, or else he would not bother about it.

Bakhtíyárí has related the following about the time when he was alone in Murree:

“I used to walk about the small township all day looking for a place to rent. It was strange to be living in a town with no acquaintances, with no one to talk to except when I would speak to people on the excuse of purchasing something. No shop or house could be found to hire. One day, as I was walking along the main road, it started to rain. Soon the rain began to fall in torrents and I was getting drenched so I stood under a tree. I do not know why, but an overpowering depression came over me and I could not control my tears. All I could do was to picture Bahá'u'lláh's image in my heart. When the rain stopped I started walking again. I had hardly taken a hundred steps before I found myself in front of a vacant shop with a board saying 'to let' hanging from its door.

I knew Bahá'u'lláh had prepared that place for me, and I thanked Him from the bottom of my heart."

Bakhtíyárí opened a shop in Murree where he sold stationery and Bahá'í books. Because of his literary and religious trend of mind and his kind nature he began to attract men of letters. A group of people would often gather in his shop and, as his friends grew in number, he was successful in guiding some of them to the Faith.

In 1975, when he was touring the Frontier Province of Pakistan in relation to his duties as an Auxiliary Board Member, he fell ill and was admitted to hospital in Rawalpindi. Mr. Firaydún Yazimaydí, his business partner and spiritual son, immediately went and brought him back to Karachi. After staying for about a month in a nursing home, he passed away from this world in a prayerful attitude on June 24, 1975, having made a Will donating all his properties and worldly belongings to the Universal House of Justice.

Bahá'ís do not dread death. To them death is entrance into the spiritual world. It is "returning to God", and Bakhtíyárí knew this full well. Fewer people have addressed more memorial meetings than he has. I well remember a memorial meeting in Karachi where he quoted the following verse:

"The flame of Love is not extinguished after death;
The lamp is taken from this house to that."

He often quoted Persian poems on this subject, his favourite being a verse from Háfiz:

"The dust of my body is a veil for my soul;
Happy the day when the soul is unveiled."

On many occasions, too, I heard him quote Bahá'u'lláh:

“O son of the Supreme!

“I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendour. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?”¹

Men like Bakhtíyárí, who are the personification of spiritual greatness, sincerity, dedication, devotion and godliness appear but rarely in this world. They leave an eternal imprint on their times and fellowmen. The Guardian referred to Bakhtíyárí as “the strong pillar of the Cause of God and the defender of His Faith in that subcontinent.”² This was indeed the true estimation of this noble soul.

The Universal House of Justice paid him this glowing tribute after he passed away:

“Deeply grieved passing valiant selfless steadfast promoter Faith Isfandiyar Bakhtiyari. His lifelong services shed lustre annals Faith entire subcontinent. Advise holding befitting memorial meetings. Supplicating Divine Threshold rich reward his long devoted services Cause God.”³

Memorial meetings were held at Bahá’í Centres throughout India, Pakistan and Burma. Bakhtíyárí’s valuable services to the Faith were recounted and prayers were offered for the progress of his immortal soul.

* * * *

¹ *The Hidden Words*, British edition, 1975, p.12

² from a letter of the Guardian to Bakhtíyárí, written in Persian and dated Dec. 14, 1947

³ *The Bahá’í World*, Vol. XIII, p.556

This article will be incomplete if I do not make mention of my own relationship with this great man. The story begins in the year 1937 when I was preparing for my Master's degree examinations with Persian Language as my main subject. I loved this language very much and had made a fairly deep study of its literature, but I had little knowledge of colloquial Persian. A friend suggested that he should take me to Bakhtíyárí. "He is the proprietor of the Parisian Restaurant," he told me, "and a very cultured person."

I was attracted to Bakhtíyárí from the first day I met him and, in the years that followed, he became my teacher, my best friend and, above all, my spiritual father. I pray that this relationship may endure throughout the Kingdoms of God. The love and respect I cherish in my heart for Bakhtíyárí can be explained by recounting the story of Alexander the Great. Alexander was asked why he respected his teacher, Aristotle, more than his own father, King Philip. He replied, "My father brought me from heaven to earth, but my teacher takes me from earth to heaven."

I visited Bakhtíyárí very frequently and cherished every moment of his company. When he travelled to other parts of the country, he would write to me and, with the passage of time, our friendship grew stronger. We always discussed Persian literature and quoted Hafíz whom we both loved. Bakhtíyárí also quoted outstanding Bahá'í poets whose works were not known to me.

Then one day, in the year 1940, he said to me, "Some highly learned persons have come from Írán and will be delivering a series of lectures in Karachi. You are welcome to attend these talks. You will find them most interesting." This took me to the Bahá'í Centre where I caught a fresh glimpse of life and found a new direction for the spirit. The first item on the programme was a prayer which one of the Bahá'ís chanted in a rich, melodious voice. I felt these words to be the Words of God Himself because no human being could have composed

such a prayer.

From that day onwards I felt an even greater attraction towards Bakhtíyárí and came to understand him better. He was not a businessman engaged in gathering wealth; he was a man with a mission in life. He worked for the noble cause of uniting humanity, and towards this end he dedicated his whole life.

When I became a Bahá'í three years later, Bakhtíyárí made a sincere effort to educate me in the Faith. Sometimes, when he was to give speeches he would take me along to translate for him. He would talk in Persian and I would translate into English, Urdu or Sindhi. He did not need a translator, but this was one of the ways in which he chose to deepen me in the Cause.

Bakhtíyárí looked upon me as his son and always introduced me to prominent Bahá'ís. When we attended Bahá'í conferences, he would generally receive invitations for lunch but would decline to go so that we could eat together. He laid great emphasis on Bahá'í life and believed that people of different religions or national backgrounds should unite to fulfil the injunction of Bahá'u'lláh and become as members of one family.

Bakhtíyárí and his wife had a cab and horse. They would go for a drive every evening and frequently take a friend along. I was one of those who was often invited for the drive. The horse, Bámdád, loved its master. It would get very excited when it saw Bakhtíyárí, and not until it had received his attention and caresses would it quieten down.

In 1953, Bakhtíyárí and I were both in New Delhi to attend a meeting of the National Spiritual Assembly of India, Pakistan and Burma, and we were staying in the Bahá'í Centre. Early one morning I saw Bakhtíyárí going up to the terrace. As he was there for some time, I went to see what he was doing. I found that he had thrown grains of millet on the terrace and the pigeons had gathered to eat while he sat on the

floor enjoying the sight. I said, “‘Amú Ján,¹ what is this?’” He laughed and said, “Son, have you not read the beloved Master’s prayer: ‘The fowls of the air and the beasts of the field receive their meat each day...’?”²

He applied the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh in his everyday life. For example, he would insist on investigating the truth of a matter for himself and not relying on hearsay. He believed in keeping his promise. I well remember that he possessed a plot of land which someone wished to purchase. They made a verbal deal and the man said he would pay the money by a certain date. By that day, however, the value of the land had suddenly risen to five times the price agreed upon. There was no written contract and Bakhtíyárí could have refused to sell at a low price but he stuck to his word and, much to the surprise of the buyer, asked for nothing more. At such times he would quote Háfiz:

“To be true to your word is a good thing
Should you but learn it;
Else, everyone you come across
Knows how to be a tyrant.”

The Bahá’í scholar, Irtidá Husayn ‘Ábidí, has narrated the following about Bakhtíyárí:

“I lived in Bulandshahr, at a distance of forty miles from Delhi, but was a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Capital and went there once or twice a week to join in the activities of the Bahá’í community there. Once, when we were having a meeting of the Local Assembly, Bakhtíyárí came to consult with us about a matter on behalf of the National

¹ “Uncle, dear”

² *Bahá’í Prayers*, British edition, 1975, p.86

Spiritual Assembly. The other members were excited to see him and went forward to greet him, but I remained quite formal and rather aloof.

“Some time passed and he happened to come back again in the month of June when Delhi is extremely hot and Bulandshahr even hotter. For some reason or other I could not go to Delhi for the weekly meeting. The next day when I was resting in my home after lunch, one of my sons knocked on the door and said, ‘A European gentleman has come to see you. It must be important.’ I went out and, to my great astonishment, found Bakhtíyárí at the door.¹ We embraced each other and I welcomed him to my home. Then I asked the reason for his having travelled in that scorching heat. Was there something urgent? Could I do anything for him? He said, ‘Dear brother, yesterday was the day for the meeting of the Local Assembly. Since you did not come, we were all worried and I decided to come and find out if all is well with you.’ I felt grateful beyond words and realized that here was someone superior to me, a man whose heart was full of love for others.

“At another time my son, Yásín, was not well and I sent him to Delhi for medical treatment with instructions that he should stay at the Bahá’í Centre under the care of the National secretary, ‘Abbás-‘Alí Butt. When he arrived there he found one of the rooms open with a clean bed in it and, as he was not feeling well, he lay down on the bed and went to sleep. This happened to be Bakhtíyárí’s bed. When he returned to his room at night and saw his bed occupied, he spread a bedsheet on the floor and slept on it without any fuss till the morning. Yásín woke up the next day and, realizing what he had done, felt very embarrassed and apologized for his behaviour. Bakhtíyárí assured him he had done the right thing and that, had he

¹ Bakhtíyárí was mistaken for a European because of his clothes and fair skin.

himself been there, he would have certainly offered him the bed. This is how Bakhtíyárí became loved and respected by my whole family.”

During my forty years of association with him, I never saw Bakhtíyárí getting nervous or losing his temper. He treated the humblest man with respect, and his behaviour was so noble that everyone respected him. Whatever he said came from his heart; there was no trace of insincerity in him. He appreciated the smallest service anyone rendered the Cause and continued to speak of it and thank that person for it. Almost every Bahá'í in India and Pakistan received some help or encouragement from him and, it might be true to say that no other Bahá'í in our sub-continent brought so much happiness to his fellow believers as Bakhtíyárí. From Peshawar and Srinagar in the North, to Madras and Trivandrum in the South; from Dacca and Calcutta in the East, to Bombay and Poona in the West; from Jaffna to Colombo in Ceylon, and from Rangoon to Mandalay in Burma, his name was mentioned with love and respect.

I would like to record one more incident in connection with Bakhtíyárí which often comes to my mind. The year 1955 was nearing its end. I was returning to Bombay from a meeting of the National Assembly in New Delhi. Bakhtíyárí had also come from Karachi but, being the National treasurer, he had to stay behind for some more days to settle the accounts. He came to the railway station to see me off. While I was arranging for my ticket and seat, he went to buy me a jug of water and some fruit. The time for the departure of the train was drawing near when he came back and stood at the door of the carriage. All of a sudden someone banged the door shut and his thumb got caught in it. The painful expression on his face was agonising. Tears filled his eyes, yet he never uttered a sound. His thumb was released and the train moved, while the tears rolled down his cheeks as well as mine. As I continued to

say healing prayers for him all through that journey, I wondered what had happened to his thumb. Had it been fractured? Would it be normal again?

This thumb injury lasted for a number of months before it finally healed. But even today, after the lapse of a quarter of a century or more, the wound in my heart is as fresh as it was on that day. Whenever I am reminded of the incident, I cannot keep back my tears, and Bakhtíyárí's dear face becomes visible on the tablet of the heart. I tell myself, "During his brilliant record of sixty years of selfless service, how many times must he have rendered this kind of service to his friends, and how many times must he have received bruises." May God give him rich reward!

* * * *

Sarvar Khánum

No account of Bakhtíyárí's life would be complete without some reference to his beloved wife, Sarvar Khánum, who was eight years younger than he and died seven years before him.

God did not give them any children, so they both took interest in the children of others. They conducted children's moral classes and pleaded with the friends to send their children regularly. Sarvar Khánum also conducted classes for the women where, in addition to lessons on the Bahá'í Faith, the participants were taught handicrafts.

This dear lady was never absent from the Bahá'í weekly meetings and other gatherings. She was a gracious hostess whose home was always open to guests.

Although she suffered a lot from sinus trouble all her life, she did not mind being left alone and always encouraged her husband to go on teaching trips. It would often happen that Bakhtíyárí would be away for a full month, come back for a week and go away again. She made every possible sacrifice to



Sarvar Khánum

enable her husband to serve the Cause. But for the encouragement and support that came from her, he could not have accomplished so much.

Sarvar Khánum's parents were among the early Bahá'ís from Zoroastrian background, and she had grown to love this Cause from early childhood, whereas Bakhtíyárí's whole family were strongly opposed to the Bahá'í Faith. She therefore considered it her duty to give him every moral support and nurture the love of Bahá'u'lláh in his heart.

When Bakhtíyárí's brother threw him out of his house because he was a Bahá'í, it was she who took him to the house of her uncle where they were given a warm welcome. It was she who encouraged him to pioneer to Karachi in 1921, and who helped him in every way until he had established himself in that city. Then she invited her two brothers and nephew to take over the management of the Parisian Restaurant so that Bakhtíyárí could be free to serve the Faith.

Bakhtíyárí was heartbroken when she died in 1968. In a letter to me he wrote, "I agree that death came as 'a messenger



Sarvar Khánúm

of joy' to her. I also agree that she is in a better world in the presence of the Blessed Beauty, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the beloved Guardian. But what about me, who is left all alone?"

Sarvar Khánum was a great woman. Her services to the Faith will be a guiding light to many handmaids of God. May Bahá'u'lláh's bounties be showered upon her.

* * * *

Bakhtíyárí's Partners

Next to his wife, Bakhtíyárí's partners played a most vital role in his life. Jamshíd Jamshídí, Sarvar Khánum's brother, was already in Karachi when she and her husband pioneered to that city. He became Bakhtíyárí's partner in business. Their restaurant, which was in Sadar, a posh locality in Karachi, became very popular and before long they were able to expand their business. Jamshíd's elder brother, Ardishír, was called to join them from Bombay, and his nephew, Firaydún Yazimaydí came from Írán.

As Bakhtíyárí longed to devote all his time, his energy and talents to the service of Bahá'u'lláh, Jamshíd took over the complete responsibility of the business and provided Bakhtíyárí with an adequate income, thus enabling him to give his time to the Cause.

Jamshíd, himself, is a wonderful Bahá'í. He is well-versed in the Holy Writings and ever-ready to serve the Faith with his time and wealth. His pilgrimage to the Holy Land, in 1931, was a great spiritual experience for him and even now, when he is over eighty, his zeal and enthusiasm has not diminished. Bakhtíyárí held him in great esteem and trust.

Ardishír, too, was an excellent Bahá'í who faithfully served Bakhtíyárí in the Parisian Restaurant to the end of his life.

Firaydún Yazimaydí is yet another dedicated, active believer. For some thirty years he was the secretary of the Local

Spiritual Assembly of Karachi; and he served as the secretary, the treasurer and vice-chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of Pakistan by turns for many years. Firaydún is one of the most efficient Bahá'ís I have come across. Bakhtíyári made him his trustee and nominated him as his spiritual son.

Bakhtíyári's partners remember him with love and gratitude. They have kept alive many of the friendships he established round the world through correspondence, and continue to serve the Cause which was so dear to his heart.

Pritam Singh—Lion of the Beloved

1881 – 1959

“His distinguished and constant services have endeared him to us all.”¹

Professor Pritam Singh was the Bahá'í in India with the highest number of 'firsts' to his credit. He was the first member of the Sikh community to recognize the station of Bahá'u'lláh; the first to carry the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the four corners of this most thickly populated and receptive country; the first to introduce the Faith to Rajas, Maharajas, religious heads, politicians, intellectuals and academics; the first to make the high and noble resolve to travel at his own expense to teach the Faith throughout the country; and the first individual to publish a Bahá'í weekly magazine in India, out of his own meagre financial resources.

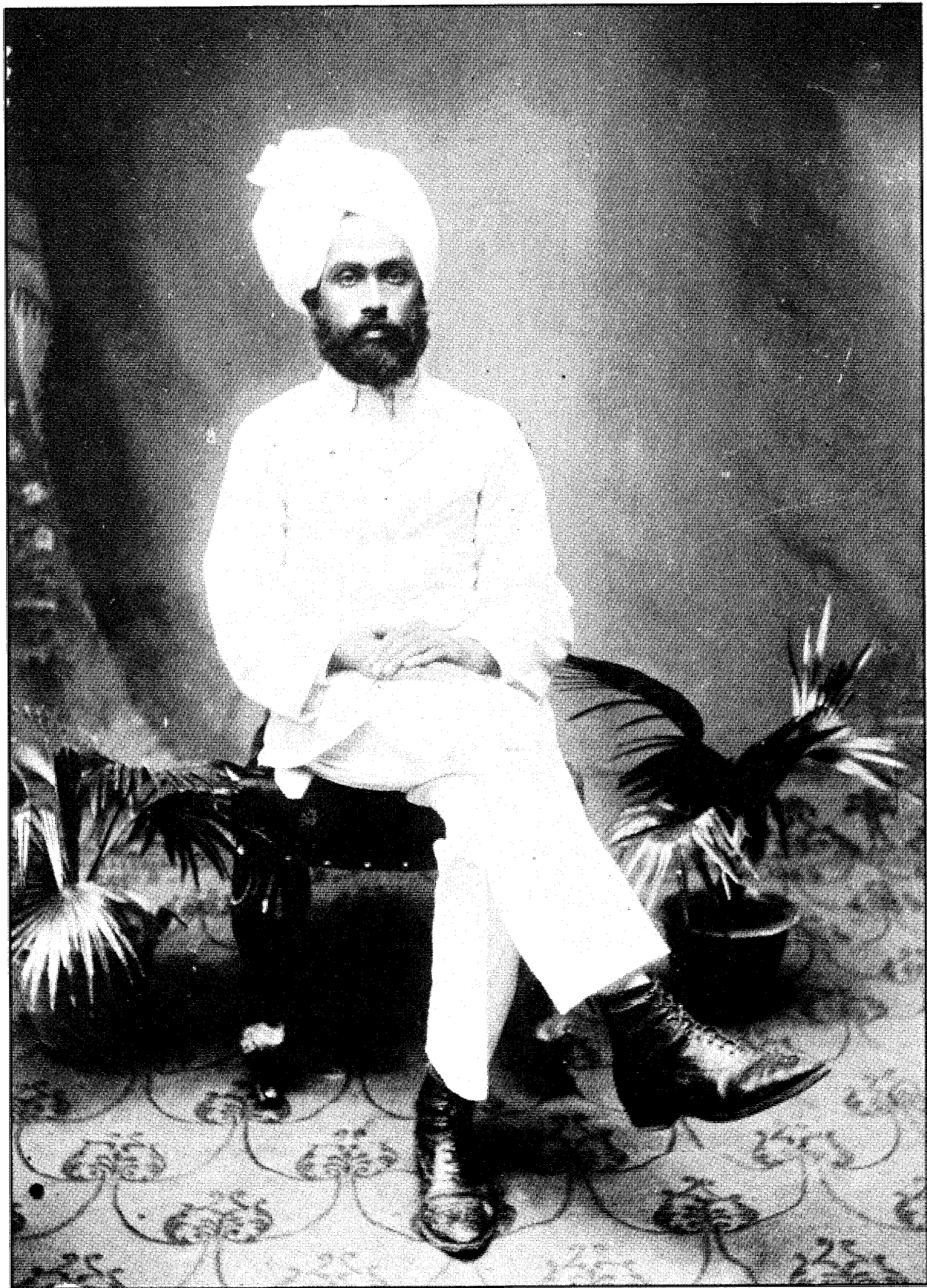
The name Pritam Singh means the lion of the Beloved, and this, indeed, he was. From the day he accepted Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God, he courageously arose to champion His Cause, and devoted his time and many talents to the promotion of His teachings. He considered no sacrifice too great when personal interests conflicted with the interests of the Cause. His day to day life was a sacrifice, and the noble example he set in India has been imitated by others but not yet surpassed.

¹ from the Guardian's letter dated March 9, 1929

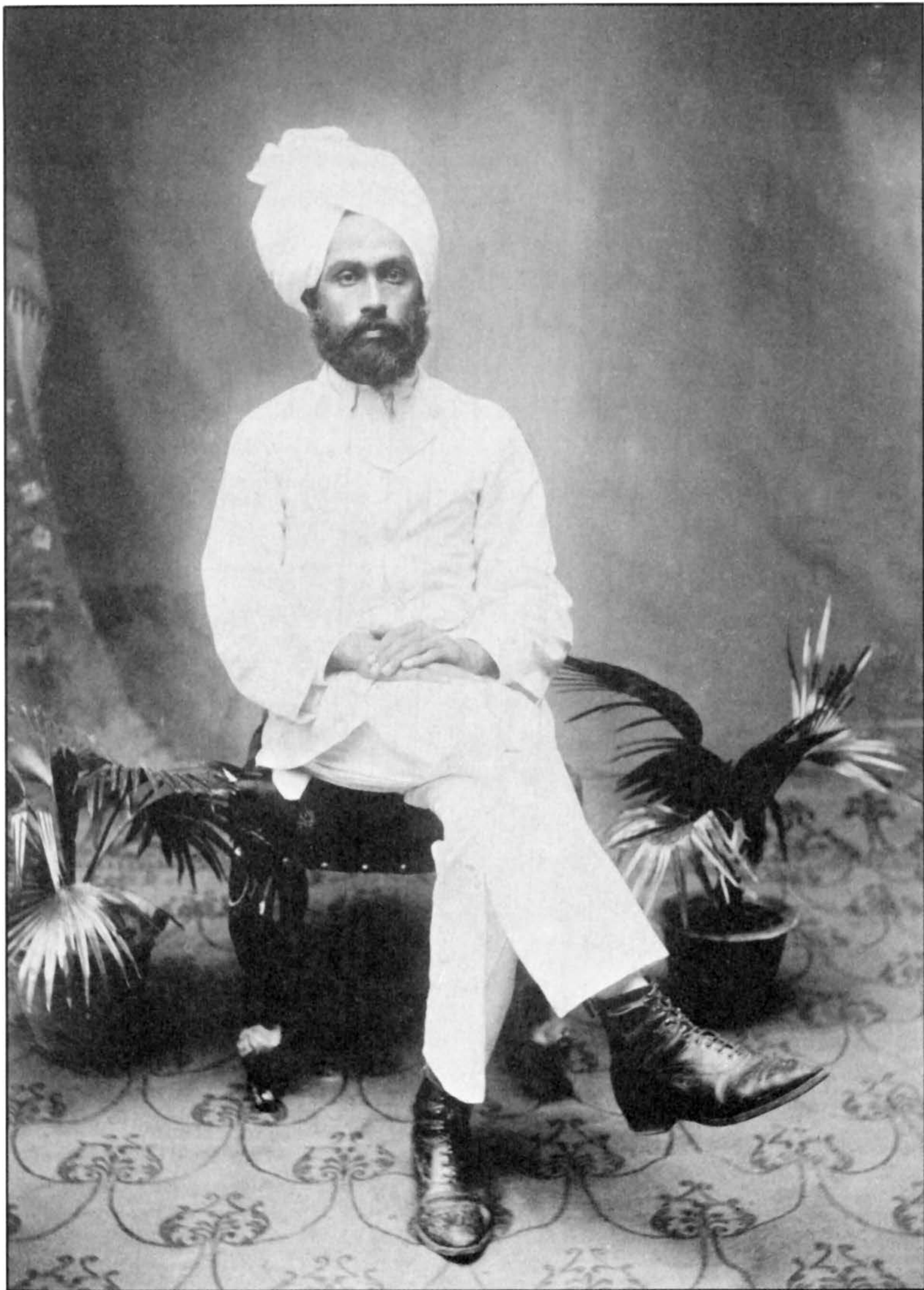
Pritam Singh was born in a highly cultured and wealthy Sikh family. His father, Sardar Sahib¹ Chatter Singh, was a judge in the High Court of Lahore and owned valuable landed property in the fertile area of the Lyallpur district in Punjab. His younger brother, who was the Commissioner of Income Tax, was the first Indian to be elevated to that high position in the service of the British Government in India. All his relatives were well-placed government officials. Education had given the family a broad outlook, as a result of which Pritam Singh's father took a bold step and gave his daughter in marriage to a prominent Hindu of the Arya Samaj community who was a friend and colleague of Pritam Singh.

The eighties of the nineteenth century were important years for the Faith in India, for this decade witnessed the birth of a number of children who rose to international fame as devoted servants of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in this country. Pritam Singh, Narayenrao Vakíl and M.R. Shírází were among them. These God-intoxicated men succeeded in giving the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to hundreds of thousands of people in India. They travelled far and wide, wrote articles for the press, organized lecture campaigns and reached people of different communities and shades of opinion. They wrote in many languages and spoke before cosmopolitan audiences. They showed the utmost respect for all religions and cultivated friendly relationships with other communities and religious organisations such as Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Sanatan Dharma, and the Theosophical Society. They also participated in Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian conferences with love and friendship and were sometimes allowed to distribute books and pamphlets on the Bahá'í Faith in those gatherings. They surrendered themselves, body and soul, to 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Centre of the

¹ This was a title conferred by the Government on citizens who had rendered meritorious services to the State.



Pritam Singh



Pritam Singh

Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and, later, to Shoghi Effendi the Guardian of His Cause who constantly inspired them to reach the summit of spiritual eminence.

Pritam Singh saw the light of day on November 16, 1881, in Sialkot, Punjab—now part of Pakistan. His childhood was spent in his ancestral home in Sialkot where his grandfather's *Samadhi*¹ is situated. His primary and secondary education was completed in this town and, after passing matriculation, he went to Amritsar to continue with higher studies. Amritsar is the holy city of Sikhs where the famous Golden Temple is situated, but Pritam Singh did not like the academic atmosphere of that place and left for Lahore in 1902.

He stayed in Lahore for a number of years, and here he received both academic and spiritual education. In 1904, he obtained his B.A. degree in History, Economics and Political Science with distinction. Soon after that he heard of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh under rather strange circumstances.

Mírzá Maḥmúd Zarqání had been sent to India by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and asked to settle in Punjab. Mírza Maḥmúd was a versatile genius. He was a man of letters, a scholar of the Qur'án and the Traditions of the Prophet, Islamic theology, logic and philosophy. He was also a physician, well-versed in the Únání (Greek) system of medicine. It was he who, eight years later, accompanied 'Abdu'l-Bahá on His travels in Europe and America and wrote the account of those travels in two voluminous books in Persian, under the title of *Badáyi'ul-Áthár*.

Mírzá Maḥmúd set up a dispensary in Anarkali, the main commercial centre of Lahore. One day, when Pritam Singh was not feeling well, he happened to see the signboard and walked into Mírzá Maḥmúd's dispensary. He described his ailment and the physician said, "I shall, by the grace of God,

¹ a mausoleum erected over the buried ashes of a saint or great man

not only cure you of your physical illness, but shall also give you such spiritual strength that no spiritual malady will ever affect you." Pritam Singh smiled, underwent the physical treatment and was cured.

After some months he had the opportunity of meeting the famous poet, Dr. Muḥammad Iqbál, and spoke to him of the Persian physician who had established a dispensary in Lahore. Since Iqbál, like Pritam Singh, was a lover of the Persian language and eager to cultivate it, he showed a desire to meet Mírzá Maḥmúd. So they both went to see him and, from that day, a gradual change came into the spiritual life of Pritam Singh for it was then that he heard of the Bahá'í Faith. Being a keen student of comparative religion, he showed interest in the new Message from the very beginning. He later met Mírzá Maḥram in Bombay who helped to deepen him in the Faith.

Mírzá Maḥram had vast knowledge of comparative religion. He was a great orator and an inspired man who had made a deep study of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and had dedicated his life to teaching His Cause. In Pritam Singh he found a pure soul and a willing student, so he spared himself no trouble in preparing him for a life of service. When his student showed signs of spiritual maturity, Mírzá Maḥram said to him, "You should now prove your love for the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh by trying with every means in your power to win the people of India to this Faith." These words went deep into the heart of Pritam Singh and he took a vow to give first priority in his life to the promotion of the Cause of God. He remained faithful to his pledge; he lived and died a true Bahá'í.

In 1905, Pritam Singh became a teacher in Achison College, Lahore, and taught there for three years. Life in Lahore provided intellectual stimulus and, before long, he started writing articles on the Bahá'í Faith in the most influential daily newspaper of the city, *The Tribune*. He was also invited to give talks on the subject in various clubs, associations and colleges.

Pritam Singh received his Master's degree in Economics with

honours in 1909, from the famous University of Calcutta. He became Reader of Economics in Allahabad University in 1917,¹ and was later appointed Professor of Economics at the Mohindra College, Patiala. After a couple of years he got another appointment in the College of Commerce, Kanpur, and finally settled in Lahore where he joined the University of Punjab.

He continued with platform speaking and writing articles to bring the Bahá'í Faith to the attention of the public. He also started a study class on the Faith, in his own home, which was attended by learned people of various denominations. On July 10, 1925, the Guardian's secretary wrote:

“He ... hopes that the friends in India will do their very best to bring together the Hindus and Muslims. In such cases, the friends can show their good will, devotion to humanity and their disinterestedness in the material result obtained. He will pray that ... Prof. Pritam Singh will be guided in this undertaking, and ably represent the spirit of the Cause as well as its teachings.... Maybe this will be a good chance for attracting the attention of some of the prominent leaders to the reality of the Cause.”

Pritam Singh was a linguist and could express himself well in Hindi, Urdu, Gurmukhi, English and Persian. He wrote about the Faith in all these languages and produced a number of pamphlets and books. Among his translations is *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* into Gurmukhi.

The beloved Guardian expressed his appreciation in a letter to him dated July 16, 1926:

“Your earnest, patient and devoted efforts are deeply appreciated by me, and I have the greatest hopes in your future contribu-

¹ Dr. K.K. Bhargava was one of those who received the Message of Bahá'u'lláh through Pritam Singh in Allahabad. See p. 161.

tion to the progress and triumph of our beloved Cause. I will ever remember you in my prayers and will not fail to supplicate for you from the bottom of my heart the Almighty's imperishable blessings."

Pritam Singh's Bahá'í activities, incessant and purposeful as they were, caused great consternation among the leaders of the Sikh community. He had met the Sikh Maharajas of Jind, Kapurthala, Nabha, Patiala and other places, and presented them with Bahá'í literature. He had met their ministers and officers, and spoken to the chief priests of Sikh temples about the advent of the promised Messiah of all religions. As a result of this he was faced with opposition from the Sikh community and, at one time, severely beaten for daring to speak about the Bahá'í Faith in a Sikh temple.

Those who live in India and know how sensitive the people here are about their castes and languages, can realize how the Sikhs must have felt some eighty years ago when Pritam Singh became a Bahá'í. Dozens of complaints were brought to his father, his family and the Sikh religious heads. They, in turn, called upon Pritam Singh to stop offending the sentiments of the people and disrupting their society. According to them, not only the Sikhs, but also the Hindus and Muslims were upset by his speeches and writings. Pritam Singh said to them, "I am not the cause of any ill-feeling or dissention among people. On the contrary, I am trying to move heaven and earth to eliminate the prejudices they have against each other. Every community now feels that it is superior to the rest. I am eager for them to realize that they are all equally important and that each is in need of the others."

In 1927, Pritam Singh decided to resign from his profession and give all his time to the Cause. He redoubled his efforts, travelling, lecturing and writing on the Faith. The Guardian's love and admiration for Pritam Singh is reflected in many of his letters to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma.

On May 6, 1928, the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:

“He was greatly pleased with the news of the work of Prof. Pritam Singh in Karachi and Lahore, and he read his well-worded lectures with interest. It gives him immense pleasure to keep in touch with his activities and he prays for the success of his efforts from the bottom of his heart.”

On February 12, 1929, the Guardian himself wrote:

“I will specially remember our dear and valued co-worker Prof. Pritam Singh when I visit the sacred Shrine that the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh may inspire, guide and sustain him in his great task.”

Pritam Singh started a Bahá'í weekly magazine single-handedly and at his own expense. It was among the first Bahá'í periodicals of the world, much appreciated by many thoughtful people in India and greatly valued by the Bahá'ís everywhere. The Guardian's secretary wrote on August 29, 1931:

“Shoghi Effendi was particularly rejoiced at the perseverance with which our talented Bahá'í brother, Prof. Pritam Singh, is carrying on his work in connection with the publication of *Bahá'í Weekly*, copies of which he has received and read with deepest interest.”

The *Bahá'í Weekly* took a great deal of Pritam Singh's time and financial resources. In order to be able to continue the publication of the magazine he felt obliged to accept paid advertisements. He sought guidance from the Guardian concerning this matter, and the following reply, dated January 7, 1932, was received:

“Dear Prof. Pritam Singh,

“Shoghi Effendi wishes me to drop you these few lines to draw

your attention to a general principle he has laid down for all the Bahá'í periodicals, namely that they should be very careful in selecting the advertisements they accept to publish. It should be highly dignified, such as books for example, otherwise it would detract from the dignity of the periodical itself. This may cause certain difficulty in financially establishing the paper, but we should face the sacrifice and not endanger the prestige of our publications. He wishes you to take note of this general recommendation in accepting advertisements for the *Bahá'í Weekly*.

“In closing, may I assure you of Shoghi Effendi's loving greetings and prayers and express his deep appreciation for the wonderful services you are rendering, to the spread of the Cause.

“Yours very sincerely,
Ruhi Afnan”

Pritam Singh was a distinguished writer and some of the articles he wrote for various Bahá'í publications such as *The World Order*, *Kawkab-i-Hind*, *Bishárat* and *Payámbar* were later printed separately in pamphlet form. His *Second Coming of Lord Krishna* has run into several editions.

The following, written on behalf of the Guardian on January 7, 1932, shows the quality of Pritam Singh's work and his knowledge concerning the affairs of the Cause in the Indian sub-continent:

“He wishes me to inform you that he has decided to put your name among the editors of *The Bahá'í World*, as representing India and Burma. He thinks that you are best fitted to keep in touch with *The Bahá'í World* Committee and supply them all the material that refers to India and Burma.”

Between the years 1934 and 1941, Pritam Singh seems to have been travelling constantly. In the beginning, much of his travels were undertaken in the north of India, but he soon moved farther afield, hoping to take the message of Bahá'u'lláh to every part of

the country. This had been his plan for some years and the Guardian's secretary had written on May 6, 1928:

“He is confident that when his (Pritam Singh's) plans are carried out and he does travel throughout the whole of India in the interest of the Cause, he will show a record of constant progress and would have rendered valuable services to the Bahá'í Faith. Please assure him of our Guardian's unfailing prayers and good wishes...”

Although he proclaimed the Bahá'í Faith to all strata of society, Pritam Singh was particularly keen on visiting universities and colleges and attending conferences where he could bring the Faith to the attention of educated people. He was personally known to many Vice-Chancellors, principals of colleges, professors and other intellectuals throughout India. Perhaps no other Bahá'í in this sub-continent has visited as many universities, colleges, clubs and societies, and addressed as many regional and national conferences as he has. From time to time he represented the Bahá'ís at important religious conferences held in India and he always managed to create an atmosphere of harmony and friendship in these gatherings. I quote parts of a report on one of Pritam Singh's extensive teaching trips:

“A teaching tour was undertaken during the month of December 1935, when the University towns of Northern India were visited a second time, the first tour having been undertaken in December 1934. Out of sixteen universities in India, nine are in the North and the rest in Central, Western and Southern India. A teaching tour of the other seven universities would prove fruitful in case that could be arranged.

“I started my lecturing tour by addressing the students of the Hindu College at Lahore and the Government College at Ludhiana, the subject being ‘New Outlook on Religion’. My next halt was at Delhi where I addressed the students of the Jamia

Millia and also the students of the Hindu College... the subject being the same....

“I gave two lectures at Aligarh, one at the Bar Association on the ‘Divine Basis of Law’, and the other at the Historical Society of the Muslim University on ‘Evolution of Religious Thought and the Bahá’í Faith’. The chairman, Prof. Ḥabíb, who had been to Persia, paid a glowing tribute to the Bahá’ís of that country.

“My next halt was at Agra, where two lectures were delivered, one to the staff and the other to the students of the Agra College. From Agra I went to Lucknow where in addition to delivering a lecture at the Sociological Association of the University on ‘Religion as Social Science’, I helped Mr. ‘Ilmí in organising a unity group in that town as a nucleus for a Bahá’í Spiritual Assembly to be established there.

“From Lucknow I went to Allahabad, where I renewed my friendship with the Professors of the University, and since everybody was going away no lecture could be arranged there.

“My next halt was at the Benares Hindu University where a lecture was delivered to the faculty at the Professors’ Club House on ‘The Latest Development in Religious Thought’.”

In 1936, Pritam Singh, together with another Bahá’í, Dr. G.Y. Chitnis, decided to travel from town to town in India to give the Message of Bahá’u’lláh to their countrymen. What a stupendous task that was! How noble the intention! The Guardian was delighted. His secretary wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly on October 22, 1936:

“Our beloved Guardian has read with intense interest and deepest satisfaction your most welcome letter of the 5th October conveying to him the joyful news of the teaching travels undertaken by Prof. Pritam Singh and Dr. G.Y. Chitnis throughout India. He wishes you to congratulate most warmly on his behalf these two distinguished friends upon their determination to carry the Message to those numerous and varied sections of the Indian

population who have not received as yet the blessings which the knowledge of the Cause confers. He is deeply grateful to them and to those who have, whether directly or indirectly, assisted them in the pursuit of this truly noble aim.”¹

Apart from his own teaching trips, Pritam Singh accompanied many distinguished Bahá'ís from abroad, such as Miss Martha Root and Mr. and Mrs. Schopflocher (who visited India separately at different times), on some of their travels around the country. Because of his knowledge of Persian, he was also asked to translate for some of the renowned Bahá'í teachers who came from Írán.

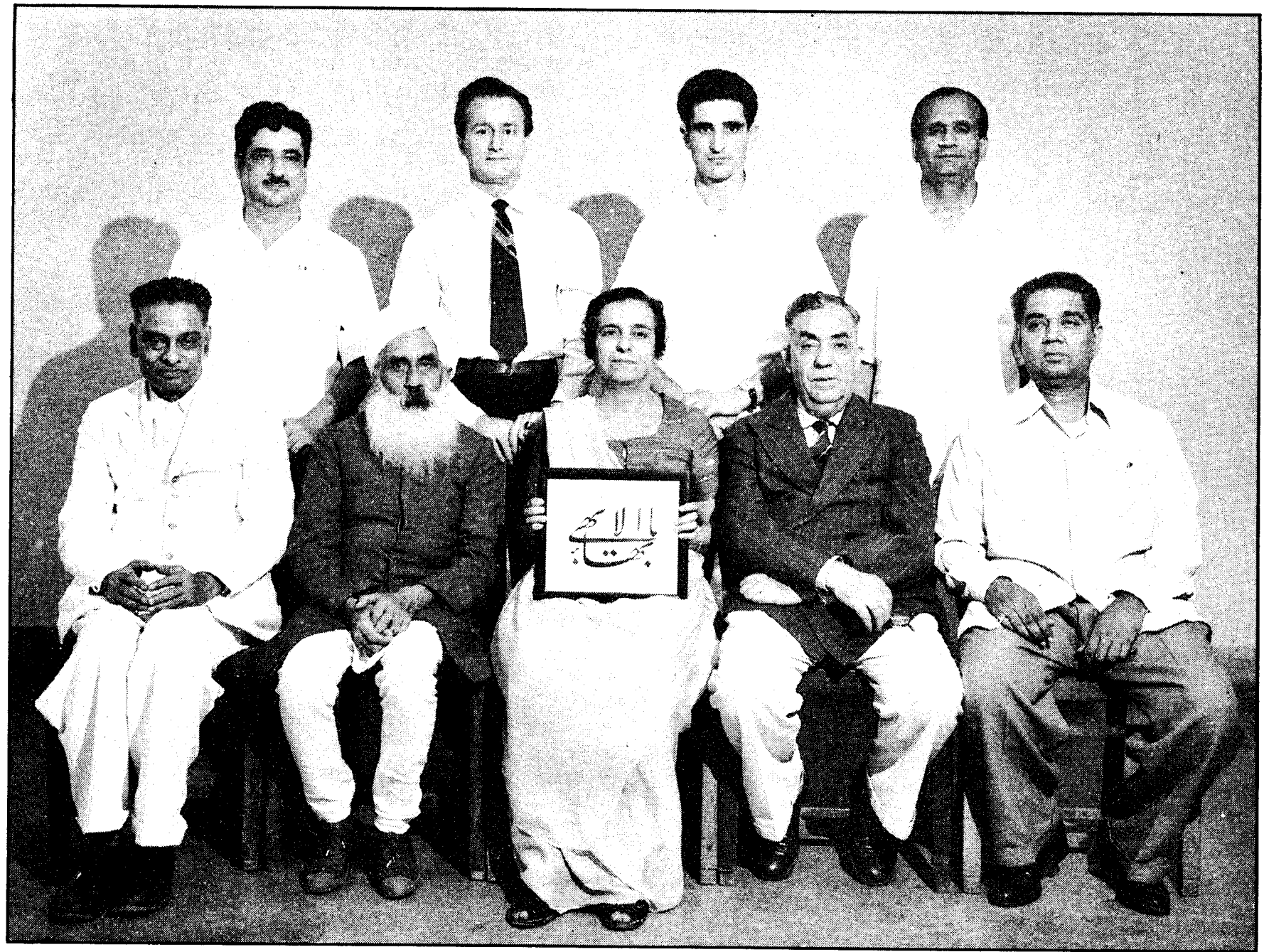
When the well-known international teacher, Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler, came to India in 1932, the National Spiritual Assembly selected Pritam Singh to accompany her on her teaching tour. In this connection the Guardian's secretary wrote:²

“Shoghi Effendi is very glad the friends have taken the necessary step to assist Mrs. Ransom-Kehler by appointing Professor Pritam Singh to accompany her on her trip through India. May God help her and help you in proclaiming the Word of God through the length and breadth of that vast land.”

Pritam Singh served the Cause for almost fifty uninterrupted years in every way he could—as a speaker, a writer, a traveller and an efficient administrator. He was one of the earliest secretaries of the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma and continued to be a member of that Assembly for many years. His contributions to Bahá'í administration in India were as important and outstanding as his teaching work. In all his divers services he worked with utmost sincerity and purity of motive and always gave accurate reports of his activities.

¹ *Bahá'í News Bulletin*, January, 1936

² on March 28, 1932



National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, 1955–1956
left to right, seated: A.A.Butt, Pritam Singh, Shírín Boman, I. Bakhtíyárí, G.H. Amreliwara
standing: Kh. Hākímíyán, M. Samimi, H. Fatheazam, D. Khianra



National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, 1955–1956
left to right, seated: A.A.Butt, Pritam Singh, Shírín Boman, I. Bakhtíyárí, G.H. Amreliwara
standing: Kh. Hákímíyán, M. Samimi, H. Fatheazam, D. Khianra

His father and other members of the family, despite their broad outlook on life, could not reconcile themselves to his ideas and way of life. The following passage from *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. XIII, is worth quoting:

“Prof. Pritam Singh belonged to a wealthy family. His family was embarrassed that he, with all the brilliant career and bright future should not only leave his comfortable way of life, but also his hereditary religion. Therefore, they started to place Prof. Pritam Singh under economic and other pressures. However, when their persuasions, flavoured with promises of large fortunes to be bequeathed to him by his father failed, they even begged of Professor Pritam Singh to remain a Bahá'í if he wanted to, but at least, for the sake of the reputation of the family, to give up his public lectures and teaching tours. But the love of God was more precious to him than all the fortunes of the world. His firmness in the Faith did not waver with all these threats and persuasions.”

Pritam Singh's father made a Will in his name whereby he would receive a building and a lakh of rupees (a very substantial sum of money at that time) on condition that he gave up allegiance to the Bahá'í Faith. When the copy of this Will reached Pritam Singh, he wrote a very polite letter to his father, the gist of which was this:

“Would it not be an insult to a learned man like yourself that his son should denounce his beliefs for the sake of a house of stone and clay, and a perishable wealth of a lakh of rupees? What will people say about our family honour? I am sure you will not want me to bring such disgrace upon your noble name.”

Having freed himself of all worldly attachments, Pritam Singh dedicated himself to the service of the Cause he loved so much. He was pure and innocent as a child and people often took advantage of him. He trusted everyone and was pained when

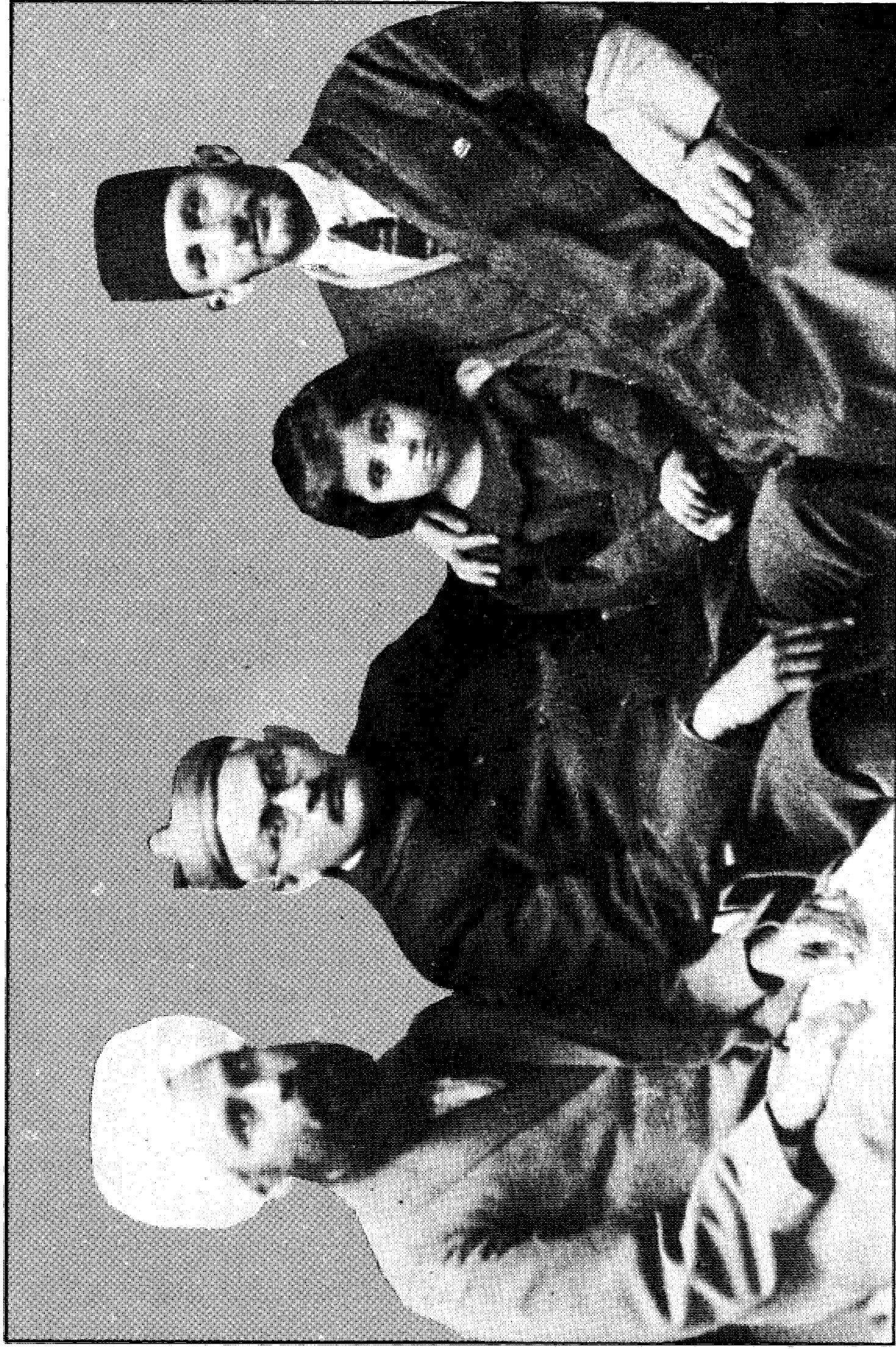
people lied and cheated. Being detached from material things himself, he could not understand the ways of the worldly-wise. The stories of the martyrs brought tears to his eyes and he longed to lay down his own life for the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

Pritam Singh became known and respected throughout the Bahá'í world. As God had given him no children, the grandchild of the esteemed Hand of the Cause, Mr. Samandarí, was sent from Írán to be his daughter. Pritam Singh called her Victoria. She grew very attached to him and later gave this account of his daily life:

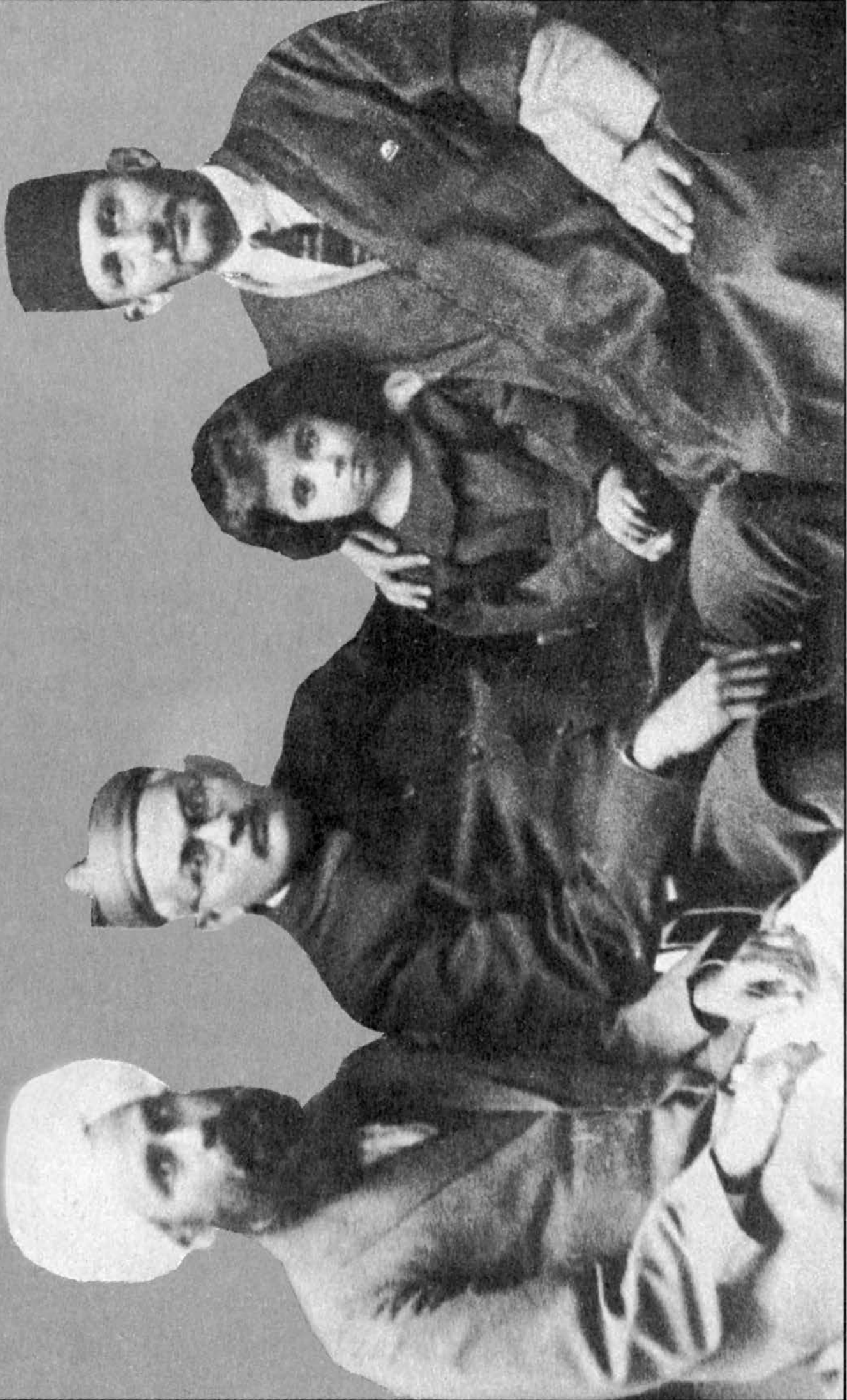
“He was a saintly man of simple habits. Always an early riser, he would get up at dawn and go for a long morning walk. Then he would return home and have a bath with cold water even in the severe winter of Punjab. His meal times were fixed and he ate with moderation. After breakfast he would settle down to his writing work. He was well-read and highly respected in the literary and cultural circles of Lahore. He was deeply interested in the study of all religions and spent some time every day at the Punjab Public Library. He was an honest and straightforward man who was constantly surprised by the wrong behaviour of people around him, and he maintained his childlike innocence to the end of his life.”

Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí, who was a close friend of Pritam Singh and who kept a diary for many years, has also left us several accounts of his experiences with the professor. Under the dates of 3rd and 4th of July, 1930, we read:

“Miss Martha Root had learnt from newspapers that the Maharaja of Patiala was to visit Simla to meet the Viceroy of India. She was very eager to meet him and present him with Bahá'í literature. She disclosed this to Prof. Pritam Singh who told her that he had been a private tutor to His Highness many years before and that the Maharaja would probably remember him, but



Pritam Singh, N.R. Vakíl, Victoria, Nabílzádh



Pritam Singh, N.R. Vakíl, Victoria, Nablázádh

no one could tell us when the Maharaja was expected from his summer resort in Chail. Martha Root said, 'Let us sit down and pray and say the Tablet of Ahmad.'

"In the morning, as we were going to meet Martha Root in her hotel, we saw a long procession coming, with the Maharaja of Patiala sitting in a comfortable rickshaw. As soon as he saw Pritam Singh, he stopped the rickshaw and paid his respects to him saying, 'My esteemed teacher, are you angry with me? Why have you not come to see me?' Pritam Singh said, 'Your Highness, how can I be angry? Even now I was thinking of you. I am here with this Persian friend and an American Bahá'í lady traveller, and we were wondering how we could meet you.' The Maharaja said, 'Why don't you all come over and stay in my Guest House at Chail?' Pritam Singh gladly accepted the spontaneous invitation.

"We then went to take the good news to Martha Root. We found her waiting for us outside her room. As soon as she saw us, she said, 'I had a wonderful dream last night and I am quite sure we shall succeed in meeting the Maharaja.' When we told her about the invitation we had received she was extremely happy and remarked, 'When a prayer is said with sincerity it is sure to be answered.'

"On the next morning the three of us went to Chail. There we were told that Martha Root and myself would be accommodated in the western block of the guest house while the professor would be taken to the eastern block. But he objected to this arrangement saying, 'How can I leave my guests by themselves? My place is with them.' His Highness was informed of this and he made an exception for Pritam Singh who came to keep us company.

"In the afternoon, His Highness invited us to the polo-ground where his team was to play against a foreign team. After the game was over, the Maharaja came and sat beside Martha Root who spoke to him about the Bahá'í Faith and presented him with *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* and *Promulgation of Universal Peace*. During the two days we were there, she had ample

opportunity to answer his many questions.”

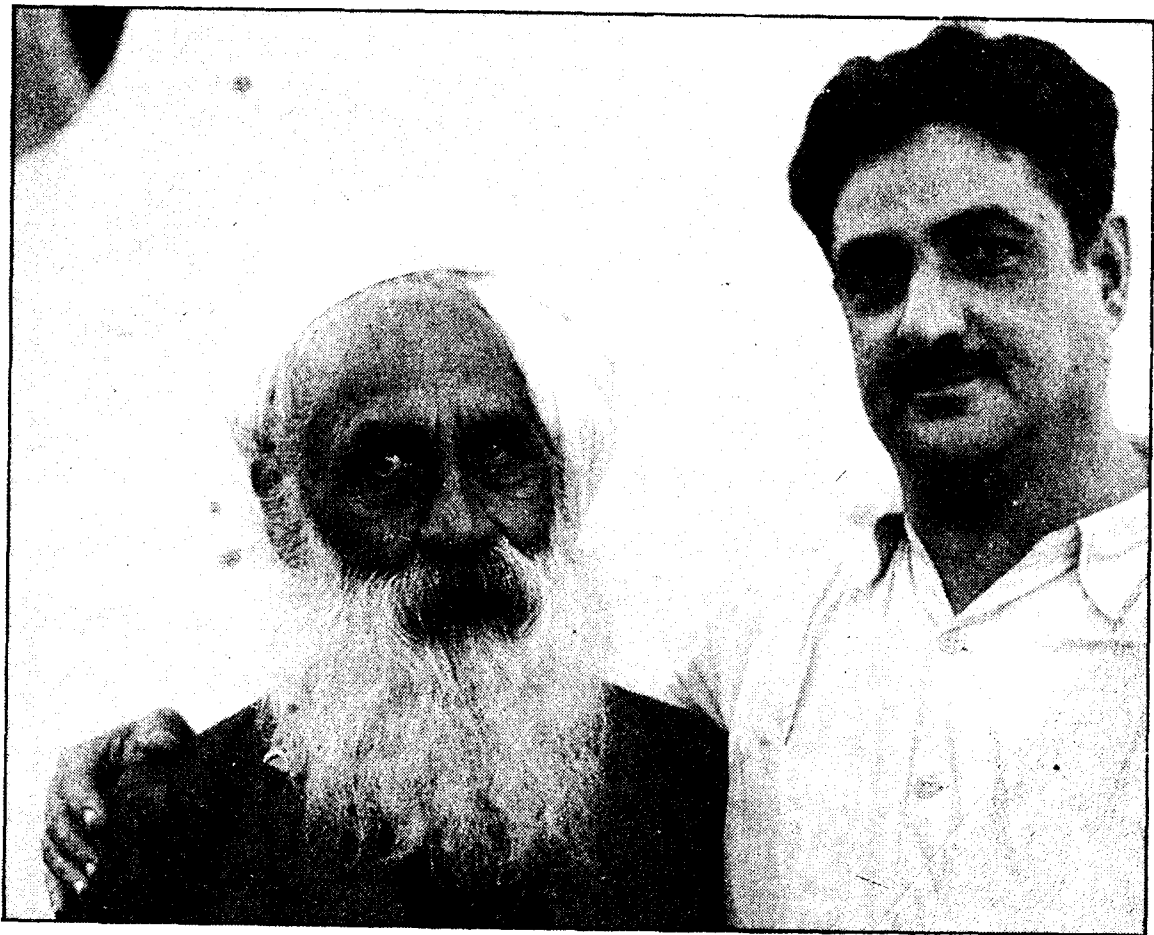
Among Bakhtiyári's recollections of Pritam Singh is also the following:

“These days, a friend whose memory comes repeatedly to my mind is Professor Pritam Singh, one of the oldest and most faithful servants of God in India.

“I vividly recall that I saw him for the first time in the year 1924 at the annual Convention of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma. Till the year 1957, these Conventions were held annually in different places and we met again and again. Also, we constantly met in National Assembly sessions or in some committee meetings. Sometimes we travelled together. When I was the National treasurer and had to come and stay in New Delhi for fairly long durations, I shared a room with him at the Bahá'í Centre. We lived in the utmost simplicity and contentment, in a most spiritual manner.

“After the partition of the country into India and Pakistan, some well-known individuals who had occupied important positions in Pakistan came over to India. Among them were admirers of Pritam Singh who held him in high regard and came to meet him. One of these was Lala Ishwardas, an ex-judge of the Lahore High Court who had left a lot of property behind in Pakistan and had been given suitable compensation from the Government of India. He lived in a palatial residence in Delhi with his two sons, one of whom was an Ambassador and the other a highly-placed government official.

“One day this gentleman came to the Bahá'í Centre where Pritam Singh and I shared a room and invited Pritam Singh to his house. The next day, when we were going for our usual morning walk and passed by the residence of Lala Ishwardas, Pritam Singh asked me to wait a few minutes because Lala Ishwardas wished to have a brief talk with him in private. He returned smiling and, as we continued our walk, he said, ‘Do you know



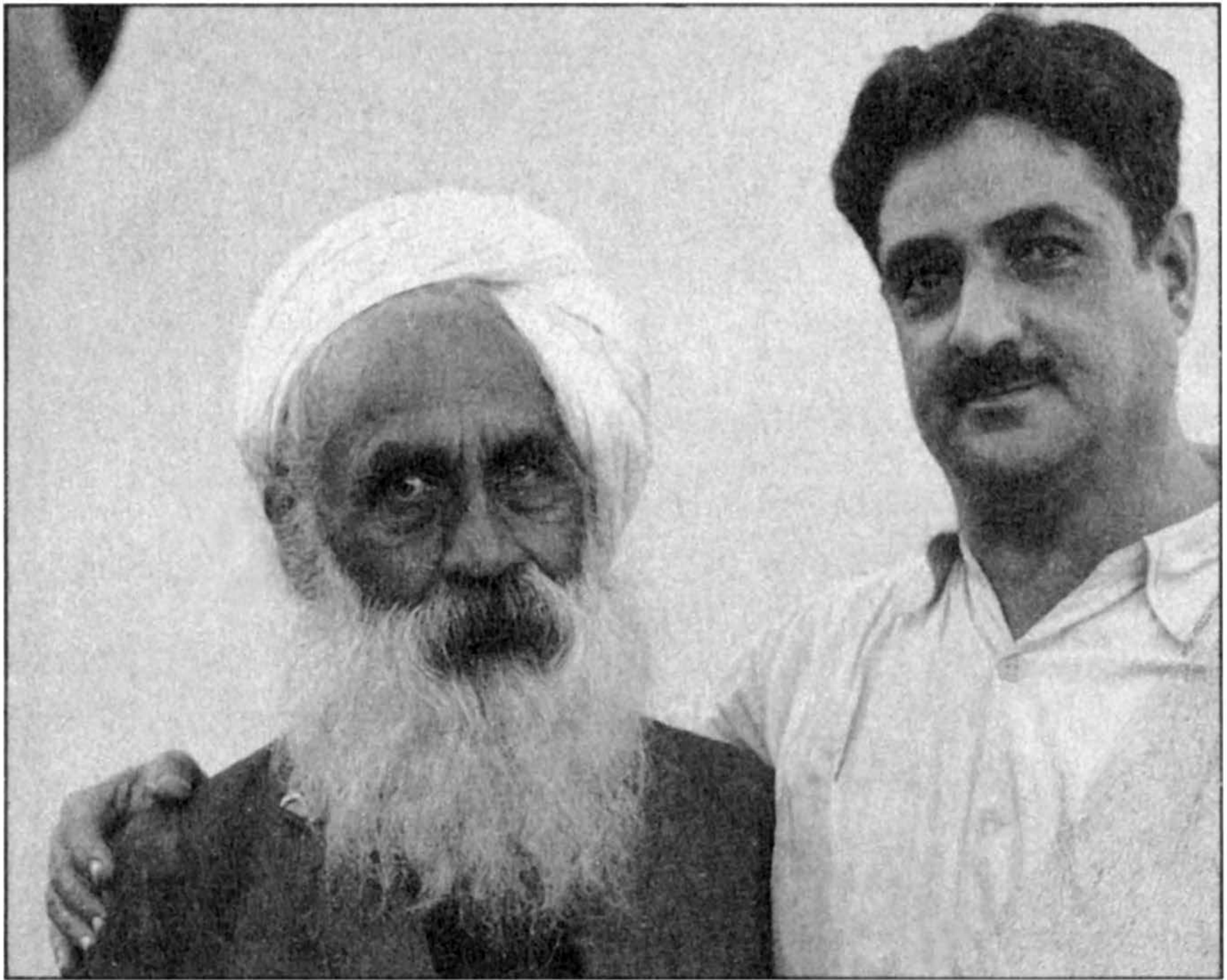
Pritam Singh with Khudádád Ḥakímíyán

what Lalaji told me? He said, “What is this life that you are leading there along with an Írání in the corner of an office? Anyone can enter your room at any time and there is no privacy.” Then he said that, as he had a large commodious house and many servants, he would be glad to give me comfortable accommodation in his house and free board for the rest of my life if I would only give up the Bahá’í Faith.’

“I asked Pritam Singh what he had replied. He said, ‘I told him do you expect me to undo what I have achieved in a whole lifetime? I am very happy where I am. This corner of an office is very dear to me and I shall not exchange it for a big palace.’ Such was the degree of Pritam Singh’s contentment and detachment and his love for the Faith.”¹

Another great admirer of Pritam Singh who has written about him with deep feeling is Khudádád Ḥakímíyán. He tells us

¹ taken from unpublished notes



Pritam Singh with Khudádád Hakímíyán

how the younger generation of Bahá'ís in India lovingly called him 'Pritam Kaka' (Uncle Pritam), and how, by his simplicity and his kindness, his loving and helpful nature, he had endeared himself to everyone to such an extent that even enemies of the Bahá'í Faith showed regard for him. At one time, after the partition of the Punjab, when Hindus and Sikhs on one side, and Muslims on the other, were mercilessly massacring each other, some Muslim neighbours saved his life at the risk of their own by taking Pritam Singh inside their ladies' quarters.

Hakímíyán says Pritam Singh travelled from Kashmir in the far north of India to Trivandrum in the far south (a distance of 2500 k.m.) at least half a dozen times. "Throughout the length and breadth of India," he writes, "we come across many persons who, when given the message of the Faith, say, 'Yes, I heard of this religion at least a quarter of a century ago from Professor Pritam Singh.' He was a most saintly figure. Some people we talk to about the Cause still say, 'Is this not what Professor Pritam Singh believed in?'"

For the last few years of his life, Pritam Singh pioneered to Amritsar where there were no other Bahá'ís. He worked as a proof-reader in a printing press and all his spare time was given to praying and teaching the Cause. He lived alone in a humble garage without means of comfort and refused to leave his pioneering post despite his old age and declining health.

The National Spiritual Assembly sent one of the Bahá'ís to meet this lone servant of Bahá'u'lláh in Amritsar, and find out how this beloved elder brother of every Bahá'í in India was faring. The friend who visited him had this to say:

"I enquired about his address from a person who left his work and said he would accompany me to see the 'Baba'.¹ We found his room locked. The landlord, a member of the Sikh community,

¹ venerable saint

said to me, 'It is good of you to come all the way from Delhi to meet this old man who has no one to look after him. Stay in my house and I will call him. He sent someone to the printing press where the professor worked and, after some time, I saw him coming. I shall never forget the sight. He wore a white turban, a white shirt, white pants and white canvas shoes. He looked worn out; his cheeks were hollow, his eyes had sunk in their sockets. He smiled and embraced me and expressed his joy and gratitude that I had gone to see him. Then he said, 'The call may come any moment now. I am eager to attain the presence of Bahá'u'l-láh and submit my reports to Him. God alone knows how I have tried to serve His glorious Cause! I am but a humble servant and rely on the mercy of the Manifestation of God.' "

This was the last contact of the Bahá'ís with Pritam Singh, just a fortnight before he passed away peacefully in his sleep on August 25th, 1959. On receiving the news, two representatives of the National Assembly and Pritam Singh's daughter, Victoria, took the first train to Amritsar and made all necessary arrangements for a Bahá'í burial.

The Hands of the Cause at the World Centre sent this message to the National Spiritual Assembly of India:

"Grieve loss outstanding Indian believer Pritam Singh distinguished teacher administrator Faith much loved praised by beloved Guardian. His devoted untiring services so long period so many fields unforgettable. Praying Shrines rich reward Kingdom."

Telegrams and letters of condolence were received from many places. The long telegraphic message from the National Spiritual Assembly of Pakistan, parts of which are quoted below, was an example of the love and admiration Bahá'ís everywhere had for Pritam Singh and the sorrow they felt when he left this world:

"With hearts rent with grief and sorrow we hasten to join you

at this hour of your irreparable loss and anguish. The ascension of beloved Pritam Singh is surely a lamentable mark in the history of the Bahá'í Faith in the sub-continent.... It shall never be possible for us to express the sense of grief and feelings of sorrow and sentiments of sympathy for our Indian brothers who have lost such a dauntless fearless gallant sacrificing and steadfast servant of the Faith. But we seek solace in the never-failing mercy of Bahá'u'lláh to Whom he has ascended in the fulsome hour of a life replete and resplendent rich with the fruits of service and dedication for almost half a century ... and pray with sincere and loving hearts to be able to do what he had done and achieve what he had and was still trying to achieve.”¹

¹ *Bahá'í News Letter*, August, 1959

Kayhusraw Rúzbihíyán

– 1905

“O Kayhusraw! Thou art a sovereign in both worlds and a monarch in the everlasting Kingdom.... Blessed art thou! Blessed art thou! ‘Abdu’l-Bahá hopes that He, too, may succeed to follow thy example and sacrifice His life through His love for the friends as thou hast done.”¹

It was the day when India and America made tryst with one another at Lahore. It was indeed a great day; it was the day of merging, so that a friend from the East would offer his life, as a sacrifice, for his friend from the West, that both might unite and lose their separate identities. Sydney Sprague came from the United States and Kayhusraw Isfandíyár Rúzbihíyán from Írán and India. The first belonged to the New World and the second to the old; the first represented a young nation of the world and the second, the historic land of the glorious Lord Zoroaster, and the ancient land of the Rig Veda.

“But there is neither East nor West,
Border, nor breed nor birth,
When two strong men stand face to face,
Though they come from the ends of the earth.”

¹ This is a free translation from a Tablet revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Persian for the relatives and friends of Kayhusraw. See p. 142

Both men carried aloft the banner of the Bahá'í Faith. Both were standard bearers of the New World Order. Both were firm believers in the new destiny of mankind through the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Both believed that Bahá'u'lláh had raised a call to the peoples of the world to bury their arms, forget their differences, realize the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man, and live in peace. He had said:

“The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.”¹

Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son, the Centre of His Covenant and the Exemplar of His Faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, carried the plan for the unification of mankind a step further. He sent Persian scholars of the Faith, such as Abu'l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáyigání and Fádíl-i-Mázandarání to America to deepen the understanding of the Bahá'ís there so that they might scatter throughout the country and consolidate their centres. He called upon American Bahá'ís to pioneer to European countries. He sent outstanding men and women in the service of the Faith to India, among whom were Lua Getsinger, Keith Ransom-Kehler, Martha Root, Mr. Schopflocher, and many others. Persian scholars of the Faith had been visiting India frequently, from the days of Bahá'u'lláh. Now the flow increased. Some of the eminent personalities who came to stay in India for some time and teach the Faith to the men and women of this country were Mírzá Maḥram, Siyyid Maḥmúd Zarqání, Mishkín Qalam and Mírzá Munír Nabílzádi.

On the eleventh of November, 1904, a contingent of sixteen Bahá'ís, fifteen from the Orient and one from the Occident, boarded a ship bound for India from Port Said in Egypt. Among them were well-known teachers of the Cause such as

¹ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.164.

Jináb-i-Adíb, the Persian philosopher; Mishkín Qalam, the famous calligraphist;¹ Mírzá Maḥram, the great teacher of the Cause who was to serve India for the rest of his life and teach the Faith to hundreds of people in this country, including such stalwarts as Narayenrao Vakíl, M.R. Shírází, Pritam Singh and Mihr-‘Alí Munj́í.

Included in the group was Sydney Sprague, a Bahá’í from the United States of America who was full of love for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He had gone on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and had experienced the joys of paradise; from there he was journeying to India via Port Said. Sydney Sprague, who has written an interesting account of this journey, says:

“He (‘Abdu’l-Bahá) beckoned me to come and sit beside Him, and after taking my hand in His, in a grip of steel, He told me very impressively that He wished me to leave for India that night.... He told me that it was a very important mission on which He was sending me, that the results of this journey would be very great.... I realized the importance of it all. I was to be the first Western Bahá’í to go to the far Orient, and carry the tidings that my fellow believers in Europe and America are one in love and unity with their Oriental brethren. I was to see the literal fulfilment of that beautiful prophecy of Bahá’u’lláh: ‘The East and the West shall embrace as lovers.’ I expressed to the Master my doubt as to my worthiness to carry out this great mission. He told me not to worry, I would be strengthened. His thoughts and His prayers would follow me. The thoughts of the King are always with his generals who are fighting in the front rank.”²

¹ Mishkín Qalam not only transcribed the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in his artistic and inimitable handwriting, but also committed them all to memory. He was famous for his delightful sense of humour even at the age of ninety when he first came to India.

² *World Order—the Bahá’í Magazine*, May 1946, p. 58

Sprague left the Holy Land that same night. The next day he reached Port Said where he joined the large party referred to above and left for India in a mercantile navy ship. He writes:

“The Persians transformed the deck in a very short time into quite a luxurious abode; rugs and carpets were spread, divans and beds arranged, the tea-service set out and we had all that constitutes comfort in the Orient.... We were sixteen altogether.... We would sit in a circle on the deck around the samovar, Muhammedan, Christian, Zoroastrian,¹ cheek by jowl, and, while the tea was being drunk, different experiences were related by each one and sometimes animated discussions took place. There would be sad and stirring tales of the Bahá’í martyrs of Persia, perhaps that of a relative of one of those present; there would be anecdotes told of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; there would be discussions on theological and philosophical subjects. Then the conversation might take a lighter vein; Mishkín Qalam, though the oldest of the party (I think he was nearly ninety years old), seemed always brimming over with fun and good spirits, and told many amusing stories which convulsed everyone with laughter.”²

On the 1st of December, 1904, the party arrived in Bombay. Many Bahá’ís had come to the docks to greet them. “I was welcomed most cordially,” writes Sprague, “as though I were an old and dear friend.” He has also written a most vivid and informative description of the Bombay community in the following words:

“The news that we had arrived spread quickly through the city, and soon large numbers of Bahá’ís, chiefly Zoroastrians,

¹ They were all Bahá’ís, but in those days people still referred to the religions the Bahá’ís had come from.

² *World Order—The Bahá’í Magazine*, June, 1946, p. 88

were crowding the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár¹ to see their new brother from the Occident. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a large hall. . . . There are three meetings a week held in Bombay, on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday evenings at six o'clock. The Tuesday meeting is reserved for the House of Justice, composed of nineteen members. . . .² The other two meetings are general, and there are, as a rule, eighty to a hundred men present. This does not constitute the numerical strength of the Bahá'ís in Bombay, for many have shops which they are unable to leave more than once a week, on which occasion another Bahá'í friend takes charge of the shop for them. The women have a separate meeting and there is a school for the children.

“At the meetings, Tablets are chanted. Talks are given by different men. I spoke through an interpreter, and on Sunday evenings there were always strangers present, and their questions were asked and answered.

“The Bahá'í community enjoys an excellent reputation for honesty, sobriety, politeness and just dealing with their fellowmen. By these qualities, they attract others to investigate their religion. Drunkenness has unfortunately become a vice among the Zoroastrians of Bombay, so when a Zoroastrian is seen never to touch liquor it is at once said, he must be a Bahá'í. . . .

“There is great solidarity, however, among the Indian Bahá'ís, and this is always most wonderful to see when we think that these groups are composed of men of different castes and creeds who were but yesterday strangers, if not actual enemies—such, for instance, as the Zoroastrians and Muhammedans. . . .

“I attended some of the meetings of this body (the council of

¹ This literally means “The dawning-place of the praise of God” and is a name given to a Bahá'í House of Worship, but the Bahá'í Centre in Bombay was called by this name in those early days.

² This later became the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Bombay.

nineteen) and wish to cite one or two incidents to show how affairs are managed by the House of Justice. A Zoroastrian Bahá'í shopkeeper came one evening and told the council that affairs had been going very badly with him and that he was on the point of failure. The council deliberated and decided that different members should give a part of their time each day to helping him in his shop, lay in a new stock of goods to attract customers, and give pecuniary help if necessary. This was done, and soon the man was on his feet again....

"I left Bombay at the beginning of the year 1905. My stay had been so pleasant there, and my friends so kind, that I said goodbye to them with real regret. I think everyone had shown me some kind act of attention; some would send me fruit, others sweetmeats and cakes, others flowers....

"On the day of my departure the great railway terminus of Bombay presented a very animated picture, for all who could get away from their work had come to bid me farewell. The sight of so many persons dressed in different robes and turbans, representing different races, saying such enthusiastic goodbyes to a Western gentleman in a straw hat, attracted a good deal of attention and apparent curiosity from the other passengers.

"A very unusual thing as well was my travelling with an Oriental dressed in the robes of a Muhammedan mullá, for my travelling companion was Mírzá Mahram, who had been with me ever since we left Port Said...."¹

Sprague enjoyed his trip from Bombay to Rangoon in Burma. He writes:

"The journey from Bombay to Calcutta was a very pleasant one, the railway carriages on the Indian lines are very spacious and comfortable, and the meals served at different stations

¹ *World Order—The Bahá'í Magazine*, June, 1946, pp. 89–91

very palatable; everything was new and strange to me, so the long journey of two days did not seem at all monotonous or tiring.

“We stopped a short time in Calcutta, and I was glad to meet again Jináb-i-Adíb, who was now teaching there. From Calcutta we took a steamer for Rangoon, the voyage taking about four days, at the end of which we found our Bahá’í friends of Burma awaiting us at the pier.”¹

From Rangoon they went to Mandalay, almost the other extreme of Burma, in the first week of April 1905. Here, Sprague loved the simple way the Bahá’ís were living. The women sat with the men in the meetings, contrary to the segregation of women in Rangoon and Bombay. Boys and girls of all ages took part in these gatherings. “The meeting ended with tea and cakes being served, and then the pretty custom of children going round with baskets full of flowers and giving handfuls of roses and jasmine to each other.”²

Sprague describes with great vividness the following incident in Mandalay:

“...Mírzá Maḥram and myself, with perhaps a Buddhist and a Muhammedan Bahá’í used to take walks through the streets of Mandalay, naturally attracting much attention, for it is not a usual sight in the Orient to see people in Christian, Muhammedan, and Buddhist dress walking together chatting and laughing in a friendly manner. I remember one day when we were walking with a certain doctor, M. ‘Alí, a devoted Bahá’í, a man of position and much respected, that we passed a group of Muhammedans standing at a corner; they beckoned to him and asked him who the Šáhíbs were he was walking with.

¹ *World Order—The Bahá’í Magazine*, June, 1946, p. 92

² *World Order—The Bahá’í Magazine*, October, 1946, p. 217

“‘The venerable old gentleman is a Persian, born a Shí’ih Muhammedan,’ he said; ‘One of the two men in European clothes is a Frenchman, born a Jew; the other, an American, born a Christian; while I, as you know, was born a Sunní Muhammedan. We have all laid aside the old names,’ he went on, ‘which once divided us, and we have become united and are friends and brothers through the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh.’

“If those who read these lines could only realize what animosity exists between the sects of Islám, such as the Shí’ih and Sunní, which corresponds to the feeling between Roman Catholics and Protestant Christians in Western countries, they would realize how difficult it is to weld even these sects into one. Then, indeed, would they marvel at the power of the Bahá’í movement, which has done not only this, but has gathered into one fold people of every creed known on the face of the earth.”¹

During this trip, Sydney Sprague visited most of the important cities of India and Burma, teaching and lecturing on the Faith wherever he went.

On their way back from Burma, Sprague and Mírzá Maḥram came to Calcutta and then visited some cities of Uttar Pradesh. During this journey Sprague became seriously ill with typhoid fever. His temperature rose high and caused great anxiety to Mírzá Maḥram. When they arrived at Lahore where Mírzá Maḥmúd Zarqání was living they found that, by ill luck, an epidemic of cholera has broken out in that city and people are fleeing the place to save their lives. Doctors and nurses were scarce. There was no one to bury the dead, so kerosene was poured on the corpses and they were burnt in the streets. The condition of the city can better be imagined than described. The situation was so dangerous that Zarqání was preparing to

¹ *World Order—The Bahá’í Magazine*, October, 1946, p. 220

leave Lahore when his two guests arrived.

Sprague's condition grew worse hour by hour and Zarqání decided to appeal to the Bahá'ís in Bombay for help. The only Local Assembly which existed in India at that time was in Bombay, and to this Assembly Zarqání turned for assistance. A telegram was sent to ask for someone to come to Lahore who could nurse Sprague and help to take him to Bombay for hospitalization. The Assembly in Bombay met to consider the dangerously serious situation. To rush aid to the friends in Lahore was absolutely essential, but to go there was deadly and fatal. After many prayers and serious consultation, it was decided that one of the members, Jamshíd Ḥakímíyán,¹ should go.

Kaykhusraw Rúzbiḥíyán was an unsophisticated man who had a small shop in Bombay. When he heard about Sprague's condition and the decision of the Assembly, he rushed to Ḥakímíyán and begged to be allowed to go in his stead. "You are serving the Cause in so many ways," he said, "whereas I am unable to do much. Let me have the bounty of nursing our Western brother." This is how Kaykhusraw came to journey to Lahore.

Kaykhusraw Rúzbiḥíyán was from Írán. When he came to India, like many other Zoroastrians who had arrived in Bombay before him, he opened a tea-shop in that city. He accepted the Bahá'í Faith and became firm in the Cause.

The Persian teachers who had been sent to India by the Blessed Beauty Himself, and later on by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, played an important part in deepening the Bahá'ís of this country. The other thing that helped to strengthen them was their well-knit community. When they visited each other's homes and shops their only topic of conversation was the Bahá'í Faith, its glorious history and its beautiful teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's

¹ See p. 205.



Kaykhusraw Rúzbihiyán

love and kindness towards the Zoroastrian Bahá'ís was well-known. He had invited many of them to settle in the Holy Land as gardeners and agriculturists. He was quick in replying to their letters and these replies, which were spiritual food for the Bahá'ís, were committed to memory and chanted in melodious voices in their gatherings. When the Tablets of the Master were chanted in the Bahá'í Centre, on the upper floor of the building, even passersby would stop to listen on the street.

We do not know much about the life of Kaykhusraw Rúzbihiyán, but the clothes which he wore in the only photograph of him available suggests that he had lived in India for some time and adopted the Parsi costume.¹ He may have lived in Bombay for two decades or more, learnt the Indian languages, and adopted an Indian costume. Kaykhusraw's eldest son, Faríbuz Rúzbihiyán, says in his booklet *The Paradise on Earth* that

¹ The clothes worn by the Zoroastrians in Írán were different from those worn by Zoroastrians, or Parsis, in India.



Kaykhusraw Rúzbihíyán

he himself was a young boy in 1905 and more at home in Gujarati and English than in Persian.

Farīburz writes that his father left for Lahore on the very evening he had volunteered to go “leaving his wife, children and his shop to God’s care”. Arriving at Lahore Kaykhusraw started nursing the sick man in the hope that the patient would soon feel better and that they would all be able to leave Lahore for Bombay. On the fourth day, however, the condition of Sprague worsened around midnight. His condition became so critical that there was little hope for his life. Kaykhusraw fell on his knees beside the sick man’s bed and supplicated Bahá’u’lláh that the precious life of Sydney Sprague be spared because he had left his native land and travelled far, in an alien land, under trying conditions, to serve the Cause of God. If death was ordained, Kaykhusraw prayed, he was willing to accept it himself so that his American brother could go back safely to his home. That supplication was made with such fervour and with so many sincere tears that the Blessed Beauty was moved to accept it. By the next morning the patient had overcome the deadly crisis and was feeling much better. That same morning Kaykhusraw fell prey to cholera and passed away from this world within eighteen hours. By the time he was buried Sprague’s condition was such that he was able to walk to the railway station with the help of Mírzá Maḥram and Zarqání, and leave for Bombay. There he spent a month recuperating in a hospital and was then well enough to return to America.

Sydney Sprague continued to think of what had happened and to shed tears for the man who had saved his life. He remembered, with tenderness and gratitude, how Kaykhusraw had, out of love for his fellowman, travelled more than 1600 kilometres to nurse his spiritual brother and deliver him from the jaws of death, and how he had willingly and gratefully laid down his own life for him. In *A year with the Bahá’ís of India and Burma*, he wrote:

“Dear Kaykhusraw, when I saw his kind, manly face by me and felt his tender care, I already began to feel better. Alas, that I must record that his coming meant that he was to sacrifice his life for mine. I thought with many a pang of the heart, of the wife and children he had left behind; and he had done this for me—no, not for me but for the love of God.

“...The father-in-law and two little sons of Kaykhusraw came to see me, and they came with tears of joy rather than sorrow, happy that he had been able to render so great a service to the Holy Cause. ‘He was a humble shopkeeper’, they said, ‘and had no ability to teach but you are able to go about and teach great multitudes; he could only give his life to serve the Cause of God and he was glad to do it.’

“Noble Kaykhusraw, you will always be remembered as the first Oriental friend to give his life for a Western Bahá’í brother.”¹

This incident greatly touched the heart of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and He was moved to reveal the following Tablet:

“He is God!

“O ye wise kinsmen and relatives!

“His holiness Kaykhusraw evinced the attributes of kingship;² he displayed fidelity, greatness and magnanimity. He arose to fulfil the teachings of the Blessed Beauty and act according to the testaments of the Most Great Name. Verily he offered his life for Sprague and gave his body as a sacrifice for the friends. That pure and holy soul ascended to the effulgent Kingdom; that saintly being transcended the heavens and became resplendent in the eternal Realm. His friends and relatives should rejoice and render thanks to the Divine Threshold,

¹ *The Paradise on Earth*, Chapter I, p. 4

² Khusraw or Kaykhusraw means king, monarch.

and be proud that such a soul from amongst them underwent tribulation and sacrificed himself in the Path of God.

“O Kaykhusraw! thou art a sovereign in both worlds and a monarch in the everlasting Kingdom. How dear wert thou that thy sweet fragrances were wafted over me. Thou didst emerge from the fire of tests and trials like unto pure gold. Thou didst become consumed with love, enkindled a flame in the heart of others, and fled this dark and gloomy world to attain the glorious Realm. Blessed art thou! Blessed art thou! ‘Abdu’l-Bahá hopes that He, too, may succeed to follow thy example and sacrifice His life through His love for the friends as thou hast done.

“O Thou Incomparable Lord! Nurture this dear friend and crown his head with the diadem of Thy favour and bounty. Establish him upon an eternal throne and adorn his temple with the crown of Thy heavenly bestowals. He longed to enter Thy Presence, give him access to the effulgent Assembly. He yearned to behold Thy Beauty, illumine him by the rays of Thy Countenance. He was a moth craving for Thy light, draw him nigh unto Thy Seat of Glory. He was a nightingale consumed with love, grant him reunion with the Rose.

“O Lord, assist his friends and grant them patience and tranquillity so that they may be freed from the agony of separation and find comfort and solace in their hour of grief.

“Thou art the Almighty, the Omnipotent, the Helper, the All-Powerful; and verily, Thou art potent over all things.

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá”¹

Even after many years ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, while in the British Isles, spoke of the noble sacrifice of Kaykhusraw and gave it as an example of complete detachment from this world and attachment to the World of God.

¹ *The Paradise on Earth*, Chapter I, p. 3

The story of Kaykhusraw Rúzbihíyán and Sydney Sprague is a true story which is stranger than fiction. It will always be remembered and related throughout the Bahá'í world. The historians of the Cause of God will write it in letters of gold. The story has a lesson to carry to every one of us: Even if Kaykhusraw had lived for another thirty or forty years, he would have gone on with his day to day work, perhaps collected some wealth and then died to join the forgotten ones of the world. But now Kaykhusraw is like a beacon of light to everyone, and his very name is sufficient to stir the heart and strengthen the faith of every Bahá'í.¹

¹ See also Appendix III on p. 237.

Mawlaví Muḥammad ‘Abdu’lláh Vakíl

“Notable promoter of the Faith”¹

1869 – 1948

I have come across a lovely article in the Persian language about Mawlaví Muḥammad ‘Abdu’lláh Vakíl written by Núru’lláh Akhtar-Khávarí², and I am giving a free translation of parts of it here:³

“The beautiful and unrivalled province of Kashmir, which is known as a paradise on earth, nurtured a brilliant child into maturity until he attained a high and lofty station. His name was Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh⁴ and he was a precious gift of God to his native land. Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh imparted a life-giving Message to his countrymen from which they will continue to receive rich spiritual bounties and eternal blessings.

“Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh, displayed extraordinary capacity from his early childhood—a capacity which he put to full use. He acquired much knowledge and became famous among his contemporaries for his intelligence, his wisdom and his pious life. He developed the virtues of sincerity and detachment to such an extent that friends and foes alike looked upon him with the

¹ from the Guardian’s cable dated April 19, 1948

² Núru’lláh Akhtar-Khávarí served the Faith for many years in India. After his return to Írán, he was arrested because he was a Bahá’í and cruelly martyred when he refused to recant his Faith.

³ taken from *Payámbar*, May, 1948

⁴ He was generally known as Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh.

eye of respect. He was a lawyer by profession; this is why he was known as 'Vakíl'.

“Since he was a seeker after truth, and was eagerly awaiting the advent of the One promised in Holy Scripture, he was drawn to the Aḥmadí movement¹ for some time and endeavoured to spread its teachings in Kashmir. Afterwards, however, he realized that he had not found what he was looking for. He persevered in his search until he recognized the Day-Star of Truth, and became a follower of Bahá'u'lláh.

“From that time onwards he busied himself with teaching the Bahá'í Faith to others, and travelled far to spread its message. Even when he was old and feeble he did not stop teaching the Cause of God. He succeeded in guiding many pure souls in Kashmir and paid much attention to the task of deepening them in this Cause. Towards the end of his life he would often say, ‘Alas, alas, that I am now too old to move about and carry the water of life to the people of this land.’

“Mawlaví ‘Abdu'lláh taught the great lesson of faith and love to his contemporaries. He would often sing this poem in Persian:

‘O Love! I wander, homeless, in Thy Path,
Renowned for lack of wisdom for Thy sake;
The book of folly now starts with my name,
Though I was once the leader of the wise.’

“Mawlaví ‘Abdu'lláh has left the mortal world, but the spiritual life he led will continue to inspire the people of this land, especially his native province of Kashmir, and the seeds he so patiently sowed will one day bear abundant fruit.”

* * * *

¹ Mírzá Ghulám Aḥmad, the founder of the Aḥmadí or Qádíyání movement, claimed to be the promised Mihdí of the Muslims.



Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh

Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí, who personally knew Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh, writes in his notes that he was the recognised head of the Ahmadis in Kashmir, and well-known and respected throughout the province. Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh had once been deputed to go to propagate the Ahmadí sect abroad, and had gone to catch a boat from Bombay when he happened to enter a restaurant which belonged to a Bahá'í. After he had eaten, he started a conversation with the proprietor, Bahrám Gush-táspí, and said he would like to read a book on the Bahá'í Faith. He was given *Alfará'id* by the famous scholar, Abu'l-Fadá'il. The book made such an impression on him that he cancelled his trip and went back to Kashmir.

From that time on he kept in contact with Bahá'ís and read their literature. After some years when Bakhtíyárí went to Kashmir in 1937, Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh was still considered to be the leader of the Ahmadis in that area though he was a Bahá'í at heart. He told Bakhtíyárí, "I have no doubt about the divine station of Bahá'u'lláh, but worldly fame and position



Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh

hinder me from declaring my faith openly, and I lack the enthusiasm needed for teaching the Cause. Please pray for me that the fire of love may be enkindled in my heart.” Bakhtíyárí said to him, “I shall certainly pray for you, but I am not sure of the power of my prayers. It is better that you yourself pray for divine confirmation.” He gave Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh a collection of prayers by Bahá’u’lláh and assured him that, if he read those Words regularly, his spirit would be attracted and his heart inspired.

Before Bakhtíyárí left, Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh gave him the names of all the members of his family, as well as his own, and asked him to send them to the Guardian, requesting his prayers and blessings. The Guardian graciously sent a reply on August 26, 1937, mentioning all the names given and assuring them of his prayers. After that Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh wrote to the Guardian personally and received his kind reply.

When Bakhtíyárí visited Kashmir in the company of Martha Root a year later, in 1938, he found Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh a changed man. He was afire with love for the Cause, and was teaching it openly to others. It was he who translated into Kashmiri the public speeches of Martha Root and Bakhtíyárí. One of the talks given by Martha Root was especially important. It was given at a gathering of many thousands of people who had come together to celebrate the birthday of Lord Krishna.

Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh showed such enthusiasm about the Faith that the Ahmadí community in Kashmir was shaken. They complained to their central office that their leader was openly teaching the Bahá’í Faith. Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh received a letter from the central office asking him about his beliefs. He replied that he had embraced the Bahá’í Faith and did not consider himself an Ahmadí anymore.

In 1940, the Ahmadis sent some of their learned preachers to confront Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh and try to discredit the Bahá’í Faith in the eyes of the public. Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh reported

this to the National Spiritual Assembly and M.H. ‘Ilmí, M.A. Şamadání and I. Bakhtíyárí were sent to join Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh in Kashmir. The Bahá’ís made it clear that they did not wish to indulge in vain arguments but were prepared to meet anyone who wanted to investigate their religion. They rented a place for their meetings in the best locality of Srinagar, the Capital of Kashmir, and they advertised through newspapers and posters put up in every part of the town, that the Bahá’ís welcomed those who wished to find out about their religion.

A large crowd gathered every day and Ahmadis of both sects came along with books written against the Bahá’í Faith. Questions were answered and adequate information about the Cause was imparted to all. One of the Ahmadis said to Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh one day, “You were the powerful head of our community, a respected leader who knew the whole of the Qur’án by heart and whose authority no one questioned. What made you leave that grandeur and position to become an obscure Bahá’í?” Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh answered, “I swear by the Author of the Qur’án that nothing but the prophecies given in that Holy Book have compelled me to accept the truth of this Faith.

Many public talks on the Faith were also arranged in schools and colleges at that time. The Cause received extraordinary publicity in Kashmir, and the name of Bahá’u’lláh and the Bahá’í Faith became known to everyone.

* * * *

Mr. Amín Kámil, a close relative of Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh, has written an excellent article on him in *Payámbar*¹ from which the following information is gleaned:

¹ June 1948 issue

Mawlaví Muḥammad ‘Abdu’lláh Vakíl was the only son of Muḥammad Şádiq who belonged to the Raina family. He was born in 1869, in the village of Gatipura in the district of Shopian in Kashmir. While Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh was yet a child, his mother died, after which his father left Gatipura and emigrated to Rampur in the province of Jammu.

Muḥammad Şádiq was a good Muslim and a teacher by profession. It was from him that Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh received his early education, but he was still very young when his father passed away. He continued his studies with the learned scholar of Srinagar, Mawlaví Ḥusayn Sháh and also received lessons from Ḥakím Núri’d-Dín who was the physician of the ruler of Kashmir and who later became the caliph (or lieutenant) of Mírzá Ghulám Aḥmad of Qádiyán.

Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh then went to Vazirabad in Punjab and there he studied under Ḥáfiz ‘Abdu’l-Mannán, and finally went to Lahore to become a student of Mawlaví Rahím-Bakhsh.

Having completed his education, Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh returned to Kashmir and settled in the district of Gilgit where he became the teacher of the chief Minister of the Nawab of Kashmir. He then went to Qádiyán and became a disciple of Mírzá Ghulám Aḥmad, after which he came back to propagate the Aḥmadí teachings in Kashmir while practising law in the court at Srinagar.

Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh’s studies were not confined to the teachings of Islám. He had made a deep study of both Hinduism and Buddhism before he came across the Bahá’í Faith. Then, in 1920, while he was in Bombay, he was introduced to the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. He studied the Bahá’í Faith for many years before he accepted it, but it is interesting to note that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had already mentioned, in a Tablet to one of the believers in India, that Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh would one day become a confirmed Bahá’í.

Mawlaví ‘Abdu’lláh was well-known, not only for his vast knowledge and understanding of Holy Scriptures, but also for

his extreme piety and saintly nature. He became detached from the world and led a simple life.

He taught the Bahá'í Faith to high and low alike with a fervour which was difficult to match. Towards the end of his life he would sit in his home and receive all types of people who came to hear him every day. He lived in an old house. The room in which he received his guests faced the east and its two windows were only one foot above the level of the street outside. The floor was covered with mats of straw, and there was no furniture in the room. Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh sat beside one of the windows with a pen, an ink-pot and some paper in front of him. The room would be packed with eager listeners, and more would be standing out on the street. They were all types of people. Among them were Muslims of various sects, Hindus, free-thinkers, and others. Some were educated, some were not; professors and peons stood together, listening to the great teacher. Everyone was spellbound while Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh explained the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. He who understood listened with interest; he who did not understand also listened. What an extraordinary power this eighty-year-old man with grey hair had! There was not another like him in the whole of Kashmir.

Kámil tells us that on April 6, 1948, Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh said to him, "I feel that my days on earth are drawing to an end." Two days later he had a stroke, and became unconscious. To those around him it seemed as if he was sound asleep. His precious soul left this world on April 12, 1948.

Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh's children were all Muslims and wished to bury him according to their own religion; but Kámil and Chaudhary 'Abdu'r-Rahmán, who were among Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh's spiritual children, were both strong Bahá'ís and they persuaded the family to allow them to bury Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh in accordance with the laws of the religion he himself believed in. Since Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh was well-known and highly admired by the followers of all religions in

Kashmir, a large crowd of people gathered to pay their respects to him at his burial, and the Muslims offered special prayers. Then the Bahá'í prayer for the dead was said and the body was laid to rest in Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh's own grounds at Barzalla in Srinagar. This was the first time that Bahá'í burial rites were performed in Kashmir, and a large number of people were there to witness it.

On April 16, the sons of Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh held a memorial gathering according to the Muslim custom in Kashmir and, after the readings from the Holy Qur'án were over, people started recalling their personal memories of the departed one. Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh's eldest son, who was a judge, related the following:

“One day I said to my father, ‘You say you are a Bahá'í but I see that you live the life of a true Muslim. I am worried as to what will happen when you die. Who will say your prayers at that time?’ My father replied, ‘Son, why don't you understand? You should not be worrying about my body. You should rather be concerned with the Message which this body is conveying.’”

Even 'Abdu's-Şamad, a well-known Aḥmadí, paid tribute to Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh in his speech and said, “We should cherish the Message which was given to us by Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh.”

In his Will, Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh had quoted the Aqdas¹ and left instructions that his property be divided according to the laws of that Holy Book.

In a couplet written by Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh we read:

“Although the paradise of Kashmir is my abode,
I long to hasten to the Rose-Garden of Bahá.”

¹ Bahá'u'lláh's Book of Laws

Bahá'u'lláh granted his wish and Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh is now in the paradise he longed for, close to his Beloved.

* * * *

The following, which is taken from an article in the *Bahá'í Newsletter* of February to April, 1948, helps to complete our life-story of Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh:

“Despite the respect he commanded by virtue of his knowledge and sincerity and zeal in the community from which he hailed, his letters to the National Spiritual Assembly breathed a spirit of subservience to the Bahá'í Administration which was truly Bahá'í and, in a man of his age and position, worthy of remark.

“Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh Vakíl was indefatigable in his labours for the Cause even unto the last. His writings were constantly directed towards guiding his former co-religionists, the Qádí-yánís, to the Truth. Among his published pamphlets, the best known is the *Maqbariy-i-Kháníyár*.

“Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh Vakíl's passing leaves a gap which will be hard to fill. May his life and deeds inspire other Bahá'ís in this country to emulate his example and serve the Cause with the same traits of selflessness, ardour and steadfastness that he so conspicuously displayed.”

The Guardian was informed of his passing and he replied by cable:

“Grieve passing notable promoter Faith Mawlavi Vakil. Ardently praying progress his soul. Urge Kashmir friends persevere meritorious labours. —Shoghi”¹

¹ dated April 19, 1948

Mihrabán Rustam Bulbulán

1853?–1938

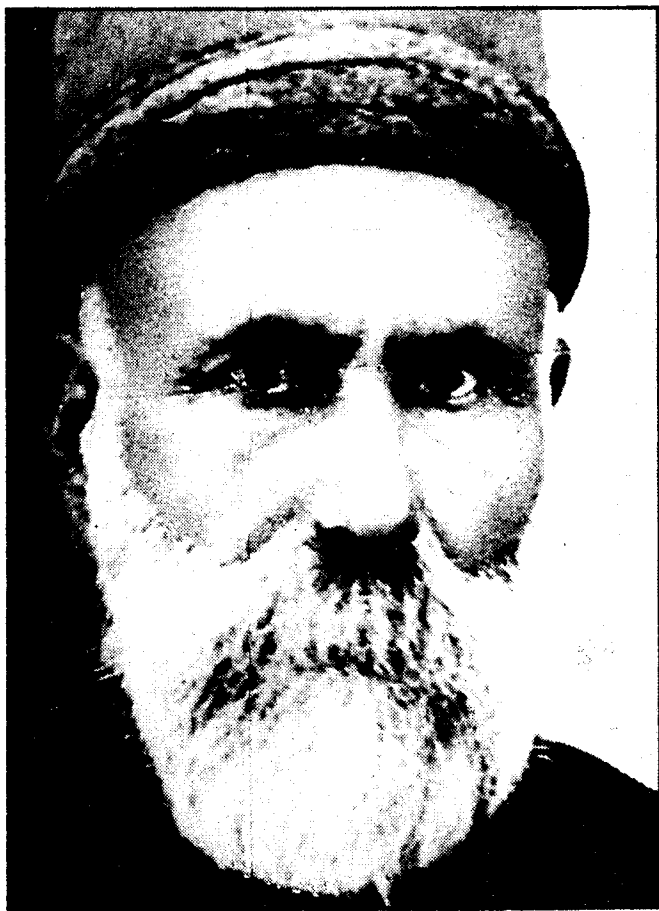
“Be thankful to God for having enabled you to recognize His Cause. Whoever has received this blessing must, prior to his acceptance, have performed some deed which, though he himself was unaware of its character was ordained by God as a means whereby he has been guided to find and embrace the Truth.” —Bahá'u'lláh¹

Mihrabán Rustam Bulbulán was a very simple and unsophisticated man who lived in the village of Maryamábád, in the district of Yazd in Írán. Nothing new seemed to happen in this village. It was a place far removed from modern life and Mihrabán had seen nothing but the mules and the ploughs, the farms and the fields of his village. Tilling the land and cultivating it had been the occupation of his forefathers and this was all that he could do. He never went to school, although for a couple of years he went to the nearest Zoroastrian fire-temple to learn the alphabet and commit to memory some prayers from the Avesta,² of course without understanding the meaning. That was all his education.

From the day he took to ploughing, he lost touch with the world outside his immediate neighbourhood. He would go to

¹ *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 586

² Holy Book of the Zoroastrians

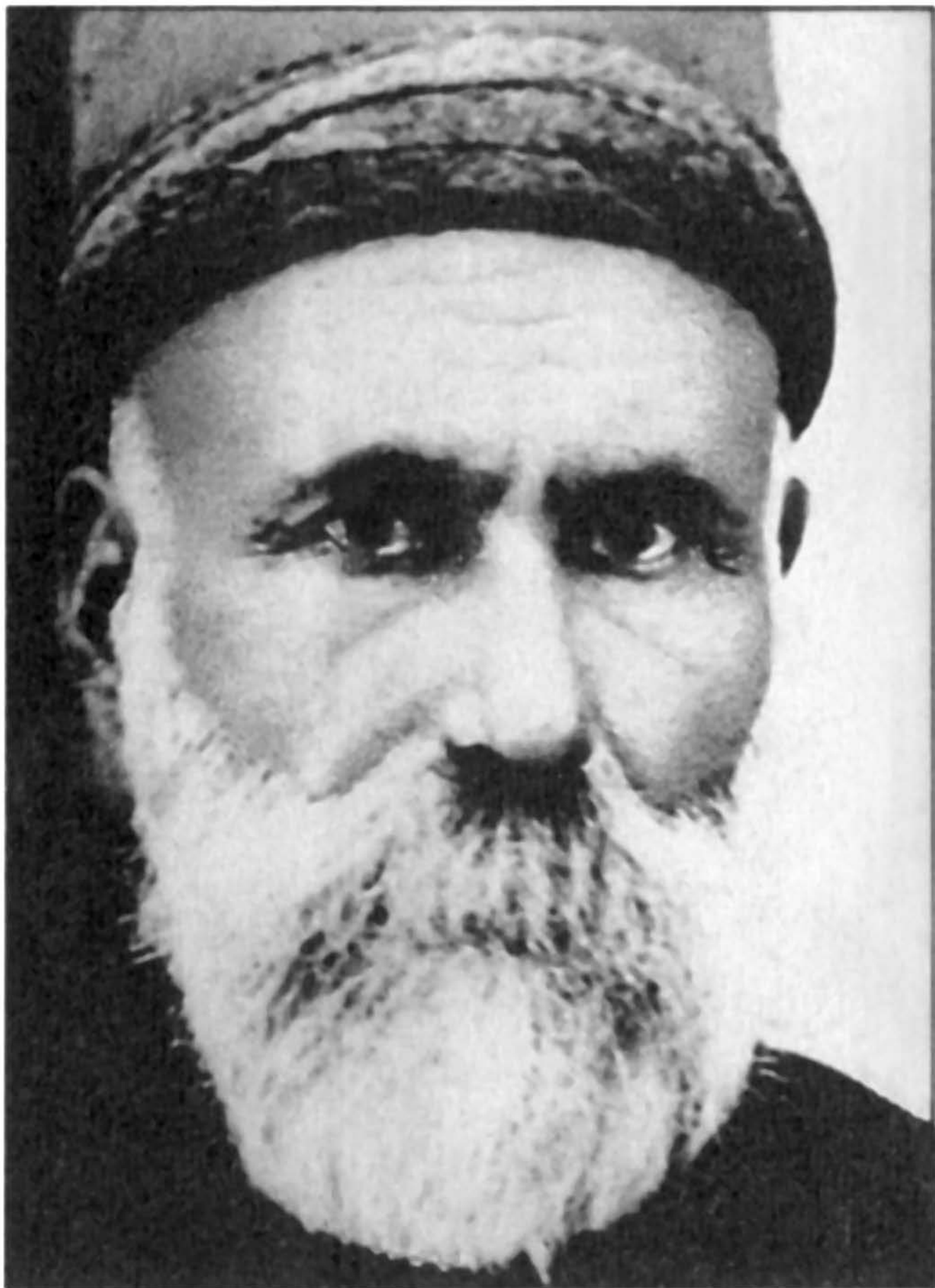


Mihrabán Bulbulán

his field at daybreak and remain there till sunset—in the hottest summer and the coldest winter. He had no company save that of the birds that flew over his field making shrill cries, or sat on the trees around and chirped.

Mihrabán had implicit faith in God. He would often look up at the sky and reflect upon the Creator of this wonderful universe. The beautiful sights of nature confirmed his devotion to the Unseen. He would go to the fire-temple as often as he could and pray with all his heart and soul. There he would ask the priests questions about God, the Prophet Zoroaster, the Holy Scriptures, and the advent of Sháh Bahrám. But, to his simple way of thinking the replies of the priests were quite confusing. Occasionally he would have doubts about the Promised One: “Will He really come? When will He come? Will He come only for us Zoroastrians? Will the priests guide us to Him? When the Promised One comes, should we continue with our own traditions or should we forsake the old ways and follow Him as did those first believers in the days of Zoroaster?”

Then, one day, something happened which proved to be a



Mihrabán Bulbulán

turning point in his life. One afternoon, while he was working in the field, he saw two men running towards him. He stopped and stood waiting. When they came near the men addressed him in piteous tones, saying, "Save our lives! Give us asylum! We are being hounded by assassins!" Without a word, Mihrabán took them into his barn and, coming out himself, locked the door. No sooner had he done this than there appeared a group of angry people with bloodthirsty and savage looks who began to interrogate him about the two who had come that way. Mihrabán pretended he had not seen anyone. The angry men left the place and the danger was averted.

The grateful refugees left safely when it was dark and Mihrabán gave them his only donkey to ride on. Before they left, however, he asked them why they had been hounded. They told him it was because they were followers of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh, they said, is a Manifestation of God but He has been exiled and imprisoned in 'Akká. They also told Mihrabán that they were on their way to visit Bahá'u'lláh and seek His blessings. Mihrabán did not understand much of what he heard, but his heart was touched and he said, "When you reach there, be so good as to remember me to Him."

The pilgrims arrived at 'Akká. They stayed for some days, poured out their hearts to their Beloved and listened to His Words. They gave Bahá'u'lláh the messages sent by some of His followers who were unable to visit Him themselves. When the time came for them to return to their home, Bahá'u'lláh said, "You have not yet delivered all you were entrusted with." The pilgrims were greatly surprised. How was this possible? What was it that they had forgotten? At last they remembered. They had not delivered the message of the Zoroastrian farmer who had saved their lives and who had requested them to remember him at the Holy Threshold. Surely such a friend and his kind help should not be forgotten. They narrated the whole episode to Bahá'u'lláh and thus it was that the golden deed was recorded in the history of the Faith and Mihrabán gained

immortality.

The compassionate heart of the Blessed Beauty was moved. He said: he who loves God should love his fellowmen. Mihrabán had shown love for his fellowmen and given them protection. He had been the saviour of their lives and had helped them at the risk of his own life. The ocean of Divine grace surged, and Bahá'u'lláh revealed the following Tablet for Mihrabán:

“In the Name of God, the All-Loving

“O Mihrabán! One of the friends hath evoked thy remembrance; thus have We remembered thee.

“In this glorious Day everything that can be seen is a witness, and calleth all men unto the one true God. Say! This is the Day in which the sun of spiritual discernment is shining forth in the heaven of true understanding. Blessed is he that hath perceived and recognized it. Whatsoever was foretold in former times hath now been fulfilled.

“Say, O friends! Suffer not yourselves to be far removed from the ocean of heavenly grace. He is come astonishingly near unto you. He who had been concealed from men's eyes is now come. How good is His coming! In one hand He is carrying the water of life and in the other the charter of true liberty. Cast ye away one thing and take hold of another. Cast away whatsoever pertaineth to the world and take firm hold of that which the hand of divine providence imparteth unto you. Lo, that which no eye hath ever beheld is now revealed. O friends! Hasten ye, hasten ye, hearken ye, hearken ye!

“The deeds of the high priests have caused the people to be estranged from Almighty God. Instead of evincing self-denial they have given themselves up to inordinate desires and strayed far from the path of the Lord God. They have grievously erred, yet fondly imagine themselves to be treading the right path. We have, however, warned the leaders of religion and taken them to witness, that they might in this day solemnly affirm His truth and guide His creatures unto the Spirit of Purity.

“Say, O high priests! Shake off your slumber, rouse yourselves from unconsciousness, incline your inner ears to the melody of the All-Sufficing and conduct yourselves in a manner that beseemeth the Day of God Himself.

“Great is the station of him who hath in this Day perceived and become aware of the truth, and wretched is he who hath failed to comprehend the utterances of the Lord of wisdom and to recognize the newly-arrived Friend in His new attire.

“Behold, the Ocean of true knowledge hath appeared and the Day-Star of wisdom shineth resplendent. Incline your ears to the Voice of the Eternal Lord of Utterance and purge yourselves from whatsoever is deemed unseemly, that ye may become worthy to gain admittance into the court of your Creator. Say, in this Day the Almighty hath unloosed His tongue before the assemblage of men. It behoveth you to draw nigh unto Him and to grasp the truths of His weighty utterance. Indeed His utterance is a messenger that beareth the token of His presence. It delivereth you from darkness and guideth your steps unto the effulgent light of His Glory.

“Thy name was mentioned before Us and We have remembered thee in Our Tablet. This remembrance is like unto a sapling that We have planted with the hand of loving-kindness. Erelong will it grow verdant and flourishing, laden with abundant fruits. Thus hath the Lord God ordained, and thus hath He shown the way.

“He is the Mighty, the Seeing, the Lord of Utterance and Wisdom.”¹

Mihrabán became a devoted Bahá'í and eventually came to India. His daughter was married in this country and his grandchildren went to school here. Every one of them was a firm and dedicated Bahá'í. Two of his grandchildren, Mrs. Shírín Núrání and Shápúr Khujastigán, later went out as pioneers to

¹ *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. XVIII p. 967



Shírín Núrání

take the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to Karikal in south India. Mrs. Núrání became a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.¹

Towards the end of his life, Mihrabán was too weak to go out of the house. But his children were around him and he was loved and respected. He had memorized a number of prayers and Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá which kept him happy as he chanted them to himself in his warm, rich voice.

Mihrabán died in Bombay on May 8, 1938, and was buried in the Bahá'í cemetery. He had been a simple-hearted man who did not care much for the world and its ways, but the good deed he had done was worth much in the sight of his Creator. The Tablet which Bahá'u'lláh revealed in his honour has been printed in a book of prayers and Tablets published under the title of *Ad'íyyi-yi-Mahbúb*. Thousands of people have read this Tablet and blessed Mihrabán. People in the four corners of the globe will continue to read it and to remember Mihrabán and his noble deed.

¹ "Knight of Bahá'u'lláh" was a title given to those Bahá'ís who were the first to settle in virgin territories during the Ten-Year Crusade—1953–1963.



Shírín Núrání

Shyamdulari Bhargava

1900 – 1943

Shyamdulari Bhargava lived and died as a great Bahá'í. She was taught the Faith by her husband Dr. Kaushal K. Bhargava, who was the recipient of great favours from 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

As a young man Bhargava heard about the Message of Bahá'u'lláh from Pritam Singh and became a Bahá'í while visiting Narayenrao Vakíl in Surat. Later on, when he was proceeding to Europe on a scholarship from the government to obtain a Doctorate in soap industry, he visited the Master in the Holy Land. Like so many others who went on pilgrimage, he became an ardent lover of 'Abdu'l-Bahá until the end of his life.

While he was in the Holy Land, 'Abdu'l-Bahá told Bhargava one day that he should study sugar instead of soaps and oils. Bhargava said, "Beloved Master, this is not possible. It is the decision of the government that I study soap manufacturing. How can I change it?" The Master said, "It will be so. The subject will be changed." A telegram was then sent to Lady Blomfield, an English Bahá'í, to get the subject changed as a special request from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Bhargava was still in the Holy Land when he received word that his scholarship was changed to sugar industry.

After his return to India, Dr. Bhargava was at one time the manager of a large sugar mill in the thick jungles of Bihar where he invited Mr. and Mrs. Fádíl to spend a few months. Mehru Fádíl grew to love Dr. Bhargava's saintly wife more

and more every day, and Bahá'ís will be always grateful to her for the account she wrote about Shyamdulari in the *Bahá'í News Letter* of May, 1944, after that dear lady had passed away. The information given in these pages is taken from that article, as well as from an interview which Dr. Steve Garrigues had with Dr. Bhargava in 1973.¹

Shyamdulari was a gentle, loving mother to those around her. She had a lovely face to look at and a warm, sweet voice.

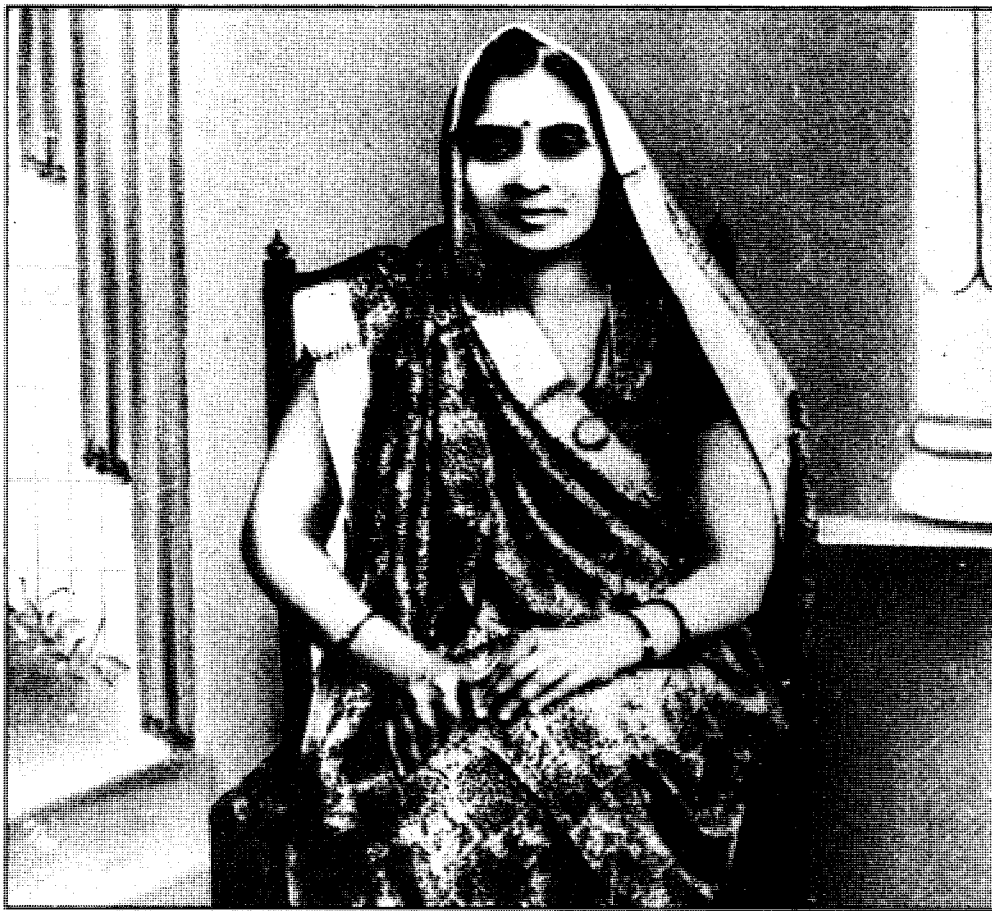
There were more than four hundred men and women working under Dr. Bhargava in the factory and the farm, and his wife was in close contact with each one of them. She mixed with these humble village folk, and was kind and generous towards them all. Yet she was quite unassuming, utterly unconscious of her own spiritual influence.

Shyamdulari had been religious from her childhood and had read Hindu Scriptures in her mother tongue, Hindi. She was married to Kaushal Bhargava with great pomp and show when she was only ten and he was twelve. Child marriages were common in those days, arranged by the parents. But Shyamdulari continued to live with her parents until she was seventeen years old. Then she went to stay with her husband and his parents when Bhargava was studying for his Bachelor of Science degree.

Shyamdulari had been brought up as an orthodox Hindu, but she soon found that her mother-in-law was much more strict in her habits. She was a firm believer in untouchability, as a result of which Shyamdulari sometimes had to take as many as six baths in one day.² While her husband was receiving modern education in a Westernised university, Shyamdulari was

¹ See *Glory Magazine*, No. 4, 1977

² The Bhargavas were Brahmins, the highest caste among the Hindus. By tradition a Brahmin has to take a bath even if the shadow of an untouchable falls on him.

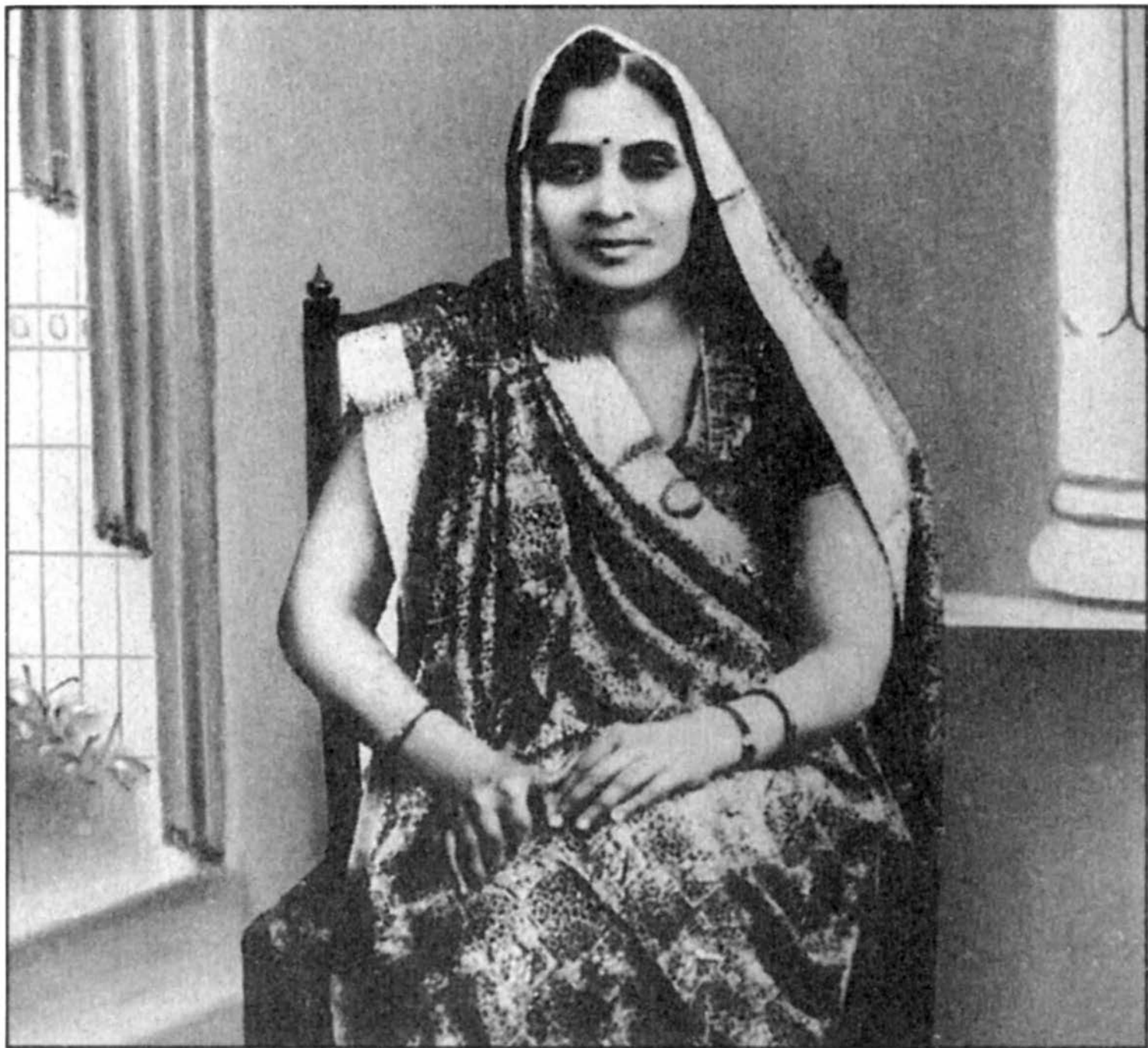


Shyamdularí Bhargava

being confirmed in ancient and out-moded ways of life. She was even forbidden to have contact with those who lived around her.

Kaushal Bhargava became a Bahá'í in 1920, and was almost immediately sent by the government for further studies in Europe. From Europe he wrote to his wife and parents about the Bahá'í Revelation, but Shyamdulari did not understand much of what he said. Then he wrote to his parents asking them to see that his wife received a proper education. This made them very angry. They did not believe that a young wife should be educated but subjected to strict discipline and control. As a result of all this when Bhargava returned from Europe, he and his wife had nothing in common. They were living in two different worlds and felt like total strangers towards each other. Shyamdulari would not eat with her husband or meet any of his Muslim and Christian friends; and she was extremely unhappy because he would not follow her strict orthodox ways.

Shyamdulari was twenty when a son was born to her. One



Shyamdularí Bhargava

night she dreamed of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He came to her bedside and put His hand over the baby asleep by her side. She had never seen a photograph of the Master, so she did not know who the saintly Figure was, but when she related her dream to her husband, he showed her a photograph of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and she immediately recognised Him. However, she was not yet prepared to listen to her husband when he wished to tell her about Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings. She was prejudiced and could not tolerate even the mention of any religion other than her own.

The relationship between the husband and wife did not improve and Shyamdulari suffered a great deal. In 1929, when the situation became unbearable, she said to her husband, "Either you must become a Hindu, or I must become a Bahá'í, because we cannot go on like this. I will go on a fast unto death, praying and meditating for the answer. You also must decide. I want to see Bahá'u'lláh. If He appears to me and tells me to become a Bahá'í, then I'll become a Bahá'í.... If Bahá'u'lláh is a Manifestation of God, I'm sure He'll take pity on me and won't let me die."

Shyamdulari sat in a room by herself and began her fast. She wept and prayed day and night imploring for guidance. She begged God with all her heart to let her know if her husband was following the Truth; and if he was not, she supplicated the Almighty to change his heart so that he might turn back to the old tradition and the way of life with which she was familiar. She prayed and wept in her agony until the third night when she saw Bahá'u'lláh in her dream. He extended His hand over her head and said that what her husband believed in was true.

Shyamdulari woke up a believer in Bahá'u'lláh, and Bhargava was extremely happy. Now she wanted to know how Bahá'ís prayed and what her husband said when he counted his rosary. Bhargava was still not sure of her faith and knowing how prejudiced she was against Muslims, he thought he should



K.K. Bhargava

not mention to her the words “Alláh-u-Abhá”. She might get the wrong impression and think that Bahá’ís are Muslims. Instead, he taught her to say “Bahá’u’l-Abhá” ninety-five times on her rosary each day. Shyamdulari obeyed her husband as she now considered herself a Bahá’í. The next morning, however, she woke up quite upset with him and said he should not misguide her. Bahá’u’lláh had come to her once more in her dream and told her to say “Alláh-u-Abhá” when she meditated, not “Bahá’u’l-Abhá”.

Bhargava now began to teach her everything. As there was not much Bahá’í literature in Hindi at that time, Bhargava translated what he could for her from Persian or English. From the day she became a Bahá’í, Shyamdulari never missed saying the obligatory prayer or keeping the fast. She loved to say the prayers of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the original Persian rather than in the Hindi translation. Her husband would transcribe them for her into Hindi and she would commit them to memory.



K.K. Bhargava

Shyamdulari left her home outside Gorakhpur on October 16, 1943, to attend a Bahá'í Summer School in Delhi. She fell ill three days later and passed away calmly on the 4th of November. Her death was so serene and peaceful that everyone, including the doctor by her bedside, first thought she had gone to sleep.

Her body was placed in a beautiful coffin, scented with rose water and camphor and brought to the National Bahá'í Centre where the friends recited prayers through the night and the next day. Then they all gathered round the coffin with lovely bouquets of flowers to say the special Bahá'í prayer for the dead. Bhargava's whole family was there too, including his aged sister. The occasion was very beautiful and dignified.

Dear Shyamdulari had the distinction of being the first Bahá'í from Hindu background to be buried according to Bahá'í rites. The Guardian's secretary wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly:

“Please convey to Dr. Bhargava the assurance of the Guardian's prayers on behalf of his departed wife, and tell him that his courageous stand in having his wife buried according to Bahá'í law is highly commendable and cannot but hasten the emancipation of our beloved Faith.”¹

¹ from a letter dated March 19, 1944

Dawlat Vajdí

1878?–1974

Another great name is that of Dawlat Khánum¹ Vajdí. She lived a long life during which she served the Faith with undiminished fervour. She came to India from Írán as a very young girl and was married at the age of sixteen or seventeen to Bihmard Vajdí, one of the earliest and most devoted servants of this Cause in Bombay, who had the book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* translated into Gujarati as early as 1924.

Dawlat was great in her own right and gave every ounce of her energy to the service of the Faith. She spent very little on herself but when it came to contributing to the funds of the Cause, she was magnanimous. She gave the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to everyone who crossed her path in life. Even those who came to the door selling eggs or vegetables heard of the Faith through her.

She herself did not belong to a Bahá'í family and accepted the Faith after she was married. She was often insulted by some of her former co-religionists, the Zoroastrians, and one of them never failed to spit and abuse her for being a Bahá'í everytime she passed her by. But Dawlat's faith in Bahá'u'lláh grew stronger day by day.

Her love for 'Abdu'l-Bahá was such that when she heard His name tears would gather in her eyes. She and her husband had the bounty of visiting 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land,

¹ Khánum means “lady” and is used as a sign of respect after the first name.



Dawlat Vajdí

and there is an interesting story in connection with this visit. Dawlat had bought the costliest clothes she could find in Bombay for 'Abdu'l-Bahá and, wrapping them all in a neat bundle, offered them to Him when she arrived in the Holy Land. By chance a poor man came to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house at that time and, standing in the doorway, said, "'Abbás Effendi, you are the guardian of the poor." The Master smiled on him kindly, picked up the package of clothing Dawlat had just brought Him and put it in the hands of the needy man. Dawlat let out a suppressed groan of dismay at the time, but later on she would often say, "'Abdu'l-Bahá taught me the greatest lesson of detachment by what He did that day."

Dawlat conducted Bahá'í classes for children and taught dressmaking to the girls in Bombay. She was a very punctual and regular teacher who did her job well.

Dawlat had no children of her own. One day while on pilgrimage, she caught hold of the hem of the robe of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and asked to be given a child. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reply was, "Inshá'lláh", which means "If it be the Will of God". Years



Dawlat Vajdí

passed and a son was born to Dawlat's younger sister. When the child was a little over two years old, his mother became dangerously ill and, before she died, she said to Dawlat, "All your life you have been longing for a child. Now I am giving you my son, Khudádád."

Khudádád was a sickly child and Dawlat constantly worried over him. Then, while she was on a second pilgrimage in the days of the Guardian, she put Khudádád on the lap of the Greatest Holy Leaf and begged for healing for him. The Greatest Holy Leaf kissed the child and said, "Do not worry about him. He will live to become a man."

After that Dawlat's heart was assured and she never worried over him any more. Khudádád grew up to be a devoted Bahá'í, and Dawlat imparted to him her own enthusiasm for teaching the Cause.

In 1959 Dawlat, Khudádád and his wife pioneered to Ujjain, in Madhya Pradesh. When in 1961, mass teaching started near Ujjain for the first time in India, Dawlat bought a jeep for the Bahá'ís to use for their teaching trips from village to village. She herself never stopped giving the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to anyone who would listen, right up to the last few days of her life.

She died at her pioneering post on October 10, 1974, and will always be remembered for her staunch faith, her love for 'Abdu'l-Bahá and her many qualities of head and heart.

Ghulám-‘Alí Ibráhímji Kurlawala

1896–1978

“His name as a Knight of Bahá’u’lláh has become immortal in the history of the Formative Age of the Cause.”¹

Ghulám-‘Alí Kurlawala was born in a Davúdí² Bohra family of Shí’ih Muslims in the year 1896. They were originally from the Rajputs, the warriors among the Hindu race, who had once been the sword and buckler of the country. That was centuries ago but you could still see the signs of the warrior in Ghulám-‘Alí. He could not bear to hear the Bahá’í Faith being abused or insulted, and it was with difficulty that he controlled his anger.

Rustic and rough, he did not have what people call finesse, but a gradual change came over him after he became a Bahá’í. He learnt of the radiant Báb Who had endured every form of harshness from His enemies; of the Blessed Beauty Who had defeated hatred with love and Who, having spent forty years in incarceration and exile, still prayed that God would show mercy to those who persecuted Him; of the beloved Master Who voluntarily went into exile and imprisonment with His great Father and showed every kindness towards His oppres-

¹ from a letter of the Universal House of Justice, dated Sept. 28, 1978

² or Dawoodi

sors; and of the twenty thousand martyrs of this Cause who forgave their torturers and put sweets into the mouths of their executioners. Ghulám-‘Alí was reborn. Those who had known him before bore witness to the change in him and said, “He was a lion and has become a lamb. This is the miracle of Bahá’u’lláh.”

Ghulám-‘Alí heard of the Bahá’í Cause for the first time in the year 1926 from Dr. M.E. Luqmání, the well-known Bahá’í teacher. For a full year he resisted it with all his might, saying that Islám is the final religion and that prophethood has ended with the Prophet Muḥammad. Dr. Luqmání was well versed on the subject and, with many quotations from Islamic Holy Scriptures, he made Ghulám-‘Alí realize the truth of the Message of Bahá’u’lláh. His inner eye was opened and he accepted the Faith with all his heart. He became a faithful servant of this Cause and served it to the end of his life. His method of teaching the Faith was simple and straightforward. He would discuss the religions of the past and the promises they had given for the advent of Bahá’u’lláh; then he would speak of the ways in which these promises were fulfilled.

Ghulám-‘Alí had hardly received any education and could only write a little Gujarati. After accepting the Bahá’í Faith he felt sorry that he had not received better education and decided to learn the Urdu language. When he was able to read books in Urdu, there was no Bahá’í publication in that language which he did not go through a number of times.

Ghulám-‘Alí was known among Bahá’ís as Kurlawala because he was born in Kurla, a suburb of Bombay, and spent most of his life in that place. By occupation he was a plumber. He could also repair sewing machines, stoves, etc., and manufacture the spare parts of a machine of any kind. He was extremely industrious and honest. He did his utmost to do justice to his trade, therefore he was popular among his customers. But his heart was not really in his work. His love for the Faith was so great that if he did not contact a number of



Ghulám-‘Alí Kurlawala

persons in a day to give them the new Message, he would not be able to sleep that night.

He was so devoted to his spiritual father, Dr. Luqmání, that he would cycle twenty-five kilometres from Kurla to Bombay every alternate day to see him. He was physically strong, and this cycling of fifty kilometres in one day did not tire him. He received spiritual deepening from his teacher and returned home enthused and fortified in his love for Bahá'u'lláh.

After becoming a Bahá'í, he taught the Faith so openly, so dauntlessly and constantly, that the news soon reached the headquarters of the High Priest of the Bohras. Ghulám-‘Alí was summoned and given a long sermon on the superiority of the Bohra community and the great benefits it had received through the benedictions of the High Priest. The second man in the hierarchy, who was speaking to him, then came out with a novel plea. If Ghulám-‘Alí was in need of financial aid, he would receive it. Ghulám-‘Alí was frank with his answer: no one could win him over with money. He had been attracted to Bahá'u'lláh because He was the Manifestation of God and the



Ghulám-‘Alí Kurlawala

Promised One of Islám and of all the past religions. If the priest could convince him otherwise, he would return to the old fold. Then he said, "We were all Hindus originally. How did we accept Islám?" The priest answered, "Our ancestors accepted it because it is the true religion of God." "Were they converted by the lure of money?" asked Ghulám-‘Alí. "God forbid! They were attracted by the reality of the religion," replied the priest. "I, too," said Ghulám-‘Alí, "am attracted by the divine nature of the Bahá’í Faith and I invite you to investigate its teachings." He was then sent away, considered a lost man.

Ghulám-‘Alí was proud of his name. He would smile and say "I am the slave of ‘Alí. ‘Alí is the first part of the name of the Báb (‘Alí-Muḥammad) and the last part of the name of Bahá’u’lláh (Ḥusayn-‘Alí). I must always be faithful to both of my Masters. I have glorious Masters, but if I do not serve them whole-heartedly and with real devotion I will be dismissed." He was therefore extremely conscientious about his work for the Faith and let no opportunity of service slip by.

He taught the Faith in Bombay for many long years, putting his heart and soul into the work. Then a Local Spiritual Assembly was established in Andheri, a suburb of Bombay, and Ghulám-‘Alí was elected as its vice-chairman. He continued to hold this post till he pioneered to Bhopal. There he spoke of the Faith to everyone he could, and this aroused the enmity of the Bohra *mullás* who started to argue with him. Mr. Maḥfúzúl-Ḥaq ‘Ilmí, the famous Bahá’í scholar, and Mrs. Shirin Boman went to help Ghulám-‘Alí. They had discussions with Muslim divines in Bhopal for a full month. Not much came out of it except that one of the Muslim scholars, Mawlaví Yúsuf Sawdágar, said, "The language of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh is as inspired as that of the Qur’án."

Fearing that the Bahá’í Faith might spread throughout the whole of Bhopal, the *mullás* brought pressure on the Muslim ruler and had Ghulám-‘Alí expelled from that city. After



Bahá'ís of Andheri: Kurlawala is standing 2nd from left, holding a child; Dawlat Vajdí is seated 4th from right



Bahá'ís of Andheri: Kurlawala is standing 2nd from left, holding a child; Dawlat Vajdí is seated 4th from right

staying in Bhopal for six months Ghulám-‘Alí spent some months in Ujjain, where Mrs. Boman had gone as a pioneer, and helped her in giving the message of the Faith to all kinds of people there.

The next major step which Ghulám-‘Alí took in the field of pioneering was when he went to Jaipur under the four-and-a-half year Teaching Plan in the year 1949. His self respect always prevented him from accepting financial aid from any source, so he took to pulling a cycle-rickshaw in Jaipur. During the two years that he was there, he succeeded in establishing a Local Spiritual Assembly and a sound Bahá’í community. In Jaipur too, Ghulám-‘Alí went to meet the most important Muslim preacher of the place and informed him of the advent of Bahá’u’lláh. The *mullá* was so infuriated that he told Ghulám-‘Alí to leave his house immediately and never again dare to pass by that lane.

In the year 1953 the beloved Guardian gave the Bahá’í world the plan for the Ten-Year World Crusade. So far, pioneering had been mainly limited to the boundaries of each country. Now the friends were asked to pioneer to virgin lands in foreign countries. The Bahá’ís of India responded immediately and went to the foreign colonies around their country. Mrs. Salisa Kirmání and Mrs. Shírín Núrání pioneered to Karikal; Mr. Qudratu’lláh Rawhání and Mr. Khudáraḥm Muzh-gání to Mahe; Mr. Shiyam Bihari Lal to Pondicherry; Mr. Uday Narain Singh to Sikkim, and later to Tibet; Mr. Ardishír Furúdí and Mr. Shápúr Rawhání to Bhutan; and Mrs. Fírúziḥ Gushtásp Yigánigí and Miss Rawshan Áftábí to Goa. There were others as well, but Ghulám-‘Alí Kurlawala was the first to set out. He pioneered to Daman, a Portuguese colony, reaching there on June 21, 1953, and earning for himself the title of “Knight of Bahá’u’lláh”.

He did a lot of work for the Faith in his new pioneering post. Two things prompted him to exert himself to the utmost. First of all he considered this work a most sacred task en-

trusted to him by the beloved Guardian. Secondly he found that the people of Daman did little except drinking and smuggling, and never bothered about God or religion, so Ghulám-‘Alí felt impelled to work extra hard. He spoke about the Bahá’í Faith to as many people as possible, of different shades of opinion and religious background, and tried to awaken them to the fact that the Promised One of the world had come and it was incumbent upon them to investigate His claim.

In Daman, too, when Ghulám-‘Alí started his teaching activities, there was great concern among the *mullás* residing in that area, and Muslim divines were called from Bombay to talk to him. They had a meeting with him but refused to discuss his beliefs; instead, they directed him to come to Bombay to discuss the Day of Judgement and the revival of Islám.

Then the butchers of Daman, who were all Muslims, lodged a complaint against Ghulám-‘Alí, saying that he was indulging in anti-Islamic activities, and asking the government to send him away from Daman. This resulted in a police inquiry and the decision arrived at was that Ghulám-‘Alí was a peace-loving man and had nothing to do with Islám. He was preaching an independent religion which advocates peace and good-will. After this incident stricter police measures were introduced in the town, Ghulám-‘Alí continued his activities and succeeded in establishing a Local Spiritual Assembly in Daman.

One day news reached the National Spiritual Assembly that Ghulám-‘Alí was ill. Mr. G.H. Amreliwala and I were asked to go and visit him in Daman. At the customs check-post there, the man on duty winked at us and said, “I wish you a merry time”. We laughed for he was evidently referring to the prohibition of alcohol in India and the overflow of wine in Daman. We found Ghulám-‘Alí bed-ridden. It was a pleasure to give him a good bath, clean his house and procure medical aid. After a few days we were back and by chance the same man was on duty at the customs check-post. He recognised

us, smiled and hoped we had had a good time. Yes, we had indeed had the best of times, looking after a dear friend, meeting the young Local Spiritual Assembly, telling them of the importance of the global Crusade launched by our Guardian, and discussing their teaching plans. Could there have been a more pleasant way of spending our time in Daman?

Ghulám-‘Alí stayed in Daman for two years before returning to Bombay where he resumed his plumbing business. His Bahá’í activities were carried on with the same fervour as before.

In those days a Shí‘ih priest named Siyyid ‘Abbás Raḍaví had started a series of sermons for the month of Muḥarram in which he made it a point to abuse the Bahá’ís. He advertised the Muḥarram gatherings in the mosque through newspaper columns and Ghulám-‘Alí decided to attend one of them. Raḍaví, after a brief reference to the historical events which had taken place in Muḥarram, and a few words about the greatness of the Shí‘ih Imáms, started attacking the Bahá’í Faith. When he had finished, he invited questions. Ghulám-‘Alí got up and said, “I had come to learn about the history of the sacred month of Muḥarram, but you brushed those events aside with a few words and spent your time abusing the Bahá’ís. What have you to say about the advent of the promised Qá’im which has been repeatedly referred to by the Imáms? Don’t you know that the most important mission of the Imáms was to prepare the Muslims to receive the Qá’im? How can you prove that the Báb was not the One they had referred to?”

No sooner had he said this than there was an uproar in the mosque and Ghulám-‘Alí was attacked by the fanatical mob. His clothes were torn, his pockets picked, his shoes stolen, and his spectacles broken. Then the police were called and it was alleged that Ghulám-‘Alí was a drunkard who had come to the mosque to create disorder in the meeting.

Ghulám-‘Alí was taken to the police station and then to a

hospital where he was carefully examined to see if he had taken any liquor. The doctor's report showed no signs of alcohol and Ghulám-‘Alí was released. It was after midnight and he reached his home in the small hours of the morning. But he had done his work well because he had proclaimed the Bahá’í Faith to hundreds of people in the mosque, and had created a desire in the hearts of some to investigate the claims of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. After that incident, ‘Abbás Raḍaví stopped abusing the Bahá’í Faith.

This was not the only time Ghulám-‘Alí was beaten for the sake of his religion. To my knowledge, he received quite a number of beatings from the Muslims during his many years of teaching, but no amount of persecution could dampen his enthusiasm.

Ghulám-‘Alí was very scrupulous in attending the Nineteen Day Feasts and the meetings held on Bahá’í Holy Days. On the night of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh or ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, when the meeting ended well after midnight, Ghulám-‘Alí would walk a mile from the Bahá’í Centre in Apollo Street to Victoria Terminus where he would spend the rest of the night on the benches in the railway station before catching the first train to Kurla in the morning.

Sometime after his return from Daman, Ghulám-‘Alí received an injury as the result of an explosion. This confined him to hospital for some months, but even from his sick bed he continued teaching the Faith.

His health was never the same after that. He had had a strong constitution and had lived a rough and tough life, bearing hardships cheerfully in the path of God for more than forty years, but now his body could take no more physical strain.

For the last three years of his life his eyesight failed and it was not possible for him to do any plumbing. Yet he would open his shop and sit there to teach the Faith, and everyone who came to him would hear of the advent of Bahá’u’lláh. Finally, on July 3, 1978, he left this transitory world to go to

his Beloved at the age of eighty-two.

Ghulám-‘Alí was neither educated nor rich. He was a labourer all his life, but spiritually he was a king. He was generous from the core of his heart. He delighted in serving every one. He loved his fellow believers and proudly associated himself with the Bahá’í Faith under all circumstances.

He believed in Bahá’u’lláh at a time when only a few hundred of his countrymen had embraced this Cause and he lived to see the Faith flourish and expand in the land of India. He played his part truly and well. May Bahá’u’lláh bless his noble soul.

Sháh Bahrá[́]m Mu'bidzá[́]dih

1901 – 1980

“You are numbered among the loved ones of God and the courageous, faithful servants of His divine Threshold.”¹

I t is difficult to find a Bahá'í more devoted and attached to his Faith, more self-sacrificing and sincere towards his fellow believers, than Sháh Bahrá[́]m Mu'bidzá[́]dih. I saw him for the first time in Karachi; that was in the year 1936. His face was spiritual, his eyes were luminous, and his language was flowing Persian—sweet and inspiring. I liked him at first sight and there was friendship between us from that moment—a friendship which grew and mellowed with the passage of time.

We met at least four to five times a year, sometimes more frequently. Mu'bidzá[́]dih always spoke of the Faith, of its greatness, its glorious history, of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and, especially, of the beloved Guardian who had invited him to the Holy Land in 1932 and had kept him there for one month. Mu'bidzá[́]dih also spoke with great admiration of the old Bahá'ís in India during the days of 'Abdu'l-Bahá—of Jamshíd Ḥakímíyán, Khusraw Bimán, Jamshíd Zaynu'l-'Ábidín, Bihmard Vajdí, Bahrá[́]m Ma'naví, Bahrá[́]m Surúsh, Bahrá[́]m Gushtáspí and others.

¹ a free translation from a letter of the Guardian to Mu'bidzá[́]dih, written in Persian

It was my good fortune to travel in the company of Mu'bid-zádih in 1975, for about a week in Jodhpur and Ajmer, and I used the opportunity to get to know as much of his life-story as possible. So I shall attempt to give it in his own words:

I come from the Zoroastrian priest-class. My ancestors had all been priests since the days of the noble prophet, Zoroaster. Not only were they priests by profession, but they had deep knowledge of our Holy Scriptures and were very staunch in their beliefs. But my father, Mu'bid Khudábakhsh,¹ left his ancestral occupation and took to trade. He imported goods from India, had business dealings with this country and came to like the place. Before my birth two sons were born to him who did not live for long. When I was born on January 25, 1901, my father's sister named me Sháh Bahrám. While naming me, she is reported to have said, "God willing, he will live to see the Promised One of Zoroaster, Sháh Bahrám Varjávand." Her wish was fulfilled when I accepted the Bahá'í Faith and visited the Holy Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.²

I grew up as a staunch Zoroastrian and, until the age of sixteen, I could not tolerate any other religion. At this age my father thought of sending me to India for occupational pursuits. Before that he sent me to stay at his sister's house in Iṣfahán so that her husband could teach me proper Persian. I distinctly recall this journey. Motor trucks had just been introduced in Írán and the first truck that ran on the road to Iṣfahán took me there along with two other Zoroastrians from Yazd. I soon discovered that these fellow travellers were not real Zoroastrians. They offered their prayers in a language

¹ Mu'bid is the title of a Zoroastrian priest.

² Bahá'ís consider Bahá'u'lláh to be the One promised in all the Holy Books of the past.



Sháh Bahrám Mu'bidzádi

and manner altogether different from ours.¹ So I looked upon them as suspects and kept aloof from them during the whole journey.

When I reached Isfahán, I found that the uncle at whose house I was to stay was away on business, but I was invited to stay at his home. Each morning I would offer my prayers scrupulously, according to my ancestral custom. One day, while I was offering my prayers on the terrace, a venerable Muslim from the neighbouring house saluted me with great cordiality. I was flattered. Muslims hated Zoroastrians like poison and looked down upon them, yet this respectable gentleman had saluted me! I returned his greeting with a smile. He invited me to a cup of tea and actually served me tea in a cup like his own and made me sit with him as an equal! Then he asked, "What prayer were you saying?" "The Zoroastrian prayer, of course," I answered. He said, "Do you understand

¹ Zoroastrians pray in the ancient language of their Holy Book, the Avesta.



Sháh Bahrám Mu'bidzádi

the meaning of the words you recite?" "Yes, I do," I replied. Then, to my great surprise, he read one of the verses of the Avesta and translated it word by word. I was so amazed at his scholarship that I could never again boast of knowing the language of the Avesta in his presence. After perhaps fifteen minutes of conversation, he said, "Now I must leave you as I have many things to do."

The next day he again invited me to his place and spoke about Zoroaster. He always referred to Him with great reverence and called Him "the noble prophet, Zoroaster". He made mention of His greatness and majesty, and spoke about the beautiful teachings He had brought. He also told me that Zoroaster had stated that one day Sháh Bahrám Varjávand would appear to create a new World Order. Then he asked if I knew of any prophets in Írán before the advent of Zoroaster. I did not. He gave me information on the subject. Next he started to tell me about the different prophets who had come after Zoroaster, and spoke about one of Them each day. At the outset I was reluctant to hear of anyone except the Founder of my own religion, but as the days passed my interest was aroused and I was eager to learn more and more. By the time my host came to Bahá'u'lláh, I was a confirmed Bahá'í! Having taught me the Faith, he left Isfahán to carry on with his teaching work in other cities. The name of this great teacher, and my spiritual father, was Fádíl-i-Tíhrání. It was through him that I accepted the Bahá'í Faith.

When I became a Bahá'í, a friend suggested that I write a letter to the beloved Guardian and express my loyalty to him. This I did, and signed my name as Sháh Bahrám son of Mu'bid Khudábakhsh. In his reply, the Guardian addressed me as Sháh Bahrám Mu'bidzádi.¹ This explains my surname which I have used from that day onwards.

¹ Mu'bidzádi means son of a Mu'bid.

I came to India in 1928. I had been given a letter of introduction by my father to take to Jamshíd Khudádád Hákímíyán. In his letter my father had requested Hákímíyán to look after me and help me find a job. Someone else had also given me a letter for the Suhaylí brothers, Isfandíyár and Rustam (may God bless their memory; they were indeed noble souls). After my arrival in India, however, I went to stay in the Parsi fire-temple near Flora Fountain in Bombay. I put on my dastur's garb, and moved about as a dastur for quite some months.

Then one day I said to myself, "I should go to meet Hákímíyán and the Suhaylí brothers." Since the Suhaylís ran a shop, they were more readily accessible. So I went to their shop, the Excelsior Restaurant, to deliver the letter. An elderly man accosted me outside the shop. He smiled at me and said, "Though you look like a Zoroastrian, you somehow do not seem to be one." I smiled back and went in to deliver the letter to the Suhaylís. Then I inquired about Jamshíd Hákímíyán to whom the letter from my father was to be given, and he turned out to be the same gentleman who had spoken to me outside the Excelsior Restaurant.

I was deeply impressed by these souls who, though from Zoroastrian background, had become such wonderful Bahá'ís. Nothing was as important to them as the Bahá'í Faith, and they talked only of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian, and the divine teachings. Yet I did not disclose to them that I, too, was a Bahá'í. I kept my faith to myself but continued to visit them. Whenever they spoke of the Bahá'í Cause, I listened without showing any reaction. I continued to live in the Parsi fire-temple in the garb of a priest, but did not participate in the priestly functions; nor did I perform any of the rites and ceremonies of which there are hundreds among the Zoroastrians, for this Faith has indeed become a religion of rituals. At the end of the first month, my share of income from the ceremonies was brought to me. It was seven hundred and fifty



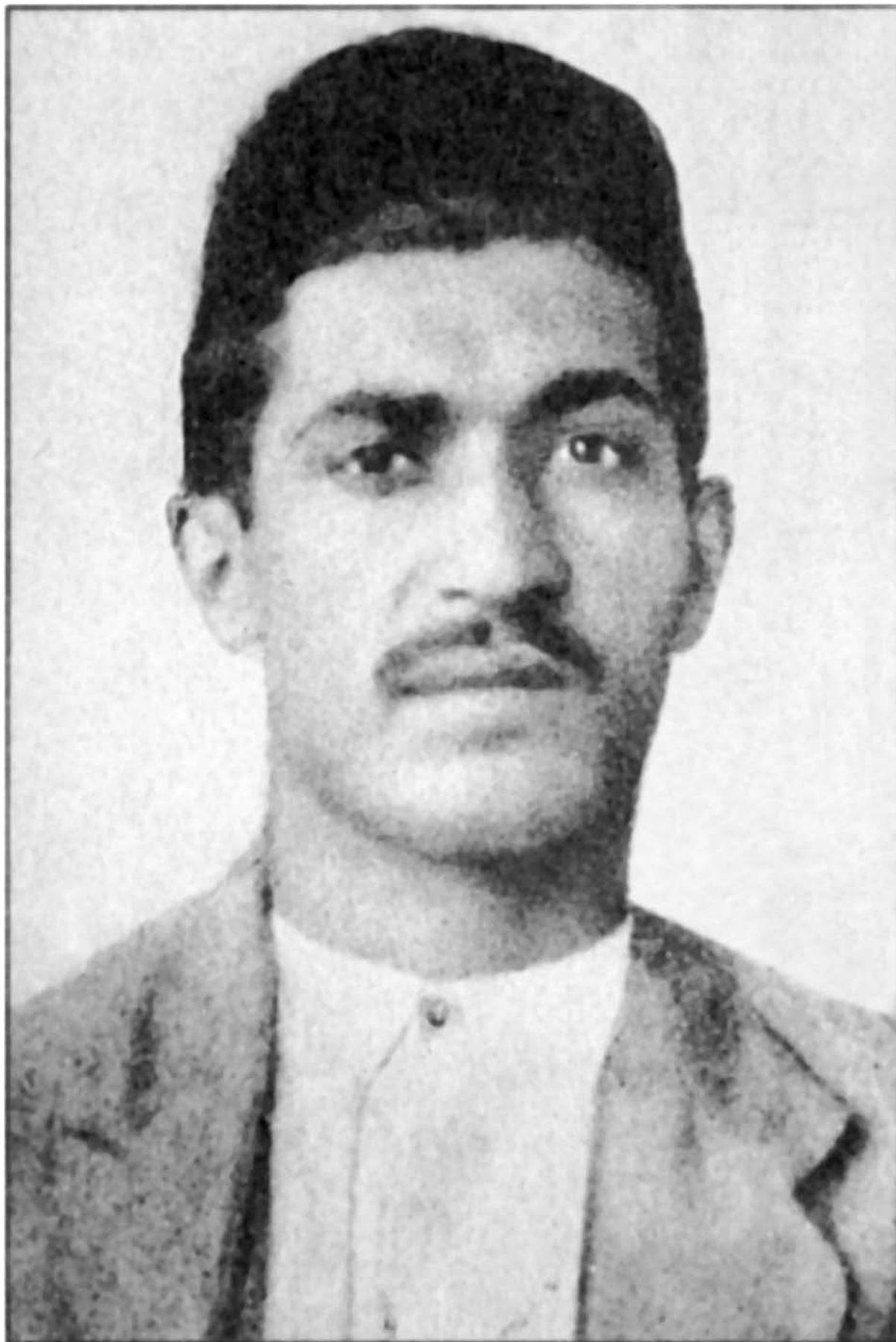
Mu'bidzádih dressed as a Zoroastrian priest

rupees.¹ Although I accepted it, my conscience was not at rest. So I decided to return the money. This action aroused the suspicion of the other priests and they asked me if I were a Bahá'í. I kept quiet about it and continued to reside in the fire-temple.

One day Jamshíd Ḥakímíyán took me to the Bahá'í Centre and I started to go there often after that. The Bahá'ís came to look upon me as a sympathiser and lover of the Faith, but not as a Bahá'í. After some months, however, I became an active member and fully participated in the affairs of the Cause. I was also frequently invited to the house of Ḥakímíyán, and these meetings with him were most instructive for me.

I now started working as an assistant in a restaurant owned by a Zoroastrian, but he found out that I was a Bahá'í and sent me away. In the next six months I had to leave four other jobs

¹ a very substantial sum in those days



Mu'bidzádiḥ dressed as a Zoroastrian priest

because of the same reason. After this I was employed by Yazdání & Company, a commercial firm belonging to fanatical Zoroastrians who were greatly opposed to the Bahá'í Faith. I was very much respected by them because I came from their priest-class, and I did not discuss my beliefs with them.

After some time my employers obtained a copy of a book written by an enemy of the Bahá'í Faith in which he had used abusive language and brought many false charges against the Bahá'ís. They would show this book to anyone who came to their office and would laugh at the Bahá'í Faith. Though I was greatly upset by their behaviour, I made no display of my feelings. One day I spoke about it to Ḥakímíyán and said, "Why don't you come and remedy this unbearable state of affairs?" He said he would come and, sure enough, he visited the place one day. The Yazdánís, with whom he was on visiting terms, received him with a welcome, offered him a cup of tea and then brought out the book as usual. Ḥakímíyán kept quiet and did not say a word. I began to despair. He neither looked at the book nor made any reference to it. When he got up to go, however, he said to my employers, "There is a well-known story from the celebrated Persian poet, Rúmí, about a man who, while passing through the bazaar of perfumers, fainted away and fell on the ground. They brought different perfumes with which to revive him but that worsened his condition. Then a passerby who recognized him said, 'Leave him to me, I shall restore him to consciousness. This man is a tanner and the smell of perfume does not agree with him.' He then brought a foul-smelling piece of hide which he held to the man's nostrils and lo, he opened his eyes and rose up! Now, you, too, were mute when the perfumes of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá were released, but have become eloquent with the filth of such abuses and lies." Having said this, Ḥakímíyán went away, but so great was the effect of his words that my employers never again showed that book to anyone. Shortly after that incident, however, I left them, trust-

ing in God and His unlimited bounty.

I could not find another job and became absolutely penniless. For a few months I lived close to starvation. Once I even thought of drowning myself in the sea, but when I reached the seashore I felt very drowsy and, lying down on the beach, I went to sleep. I had a dream in which I saw 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He lifted me up by the hand and sent me away from that place. When I awoke I decided not to put an end to my life because I felt that I had a duty towards my Faith which I should discharge with all my heart and soul, and that I should remain steadfast through the tests and trials of life. Suddenly the idea came to me that I should go to Calcutta. This meant expenses and I did not have a single rupee. I went to Rustam Suhaylí who was very happy to see me and served me with coffee and cakes. Then he reprimanded me, in his sweet, gentle way, for not coming to see him all these months, and for keeping away from the Bahá'í gatherings. When I told him I needed a loan of forty rupees, he said, "Why only forty? You can have more if you need it."

The next day I was travelling to Calcutta; but as the train gathered speed I was filled with apprehension, and the farther I got from Bombay, the greater became my anxiety. Calcutta was the largest city in India and I did not have any place to go. I had heard of an Iranian Bahá'í of Zoroastrian descent, Firaydún Farámarz, who lived in Calcutta but I had never met him and did not know how to find him. I began to chant prayer after prayer and repeated the Tablet of Ahmad over and over again. This must have touched the heart of the Blessed Beauty. Soon a young Parsi boarded the train and came and sat next to me. I asked him where he was going and he replied he was on his way to Calcutta where he worked in a restaurant belonging to a man called Firaydún Farámarz! How wonderful it was to hear these words! What a relief they brought to me, and how kind was Bahá'u'lláh who had answered my prayers! The joy I felt cannot be expressed. I now chanted another

prayer with a happy heart, expressing my gratitude to Bahá'u'lláh and making a promise to teach His Faith to others. After two days I was in Calcutta, standing before Firaydún Farámarz.

My meeting with Firaydún was rather strange. As soon as he saw me entering his restaurant, his whole body began to shake. Then he rubbed his eyes and looked at me again as though he could not believe what he saw. Finally, he called me to him and said, "Who are you? How have you come here?" I said, "My name is Sháh Bahrám. I am the son of Mu'bid Khudábakhsh of Írán. I am a Bahá'í and I have come here from Bombay in search of employment." He looked at me again from top to toe and said, "You say you have come from Bombay. Have you travelled 2500 kilometres to get a small job in a restaurant?" I said, "Yes, I have. Perhaps someday I shall have the opportunity to tell you my story. For the present, I am in need of employment, however small the job." He said, "Get busy then, you can start right away." He agreed to employ me for forty rupees a month.

I proved useful to Firaydún as I was knowledgeable in this line of business and I was willing to work hard. He soon expressed satisfaction at my work and showed his trust in me. Then, one day, while we were having lunch together, he said, "Sháh Bahrám, for a long time I have yearned to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land but I did not see how I could leave the business. How was I to find a trustworthy man who would look after it in my absence? Everyday I prayed to Bahá'u'lláh to make this possible. Then one night I saw the beloved Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in a dream and I saw you walking behind Him. The Master said, 'Firaydún, here is a reliable young man. He will look after your business in your absence. Now you can come to visit the Holy Land without any worries.' The very next day I saw you entering the shop. You must have seen me shaking and rubbing my eyes. I could not believe what I saw. I am so grateful to 'Abdu'l-Bahá Who

has made it possible for an unworthy person like myself to visit the divine Threshold.”

Firaydún had a great love for the Faith. He longed to serve it but did not know where to start. When I joined him, he asked me to try and find out if there were any other Bahá'ís in Calcutta. I moved about in the city and, after quite a long search, found other Bahá'ís. There had been a Bahá'í community in Calcutta for some time, mostly composed of people from Muslim background. Apart from this, there were also Bahá'ís in two other towns nearby—Shrirampur and Kamarhatti. It was a great joy to find these devoted Bahá'ís who knew dozens of prayers by heart in Persian and Arabic.

At Firaydún's request I also found a suitable place to rent which could serve as a Bahá'í Centre. After some years, he also bought a piece of land and donated it for the Ḥazírat'ul-Quds.¹

For one year I was happy in my work and active in the service of the Faith. Then Firaydún's brother and partner, Mr. Sháh, who was a staunch Zoroastrian and who had no love for the Bahá'í Faith, came back to Calcutta after a long absence. At first, when he found out that I came from the priest-class, he asked Firaydún to raise my salary to two hundred rupees per month. But my Bahá'í activities upset him and one day he told me I should stop my Bahá'í work and give all my time to the restaurant. The employers, he said, were paying me to work in the shop and they expected me to spend all my time there. I politely declined to stop serving the Faith and this brought about the termination of my employment in the closing months of 1931.

Before leaving for Calcutta, I had written to the beloved Guardian about my difficult life and he had graciously invited me to visit the Holy Land. Now, after nineteen months, I

¹ A Bahá'í Centre has now been built on the land bought by Firaydún.

decided to go on pilgrimage and arrived in Haifa in January 1932. To be with the Guardian was the rarest privilege and the happiest experience of my life. The Guardian was the personification of kindness, and those around him each felt that he was receiving more love and attention than the others. One night I said to my fellow pilgrim, Mr. Raḥmatu'lláh 'Alá'í, "I feel that our Beloved is showing very special love and consideration towards me." Mr. 'Alá'í smiled and said that he too felt exactly the same way about the love he received from the Guardian. We were both right, of course, because our Guardian loved all of us very much.

To sit with Shoghi Effendi was like being in heaven. In his presence one understood the real importance and significance of the words 'Abdu'l-Bahá had used for him: "the Sign of God on Earth". To be with him was a real education. He was the quickener of the heart. He deepened the understanding of those around him and moulded their lives according to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. He once said that if people did not hearken to these teachings they would be exposing themselves to doom.

The following are a few of the things I remember having heard from the Guardian:¹

1. A Bahá'í should keep his word; fulfilling a promise is binding on us.

2. Punctuality should become an essential habit of our lives. If we do not keep our word and are not punctual, confirmations will not come to us.

3. Teaching is the foremost duty of a Bahá'í. When teaching an individual, you should allow him to pour out his heart. You should listen to him without interrupting and encourage him to say what he wishes, then speak to him with wisdom and love,

¹ Mu'bidzádiḥ's recollections are a pilgrim's notes and may not, therefore, be absolutely authentic.

showing understanding and appreciation of his statements. If you have no time, you should fix another appointment.

4. The friends must keep up correspondence with one another. Letters strengthen our spirits and increase affection. They also add to the knowledge and experience of both parties.

5. The Local Spiritual Assembly must be elected by the whole community strictly according to the laws of Bahá'í administration. The voting must be conducted in an atmosphere of love and spirituality after prayers are chanted and the seriousness of election is understood. The community must recognize the importance of the Local Spiritual Assembly and be prepared to obey it. The Assembly must meet regularly and guide the community according to the principles of Bahá'í administration.

6. The election of suitable members for the Assembly is the key to a healthy and spiritual community. The foundation of the Bahá'í community is the Nineteen Day Feast. During the Nineteen Day Feast gathering the friends become acquainted with each other and find out for themselves who are the most devoted and knowledgeable, the most regular, painstaking and courageous Bahá'ís and, therefore, worthy of being elected onto the Assembly. The Guardian explained at length the importance of the proper election of the Local Spiritual Assembly and of its chairman, secretary and treasurer, as well as the election of delegates to the National Convention.

7. The secretary is the most important member of the Assembly:

a—He must visit the office every day at fixed hours.

b—He must receive people with much love and kindness and listen to their problems.

c—If he can solve the problems himself, he must do so, otherwise he should place these cases before the Spiritual Assembly and get the solutions.

8. The chairman of the Assembly is a respected person in

the community. He should be fair and just, and must conduct his duties according to Bahá'í administration. He must make a study of Bahá'í laws and ordinances.

9. The reins of administration will pass on to the youth. It is, therefore, imperative that the youth be well trained. But being trained in the Faith alone, or being only well educated in schools and colleges, is not enough. Both must be combined. More important than anything is that the youth should cultivate qualities such as humility, faithfulness, uprightness, sincerity and other angelic virtues because it is through these alone that they can attract divine confirmation. God forbid that they should become arrogant! They should be manifestations of good manners and kindliness.

10. Building a Bahá'í House of Worship is a most important undertaking in India. God willing, we shall lay its foundations. This will enhance the prestige of the Faith. Crowds will enter the citadel of the Faith because of the Temple.

11. The people of India are God-fearing, spiritual and simple. It is our duty to guide them. If not guided, they will become drowned in materialism and politics. Then it will be very difficult to attract them to the grandeur of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'ís must love them and teach them the Faith.

12. Bahá'ís must cultivate relationships with the heads of State and high officers of the government, and give them the message of the Faith. Books and literature must be given to them so that they may become informed about the Bahá'í Faith and be prepared to defend it if necessary.

I was in the Holy Land from January 1st to February 7th. During this time the beloved Guardian sent me to Jerusalem, to 'Adasíyyih and other places to meet the friends. I was in the presence of the Guardian twenty-two days in all and these were the most blissful days I have ever known. Shoghi Effendi tried to be with the pilgrims as much as he could. Sometimes he would be with us for several hours a day. He spoke to us of the greatness of our Faith, of how it is influencing the world

and how its influence will increase in the future. He wanted the Bahá'ís to cultivate the qualities which will distinguish them as a new race of men. He took us with him to the Holy Shrines where he himself would offer prayers and ask us to do the same.

I felt that the Guardian always knew what was passing through my mind. If I thought of a question, the answer came from him immediately. This was also the experience of other pilgrims. One day he made a very kind reference to me and said, "There have been Zoroastrian priests who have accepted this Cause before you, but you are the first among them to proclaim your faith openly."

I cannot describe the day of parting from beloved Shoghi Effendi. My eyes were veiled with tears and I could see nothing. Words failed me. The Guardian was full of understanding and he consoled me. Then he repeated his instructions to me, that I should go to Írán to meet the friends and impress upon them that there is nothing more important than teaching and guiding the people to the Cause. The places he wished me to visit were Khániqayn, Kirmánsháh, Hamadán, Qazvín, Ṭihrán, Iṣfahán, Shíráz, Yazd, Kirmán and Záhidán.

After visiting these places in Írán, I crossed the border and came back to India. On my way to Bombay I visited Quetta, Lahore and Karachi. This was in 1932. Later these cities became part of Pakistan.

Wherever I went the Bahá'ís thronged to hear the news I had brought from the Guardian, the Holy Land and the Shrines, and to listen to the directives which the Guardian had sent for them. These messages which were read out to the friends everywhere, uplifted their spirits and inspired their hearts.

Back in Bombay once more, I decided to open a restaurant in partnership with other friends. I was also elected as secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Bombay, a post I held till 1937. Then I decided to go to settle in Poona.

There was a lively Bahá'í community in Poona. Khusraw

Bimán, that great man who had had such deep love for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and who had been impatient to make the whole world Bahá’í, had just died. But the two Yigánigí brothers—Isfandíyár and Surúsh—Jamshíd Zaynu’l-‘Ábidín, Asadu’lláh Kirmání, Bahman Bihí and others were there, all personal friends of mine. I soon started my Bahá’í activities in Poona and served as the secretary of the Local Assembly for four years. The Poona community was very closely knit and the Bahá’ís lived as one family. Teaching the Faith went on very well and everyone helped in spreading the Message.

When Khusraw Bimán passed away in 1936, the National Hotel was bought over by Isfandíyár Yigánigí. Its doors were always open to Bahá’ís. Whenever one of them visited Poona, he was Isfandíyár’s guest. Isfandíyár was particularly kind to me, so much so that I spent some hours with him every day.

Isfandíyár’s brother, Surúsh, pioneered to Bangalore in 1941, during the Six-Year Plan, and I went to be with him quite often, sometimes for months at a stretch. Similarly, I went to Mysore to help Jamshíd Zaynu’l-‘Ábidín from 1943 onwards. I made repeated visits to Mahe, Karikal, Pondicherry and many other cities where our pioneers were busy serving the Faith, or where help was needed.

In 1945, our pioneers in Madras, Khusraw Ízadyár and A.K. Furúdí, needed assistance to form the Local Assembly. A number of friends volunteered to travel to Madras and I was one of them. The South came to have a special appeal for me. It fascinated me.

In 1947, I went to stay in Madras for some time because the Local Assembly there had lapsed. After that I went to Salem, Coimbatore, Ootacamund, Coonoor and other places. It was a long tour.

When Mrs. Dolly Ráhpaymá pioneered to Ernakulam, I was asked to go and help her. We organised a successful teaching campaign and conveyed the message of the Cause to hundreds of people in the city and surrounding villages. After two years

a strong Local Spiritual Assembly was formed in Ernakulam.

Next I was asked to pioneer to Trivandrum, together with Mr. and Mrs. Dinyár Jamásp Akhtarí and their children. We first stayed in a hotel but the daily expenses were so high that we could not afford them. So one evening we went to search for a house. We had gone quite a distance from our hotel and it was dark when the street lights went out. Then it started to rain heavily. We could see nothing at all and lost our way, not knowing whether to take a turn or go straight on. It was a difficult situation in unfamiliar surroundings. All of a sudden there was streak of light on our path. A young man who had seen us from a window and guessed that we were stranded came out of his house to help us. He took us inside where we met his parents. When we told them we were looking for a house, they offered us a building of their own and advised us to go back to see it the next morning. The young man, whose name was Sukumaran Nair accompanied us to our hotel. We gave him the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and he seemed interested. Then he came back the following day to show us the house which we liked and rented. This was to become the Bahá'í Centre of Trivandrum, and the first Bahá'í of the city was none other than Sukumaran Nair himself who was to be our pillar of strength in the days to follow.

When I was going to Madras in 1949, Sukumaran accompanied me. He was to stay at the house of a Mr. Menon whose wife was related to him. Through him the whole Menon family became our staunch supporters and, later on, firm Bahá'ís themselves.

By now I had handed over my shop in Poona to my brother and stayed in the South, travelling through the States of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh continuously. There were about one hundred communities and some thousands of Bahá'ís in these places, most of whom I knew by their first names.

I went to Assam in 1960 and had the most beautiful time

there. By the grace of the Blessed Beauty, it was possible to form a number of Local Spiritual Assemblies in the north-eastern region, and we had a community in every major city or district—Shillong, Gauhati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Nagaland, Mizo area, etc. In all these places there was a sprinkling of Bahá'ís but they were devoted. We were also successful in getting literature translated and printed in the local languages.

Then, in 1962, came the Indo-Chinese war. One night, when I had gone to sleep in my hotel, I was awakened by flashes of torch-light. I got up and saw some policemen in the room who had brought a warrant of arrest for me. I had no objection to go with them but asked them to postpone it till the morning. The hotel proprietor stood as my guarantor, and I could rest for the night. The next day I went to the police station and was taken to the Superintendent who asked me many questions. He wanted to see Bahá'í literature and I gave him what I had. He was perfectly satisfied but asked me to leave the area anyway as he was not sure what might happen next. I requested him to allow me to stay until I had finished printing a pamphlet in Assamese. He immediately demanded to see what I was printing and kept the manuscript for three days before he returned it, quite satisfied that it was alright. I reported the matter to the National Spiritual Assembly and was ordered to leave Assam.

One more thing comes to mind when I think of my stay in Assam. Once, while in Gauhati, I received a letter saying that Mr. A. Sachindranath Williams, a firm and brilliant Bahá'í who was a pilot, was confined in a military hospital. I hurried to see him. When I was inside the hospital the guards arrested me and made a big affair out of it. I was taken from one officer to another. Everyone wanted to know who I was, what I was doing there and so on. After a lot of interrogation I was informed that I could not see my friend. I had taken two jars of honey with me and they promised to deliver these with a message to him. After two hours they brought me the news

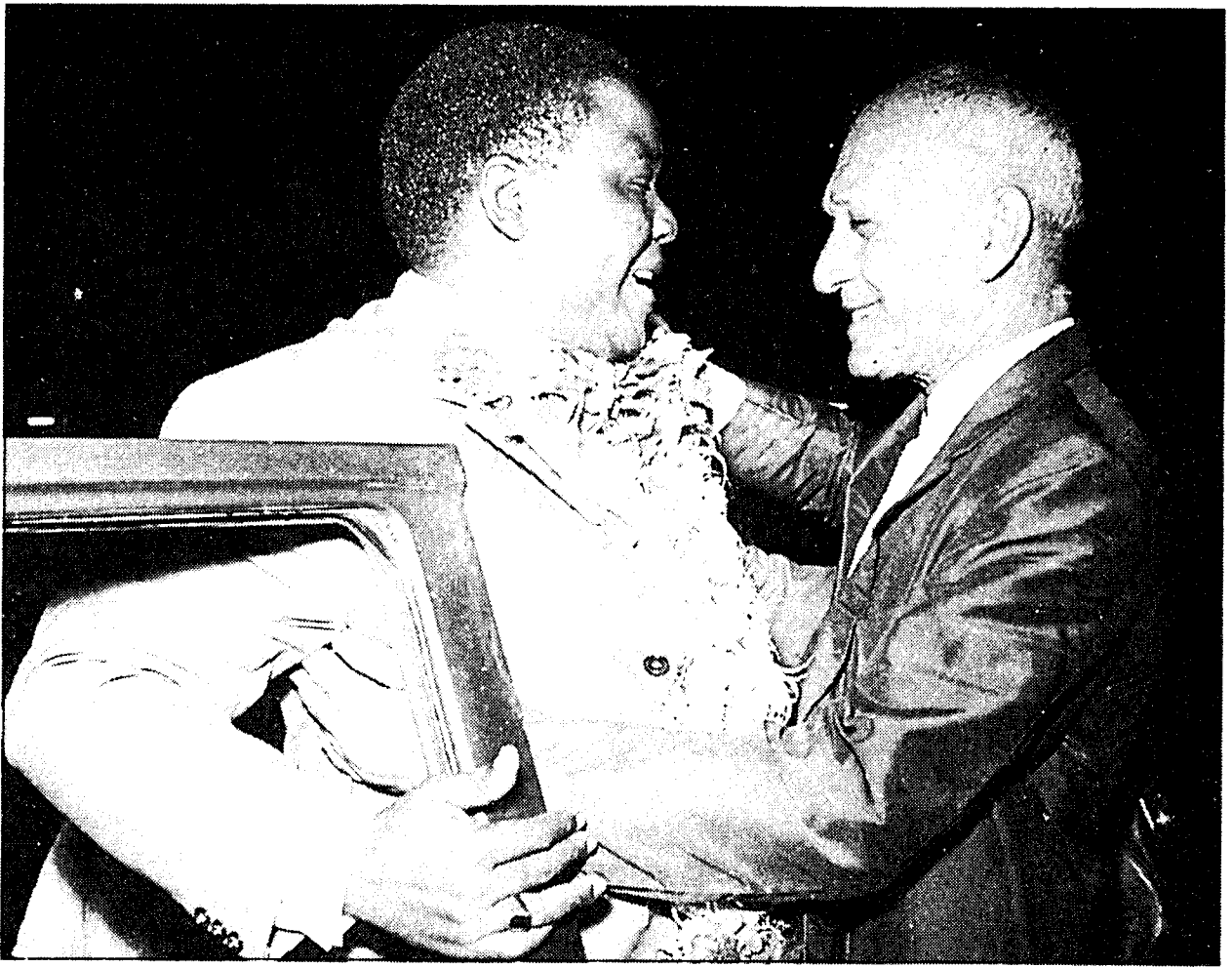
that the honey was given to Mr. Williams and I left the hospital satisfied that he knew I was there in the area. I met him six months later and asked if he had received the honey. He replied in the negative. We took the incident lightly and had a laugh over it.

Some of my cherished memories are of the times when I had the great honour of accompanying a number of the Hands of the Cause who travelled around India on different occasions. The late Mr. Ṭarázu'lláh Samandarí, the esteemed Hand of the Cause of God, travelled in India on three different occasions. I had the privilege of accompanying him and was much impressed by the saintly nature of this great man.

It was my good fortune to travel with Mr. Horace Holley on his tour of southern India in 1953. Mr. Holley could explain the divine nature of the Bahá'í Cause with eloquent tongue and pen. He had been very dear to both the Master and the Guardian because of his great devotion to the Cause, and because he was always ready to serve the Faith. He had been the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States for many decades.

In 1962, the Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum came to India. When she went to Ootacamund I had the pleasure to be with her. One day I received a message from a Bahá'í family living in a village close to Quilon in Kerala. They said they would be greatly honoured if they could receive Amatu'l-Bahá in their home. Rúhíyyih Khánum's programme was packed and I wondered if she could go, but I discharged my duty and gave her the message. She said she would be happy to go, and stayed with the family in the village for one night, enjoyed their company and offered them profuse thanks for their hospitality.

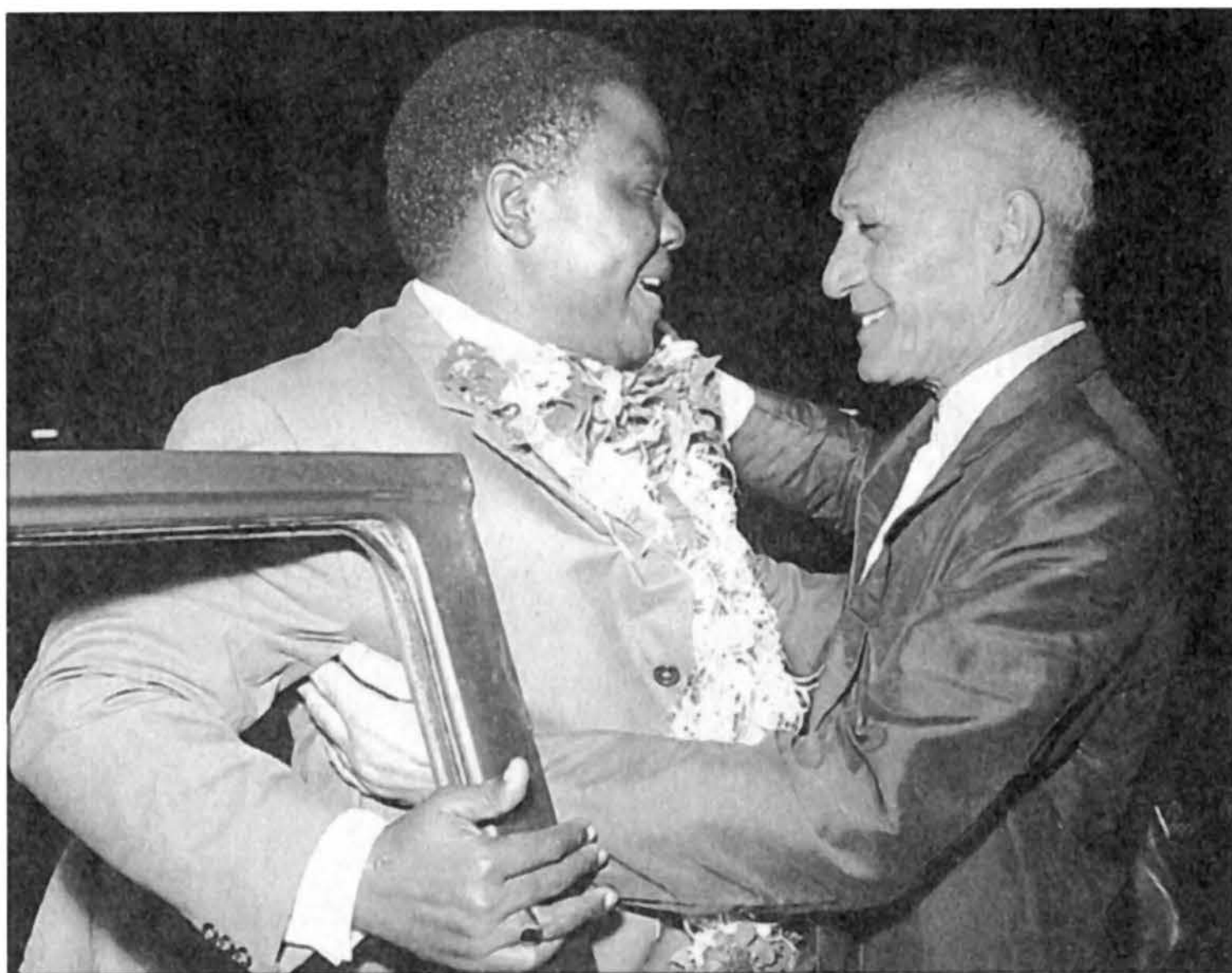
I was with the Hand of the Cause, Dr. R. Muhájir, for months during his travels in Madhya Pradesh, and I treasure the pleasant memories of his wonderful love for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.



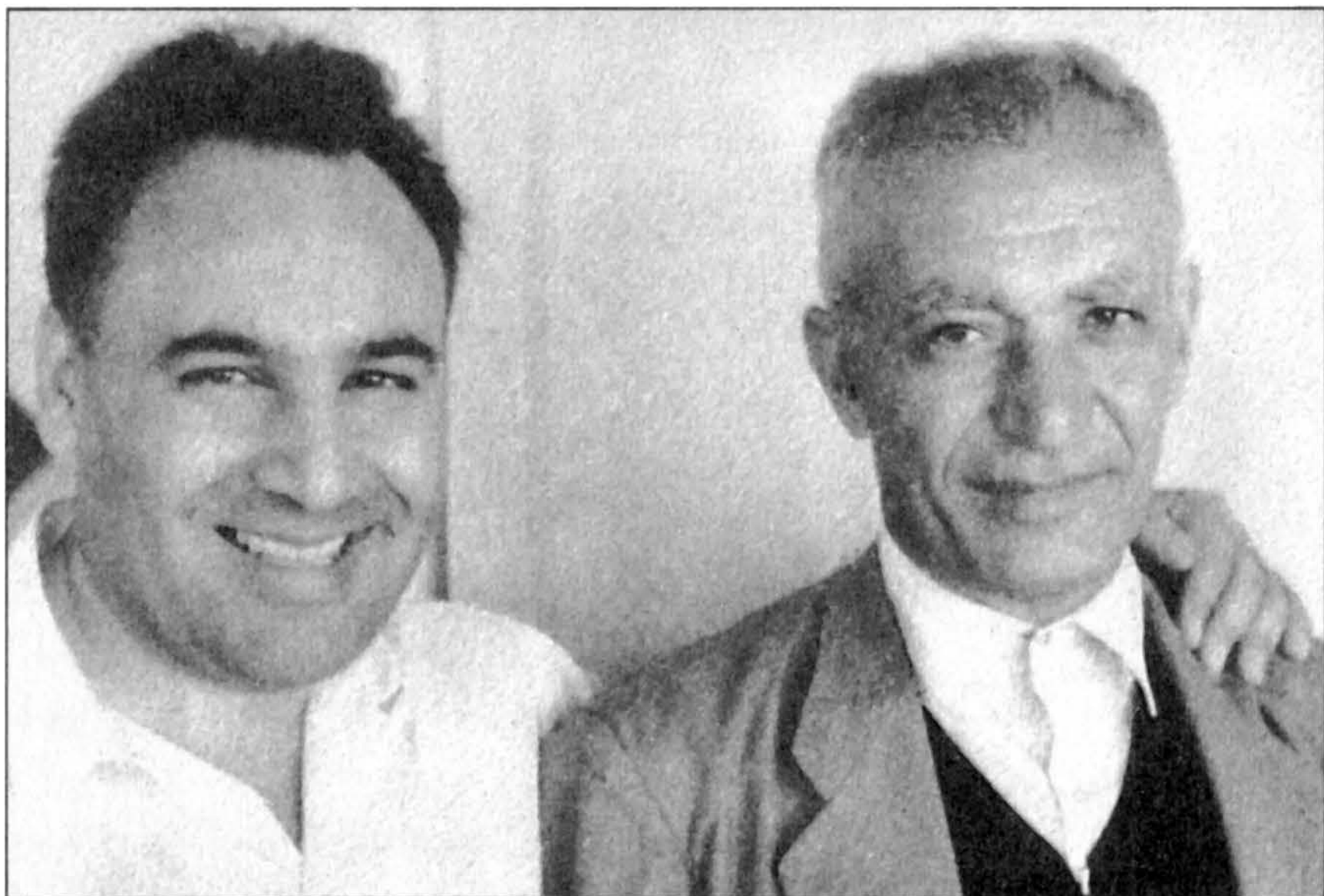
Mu'bidzádih with the Hand of the Cause Olinga



Mu'bidzádih with the Hand of the Cause Muhájir



Mu'bidzádiḥ with the Hand of the Cause Olinga



Mu'bidzádiḥ with the Hand of the Cause Muhájir

When the esteemed Hand of the Cause, Mr. A.Q. Faizi, was convalescing in a hospital in Poona and visitors were not allowed to see him, I had the privilege of being allowed to look after him.

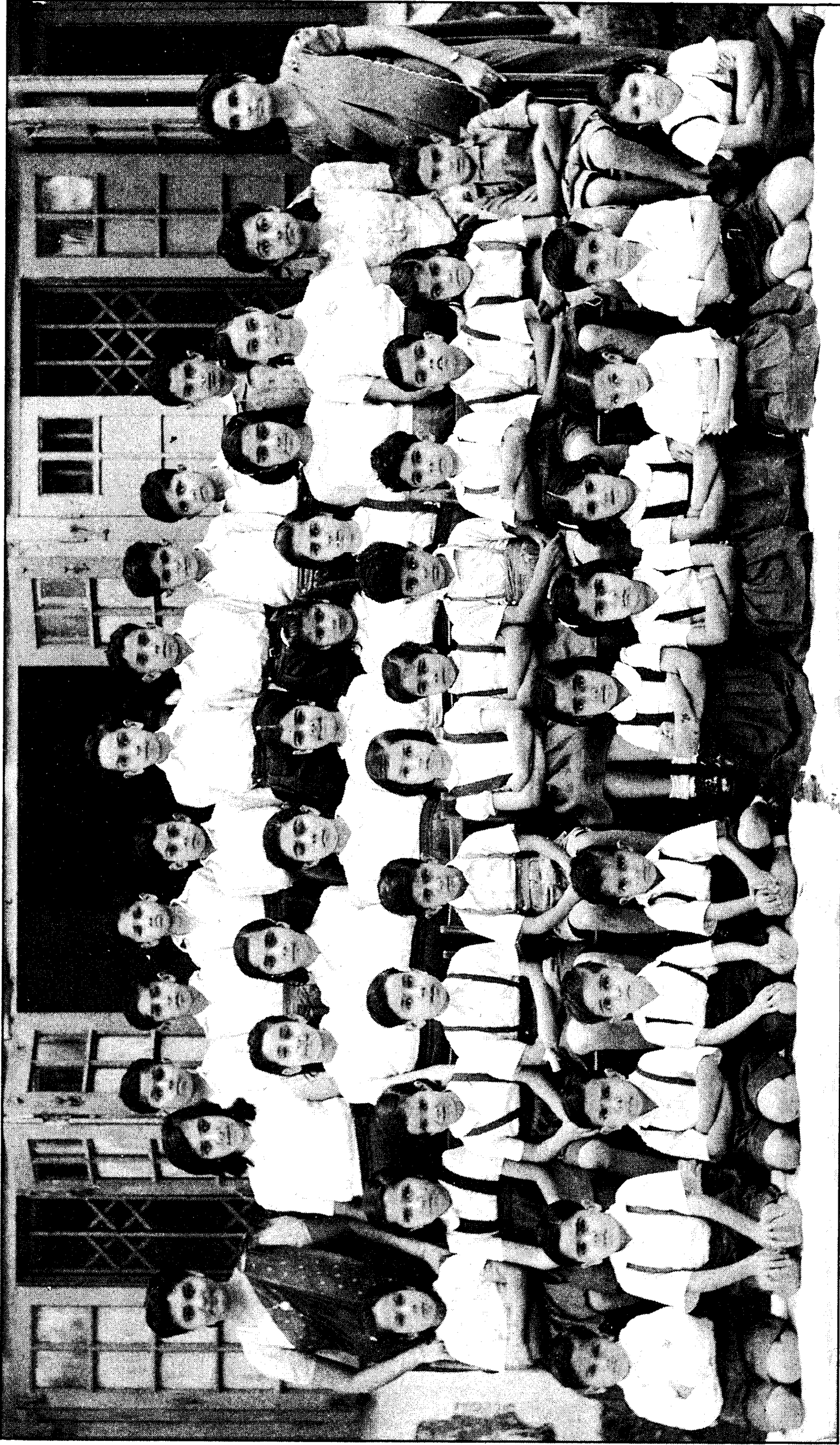
I travelled with Dr. K.M. Fozdar and his wife, Mrs. Shírín Fozdar, during their tour of different areas in the South of India where we were able to teach the Faith to many people.

Once I received a letter from Mr. ‘Abbás-‘Alí Butt, the National secretary, saying that Prof. Lakshmi Narayan and some other Hindu scholars wished to ask certain questions on the Faith. Mr. Kishen Khemani had been chosen to meet them and I was asked to accompany him to Bangalore. After Mr. Khemani had answered their queries, these good friends all declared their faith in Bahá’u’lláh. It was indeed a very happy occasion.

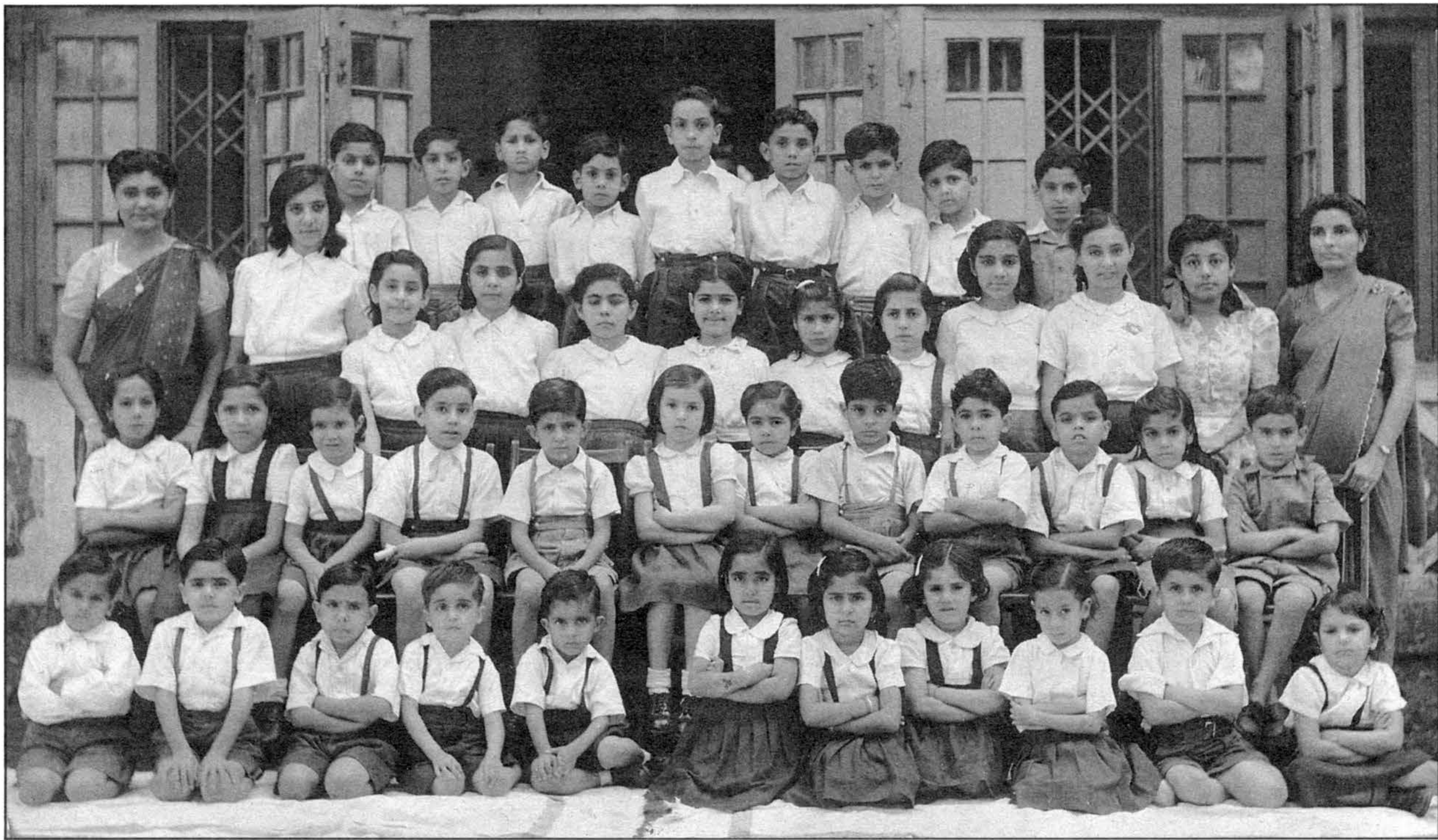
While in Írán I had cultivated the friendship of various prominent Bahá’í teachers and scholars such as Ishráq Khá-varí, ‘Abbás ‘Alaví, ‘Azízu’lláh Sulaymání, Muḥammad-‘Alí Faizi, and others. Many of them corresponded with me and, when they visited India, I was commissioned to escort them on their teaching trips.

I was appointed as an Auxiliary Board Member to the Hands of the Cause in the year 1964. In this capacity, I have had many occasions to be with the esteemed Hands when they came to India and, as a Board Member, I have continued to travel all over this country.

I have not yet mentioned my marriage to Riḍván Khánum, the daughter of the late Bahman Bihí. Bihí had devoted his whole life to teaching the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh. He was a well-known Bahá’í and had been honoured with many Tablets from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian. Riḍván Khánum herself is a great Bahá’í and she has shown much love and concern for the progress of the Faith. After our marriage in 1941, she was quite happy that I should continue my Bahá’í activities and travels around India. In 1945 she and Mrs. Salisa Kirmání



Children of New Era School, 1948-49; Ridván Khánúm is standing on the right



Children of New Era School, 1948-49; Ridván Khánım is standing on the right



Mu'bidzádiḥ and Riḍván Khánum

were asked to take care of the first batch of Bahá'í children who went to a hostel newly established in Panchgani. Not concerned about their personal comfort in life, these ladies immediately responded and went to serve the children. Under the protection of the National Spiritual Assembly of India, this small hostel of only twelve children has now become the New Era High School, and Riḍván Khánum continues to serve this institution. She feels such great love for the children that she considers them her own. I, too, have never thought of coming in the way of her services to the Cause and have always encouraged her to dedicate her life to the school.

I had the privilege of going on a second pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1970. This time I went with Riḍván Khánum. The building that had been used as the Western Pilgrim House had now become the temporary office of our Supreme Body, the Univesal House of Justice, and I remember the time when we were waiting in the main hall to meet with the members. All of a sudden a light came on, a door opened and the nine members entered the hall. In their radiant faces I found the same light I had witnessed in the face of the beloved Guardian, and I felt as if I were in the presence of Shoghi Effendi again. But once the members of the House separated to mix



Mu'bidzádi and Ridván Khán

with the pilgrims, they appeared as individuals like other Bahá'ís. Our nine days in the Holy Land passed like only a few minutes, and we were soon back again in India.

In 1971, I was asked to leave the southern States and start my activities in the northern regions. I travelled in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, etc. In all of these regions we now have thriving Bahá'í communities.

Since 1973, my assigned duty has brought me to Rajasthan. I like the people here. They are very godly and religious-minded. I have moved about in their cities and villages, and it is my belief that very soon we shall have flourishing Bahá'í communities in this State.

Sometimes I am asked how I feel at the age of seventy-five. Do I find myself fit to move about? Yes, very much so. The service of the Faith is so rejuvenating that the late Hand of the Cause, Mr. Ṭarázu'lláh Samandarí, moved about the whole earth even at the age of ninety-three. I derive inspiration from such a great teacher and do not feel my age. I move freely, visiting cities and villages, going to the houses of the friends, teaching the Faith and attending conferences.

During my life five people have shown me special affection and understanding, and I would like to mention their names:

The late Boman Mihrabání, husband of Mrs. Shírín Boman, who was my foster brother but considered me as his real brother; the late Jamshíd Ḥakímíyán who acted as my guardian soon after I came to India. He did his utmost to deepen me in the teachings of the Faith and in the study of the Writings of the Blessed Beauty and the Master; the late Isfandíyár Yigánigí who was my closest friend and whose friendship I always cherish as my most precious treasure; the late Bahrám Gushtáspí who had extreme affection for me and who lived a pure and unstained life; the late Rustam Suhaylí who was my ideal of a Bahá'í. In his daily life I saw how a devoted Bahá'í should live and how he should show love and hospitality towards others.

From all these and many other friends, I have learnt that there is only one joy in life and that is to surrender everything we have to Bahá'u'lláh, to live for Him and to die for Him.

Here ends the story I heard from dear Mu'bidzádi. After this, too, he went on visiting Rajasthan, the area assigned to him as Auxiliary Board Member, as well as other areas in India. He even made two further visits to Írán. Everywhere he went he was a source of inspiration and guidance to his fellow Bahá'ís. Towards the end of his life he did not keep as fit as he had before, and he was in and out of bed for the last two years. Still, in spirit he was always in the state of travel. Whenever you went to him, he would say that as soon as I am out of bed, I shall go to this place and that; I want a Bahá'í Centre to be bought in such a place, and a deepening programme to be conducted in another.

He would often talk of the Hands of the Cause of God, recount stories of the martyrs and speak of interesting events he had seen in his own lifetime. Except for the greatness of the Cause, he had nothing to mention because he never thought of anything else.

He bade us all farewell on October 17, 1980, to start his journey in the world of the immortals. Peace be upon him! The Glory of glories shine upon Sháh Bahrámu'bidzádi!

The Universal House of Justice paid him a glowing tribute in a cable sent on October 23rd:

“Grieved passing steadfast devoted promoter Cause Shah Bahram Mubidzadi. His decades uninterrupted unforgettable services Cause contributed strengthening foundation Faith India. Ourselves and members International Teaching Centre praying ardently Holy Shrines beseech progress his soul Abha Kingdom. Convey wife friends our sympathy. Advise hold befitting memorial gatherings.”

Gawhar Ḥakímíyán

“Devoted, steadfast, self-sacrificing handmaid
of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh”¹

1883?–1956

The life of Gawhar Khánum Ḥakímíyán is very inspiring. Her one and only ambition in life was to serve Bahá’u’lláh and sacrifice her life for His Cause.

Born in Kirmán² from Zoroastrian stock, she and her younger sister were brought to India by their aunt³ when their mother died in Írán. She came to India as a young girl and was married here to Jamshíd Khudádád Ḥakímíyán around 1904.

The Bahá’í Faith was in its initial stages in this country at that time and Jamshíd Ḥakímíyán was one of its leading champions. His home was a centre of teaching activities and prominent Bahá’ís who came to teach the Faith in India, such as Mírzá Maḥram, Siyyid Muṣṭafá Rúmí, Mishkín Qalam, and Mírzá Munír Nabílzádh, would often meet enquirers in his house. Newcomers from Írán, who arrived with a view to settle down in India were warmly received by this large-hearted man and helped in every way possible. This meant a great deal of work for his wife, Gawhar Khánum, who had to look after the comfort of the guests, but she did the task

¹ from the Guardian’s cable, *Bahá’í News Letter*, January, 1957

² a town in Írán

³ Gawhar’s aunt was Zurmurrud Khánum who went to the Holy Land after her two nieces were married and was the cook of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for many years.



Gawhar Ḥakímíyán

willingly. Her selfless services brought her rich reward for she was able to imbibe the spirit of the great souls whom she served, and she learned much from them.

Ḥakímíyán was a wealthy businessman at one time but became quite poor towards the end of his life. He died in 1931, leaving Gawhar to look after their five children with very little money.

Some Zoroastrians who were enemies of the Bahá'í Faith were anxious to take advantage of this situation. They offered Gawhar financial aid if she would come back to the old fold, but she passed this test in life with great fortitude. Bahá'u'lláh had said, "With fire we test the gold, and with gold we test our servants."¹ Gawhar preferred to live in poverty and hold on to her Faith.

Gawhar Khánum's son, Khudádád Ḥakímíyán, says his moth-

¹ *The Hidden Words*, British edition, 1975, p. 17



Gawhar H́akímíyán

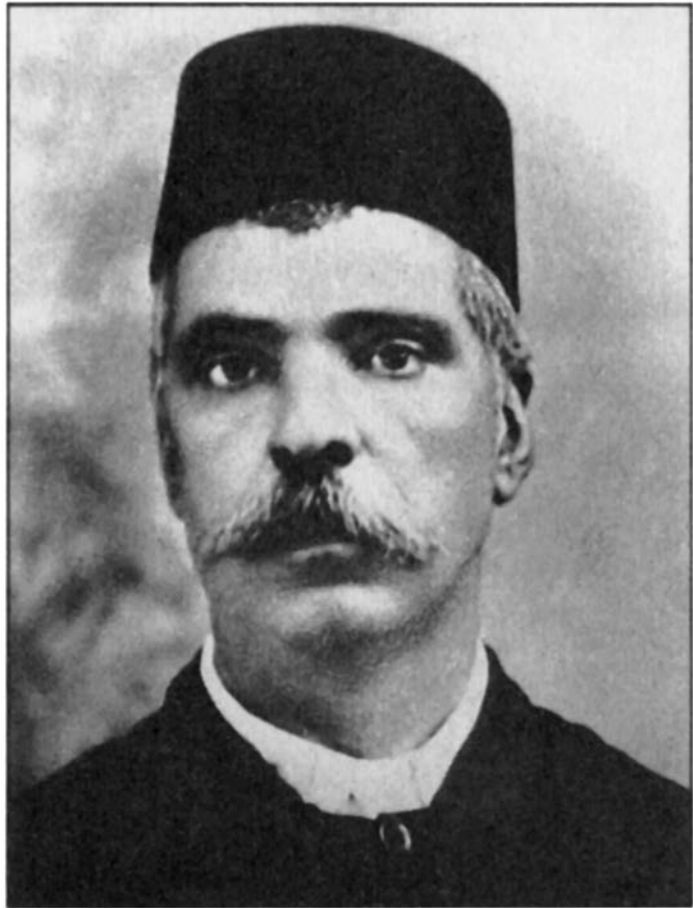


Jamshíd Ḥakímíyán

er taught all her children to work in the house and learn to do everything for themselves. His two sisters would help their mother on week days before they went to school and after they came back, but they were free from housework on Sundays. The three boys had to work in the house at the weekend, and they took turns in cleaning the house, doing the shopping, and cooking the food.

After her husband passed away, Gawhar intensified her humanitarian services and became a loving sister to everyone she came across. If she heard of people being ill, she would go to nurse and look after them whether they were Bahá'ís or not, and people came to rely on her help. Her son, Khudádád says, "She was illiterate but she knew how to love. It was a gift she had, God-given."

Gawhar made it a point to attend all Bahá'í meetings and welcome any kind of service. Bombay had become the hub of Bahá'í activities and many large gatherings took place there. On such occasions, Gawhar would invariably be in charge of



Jamshíd Ḥakímíyán

the kitchen arrangements. She forsook all rest and personal comfort, and her tireless efforts were much appreciated. In her home, too, she was a loving hostess and anyone who crossed her threshold would be received with kind affection. She was “generous in prosperity and thankful in adversity... a treasure to the poor... a balm to the suffering...”¹

Meanwhile her children grew up. Her sons started a small business and her daughters were married. She had brought them all up as dedicated Bahá'ís and they became active in teaching and pioneering for the Faith. Her two daughters eventually settled in Igatpuri and Secunderabad where pioneers were needed.

She herself accompanied the first pioneers to Kolhapur and helped them to settle down and open a shop. She continued to give her support to them until the Local Spiritual Assembly of Kolhapur was established. Then she helped in starting a centre in Ichalkaraiji.

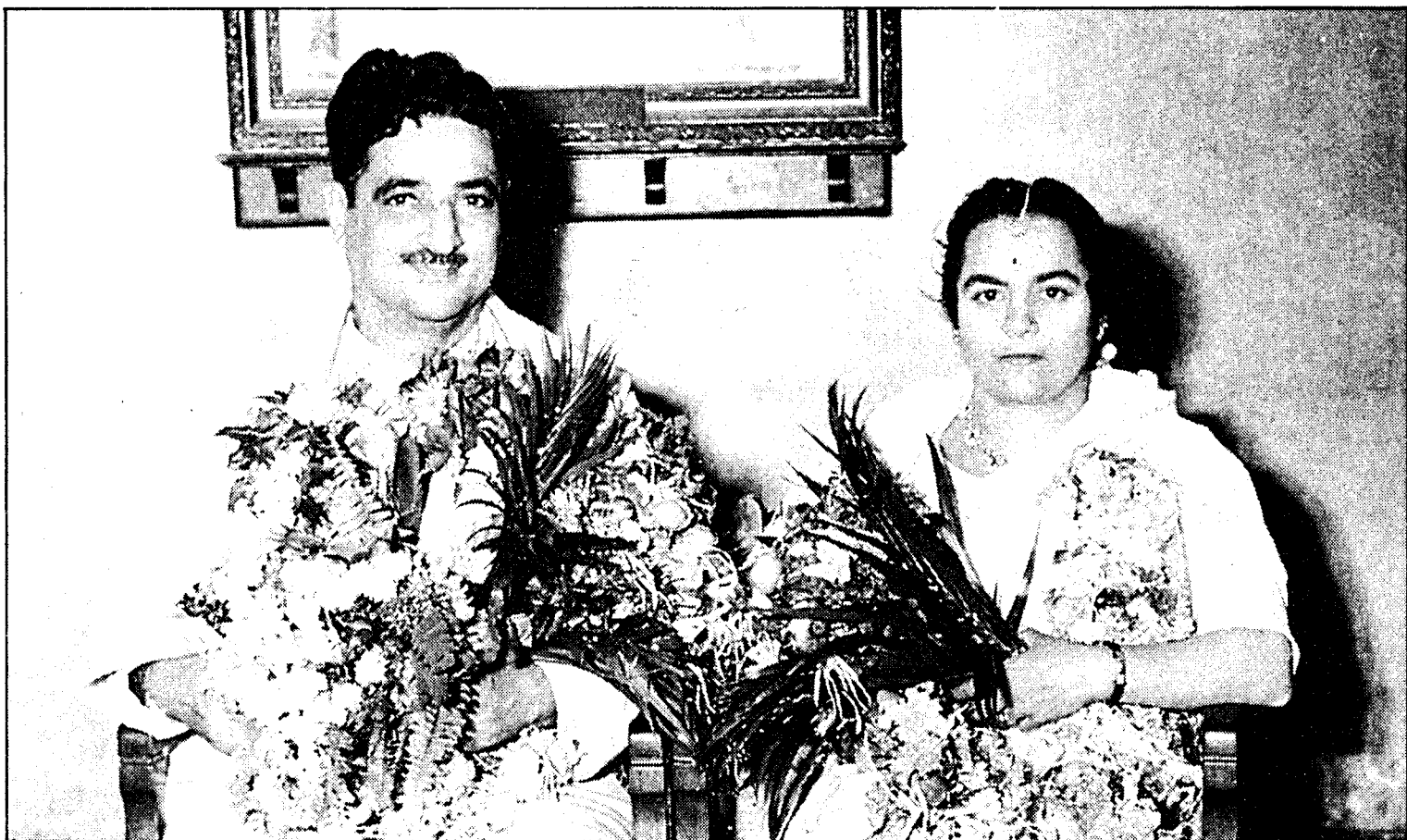
At the Inter-Continental Conference held in Delhi in 1953, Gawhar performed all kinds of services and did her utmost for the guests who came from all parts of the world. Everyone had a word of praise for her.

Gawhar's lifelong wish was fulfilled when she went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and met the beloved Guardian in 1953. This pilgrimage had a profound effect on her and she came back to India eager to serve the Faith with even greater vigour and determination than before.

When the National Spiritual Assembly appealed to the Bahá'ís to settle in pioneering goals in the beginning of the Ten-Year Crusade, Gawhar, though advanced in age, left her home, comfort and all her dear ones, to go as a pioneer to Miraj.

At first people looked upon her with suspicion and mistrust, wondering why she had gone there, but her genuine

¹ *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, U.S.A. edition, p. 285



Gawhar's son, Khudádád, married Kapila Vakíl

love and kindness soon won them over and she became known as “Mother” to all who knew her. She gave the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to many people and succeeded in forming a Bahá'í group in Miraj before she passed away.

Her daughter-in-law, Kapila,¹ says of her: “She was really a wonderful lady. She was full of dreams and wanted to do something in the world.... She never thought that she was too old to work for the Cause. She wanted to help many people; she wanted to serve many people.”

Gawhar's son, Khudádád, recounts a very interesting incident about her which throws light on another aspect of her character. When she was living in Miraj, she had a neighbour who would get drunk every night and beat his poor wife in a most cruel manner. One night Gawhar, who was five foot nine and had strong arms, took hold of this man and threw him out

¹ Kapila is Narayenrao Vakíl's daughter. See p. 14



Gawhar's son, Khudádád, married Kapila Vakíl



Gawhar on her return from the Holy Land

of the house saying, “Are you not ashamed of beating a weak, defenceless woman? Come and fight with me if you wish!” She was then over seventy-two years old.

Towards the end of her life when she was ailing, her children and friends who visited her from time to time, advised her to go back to Bombay where they could look after her properly. But she did not care for such advice and said, “A pioneer should die at her post.” True to her words, Gawhar stayed in Miraj to the end and died at her post of duty on December 29, 1956.

Through both her life and death, this handmaiden of Bahá'u'lláh taught her fellow believers the lessons of steadfastness and sacrifice in the Cause of God.

The National Spiritual Assembly cabled her passing to the Guardian and received the following reply:

“Regret loss devoted steadfast self-sacrificing handmaid Faith Baha'u'llah. Her pioneer services unforgettable. Reward



Gawhar on her return from the Holy Land

great Abha Kingdom. Assure relatives fervent prayers progress soul. Advise hold memorial gatherings in remembrance dedicated labours. Use part this message inscription tombstone.

—Shoghi”¹

In a letter dated January 11, 1957, which was sent from the National Assembly to all the Local Spiritual Assemblies under its jurisdiction, we read:

“Since our beloved Guardian desires that memorial meetings should be held in remembrance of her (Gawhar Khánúm’s) dedicated labours, the N.S.A. has fixed 27th January, 1957, for the holding of memorial meetings throughout India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon and South-East Asia.”

¹ *Bahá’í News Letter*, January, 1957

Mullá Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Kitábí

1903–1980

Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Qádirbhai Kitábí was born in Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh in the year 1903. His father, Qádirbhai, was a hand-loom weaver. He was industrious and earned a good name for himself. The looms brought him bread and butter all right, but he had set high goals for his young son Muḥammad-Ḥusayn.

Kitábí showed rare intelligence, and his father put him in a school run by a *mullá* where the young boy learnt the elementaries of religion according to the Bohra sect of Islám to which he belonged. At the school he was always the top student and his father, after consulting with the teacher, sent him to Surat which is the holy city of the Bohras and where a theological school was run by the High Priest.

After some years the High Priest selected Kitábí to be a student in the *ḥalqah* of Mullá Isháq Bhai.¹ Mullá Isháq Bhai had a high reputation for producing geniuses, and he took a great deal of interest in this young boy. That must have been in 1915, when Kitábí was twelve years old. On his part, the boy did his utmost to deserve the interest which this kind and saintly teacher took in him, and prepared his lessons with

¹ A *ḥalqah*, literally meaning a circle, was a private class run by a learned priest. Boys who showed special talent were selected to study in a *ḥalqah* by the High Priest of the Bohras. These students lived with their teacher for a number of years.

avidity to the minutest detail. Mullá Isháq Bhai was against the orthodox methods of the time and trained his students in the art of independent thinking. Thus the seeds of independence of thought and judgement were sown in the mind of Kitábí from an early age.

His studies in the *ḥalqah* lasted twenty years during which time he acquired proficiency in Arabic grammar and literature, the Qur'án and other religious books, especially those belonging to the sect of Davúdí Bohras.

In his early youth Kitábí was married to a young lady who died after a few years. He mourned her death for a long time but was finally persuaded to remarry. His second wife was Sakínabai who proved a loving companion to the end of his life.

After finishing his long years of training in the *ḥalqah*, Kitábí started classes of his own in Kota where religious education was imparted to adults of the Bohra community. Hundreds of people from various walks of life studied under him and his fame spread amongst the Muslims. The Hindus, too, had great respect for him as he was well versed in both Sanskrit and Hindi.

From my own association with him I know that he was a great scholar, a real devotee of the goddess of learning. He loved poetry and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to hear a good poem. He translated the poems of Ḥáfiz, the great Persian mystic poet, into Hindi. It was a labour of love and a herculean task. He knew that no one would print the book, and undertook the work only because of the joy it brought him. Kitábí's command of Arabic was extraordinary and it was a real pleasure to read his letters in that language.

He conducted his classes in Kota for about eight years. Then in 1943, representatives of the Bohra community of Jhalrapatan, headed by a respected elderman of the place, Mullá Rajab-'Alí Motiwala, came to request Kitábí to open a school for their children as there was no school in Jhalrapatan which



Muḥammad-Husayn Kitábí

could impart religious knowledge to Bohra children. In fact, there were no Bohra schools within a radius of twenty-five miles from their town.

After Kitábí had accepted the invitation, Rajab-‘Alí offered him a house to live in, and Kitábí devoted his time to the school without any remuneration; it was a true service of love. He maintained himself by what he earned from a stationary shop he opened which he called “Little Children’s Shop”.

His services to the community were very much appreciated and his reputation spread. Here was an independent thinker, a man of vast knowledge who had no interest in financial gain but delighted in serving others and, by his own example, was encouraging a large community to raise its spiritual standards.

All the people of the town came to admire and respect him. Once, when a Bohra was accused of killing a Hindu boy and the Hindu population of the town turned against all the Bohras, very disastrous consequences would have resulted were it not for the fact that Kitábí intervened and assured the Hindus that the accusation was false. It was on his assurance that hundreds



Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Kitábí

of lives were saved.

At this time in his life Kitábí heard the Message of Bahá'u'lláh from Mrs. Shirin Boman who had gone to teach the Faith in that area and happened to meet him. Kitábí then read many books and made a deep study of the Bahá'í Faith. Later he met Mr. 'Abbás-'Alí Butt who was the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of India, and it was through him that he was confirmed in his beliefs and accepted the Bahá'í Faith whole-heartedly in 1945. It was, however, some years before he could openly declare himself as a believer. The closed, priest-ridden community threw its shackles around him. But Kitábí could not keep quiet. He started talking of the Faith to about half a dozen receptive souls among the Hindus and Bohras. Soon there was discreet teaching going on in the town, and a study class on the Faith was started.

When the news of Kitábí's acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith became known to all, the Muslims in general, and the Bohras in particular, were infuriated. They started persecuting him in many ways and Kitábí found himself, in his old age, without a home or a job, shunned by the community he had served so well. But his faith in Bahá'u'lláh stood firm as a rock.

In 1969 Fakhru'd-Dín Motiwala, a well-known Bahá'í from Bohra background who was an Auxiliary Board Member to the Counsellors, received a letter from Mrs. Boman. In this letter she said that, as Kitábí had no son and he, Motiwala, had no father, would he not accept Kitábí as a father, look after him in his old age, and win the blessings of Bahá'u'lláh? Motiwala's loving response was immediate. He went to Jhalrapatan and brought Kitábí and his wife to his own home in Nasik.

Motiwala had a country house in Gangapur, at a distance of ten kilometers from Nasik. He took the couple to this house so that they might lead a peaceful life away from the city. As soon as Kitábí set foot inside the house, he said, "I have seen this house a number of times in my dreams. I am destined to write two books in this place."



Sakínabai

He had already written a book on the Bahá'í Faith and the teachings of the Bohras but, unfortunately, the manuscript was borrowed by someone and never returned. Of the two books he wrote in Gangapur, the first one, *The Promised Day is Come* which was written in Bohra Gujarati, was published in Kitábí's own lifetime.

Kitábí brought many blessings to Motiwala after he and his wife came to stay in Gangapur. Motiwala got better insight into the Faith he had embraced, and his family members who were all Bahá'ís became firmer in their love for Bahá'u'lláh. They all came to understand the many prophecies given in the books of the Bohras concerning the coming of the Promised One.

Kitábí spared no effort in deepening the knowledge of Motiwala, his wife and their three children. He would take a passage from the many Writings of Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá and discuss it with the family. He narrated the life stories of the three Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith in such an



Sakínabai

interesting manner that the family would listen to him till the late hours of the night. He inspired them with the history of the Faith and the sacrifices of the early believers. The effect of his words were such that Motiwala's two sons and daughter grew up as lovers of this Cause, prepared to dedicate themselves to its service.

Kitábí's wife, Sakínabai too, who was a good Bahá'í, played her part in drawing the two families close together and they became inseparable. Sakínabai also helped in beautifying the surroundings of the bungalow in Gangapur by planting trees and bushes and starting a garden. And here, the old couple spent ten happy years.

About two years before he passed away, the Bahá'ís asked Kitábí to go to Indore where there was a large Bohra community. But some months after he had gone, Motiwala heard that he was not keeping well, so he went and brought Kitábí back to Gangapur where he spent the last days of his life. His pure soul left this world on January 8, 1980, and he was buried according to Bahá'í rites in Deolali Camp near Nasik.

Dawlat-i-Írán

1885 – 1955

Dawlat-i-Írán was the first woman to be elected on the Local Spiritual Assembly of Bombay.¹ She was a good organizer and helped to arrange the community's Sunday meetings and public lectures. She herself was a fine platform speaker; and she sometimes acted as a translator for other speakers as she spoke a few languages.

Dawlat was a tower of strength and had a heart of gold. People of all denominations—Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, and others—would come to her for help in their hour of need. She had taken so many sick people for treatment, that most of the well-known doctors in Bombay knew her by name.

Dawlat was married to Mihrabán Bihjat. Her husband was one of the earliest Bahá'ís in Bombay, who accepted the Faith at the turn of the century through Mírzá Maḥram.

In 1906, Dawlat and her husband went to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land. They took their eleven-months-old daughter, Shírín,² with them and the Master, who loved children, would teach her how to walk. The second time they went on pilgrimage, Shírín was six and she would chant Persian prayers by heart in the Master's presence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has said that the first educator of the child is the mother. Dawlat accomplished this duty truly well and paid great attention to her daughter's spiritual education. This is

¹ in the year 1920

² She later became Shírín Fozdar.

what I have heard from Shírín herself:

“My mother’s contribution towards my spiritual training can never be overestimated. Right from the time I was born, she was concerned about my upbringing. She taught me to say the greeting ‘Alláh-u-Abhá’ when I was still a baby. As a child, I was taught to memorize prayers and Tablets in Persian. Mother would narrate to me the tales of the martyrs of the Faith who met their death with a smile and kissed the dagger that was to be thrust into their heart. The story of the Bábí martyred heroine, Táhírih, who put away the veil and openly spoke of her beliefs, even to the dreaded Muslim priests; who refused to be the Queen of the Sháh of Írán and paid the price with her life, always fascinated me. Even at an early age I would aspire to become a champion of women’s rights and lay down my life for this dear Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.”

By the time she was ten, Shírín had learnt to translate Persian speeches into Gujarati and English and, as she was too short to be seen by the audience in the hall, she was made to stand on a table. The translations she did brought her close to the Bahá’ís who came to Bombay from abroad.

Dawlat’s home was in the same building as the Bahá’í Centre, and the friends who arrived in Bombay from other parts of India would always visit her family. The local Bahá’ís, too, who came to attend the meetings at the Centre would pay them regular visits. In this way Dawlat and her family came to know almost all the Bahá’ís of Bombay and of India, and to feel the close ties which bound them all together.

The early foreign visitors to Bombay, such as Martha Root, would also visit Dawlat because in those days she was the only Bahá’í woman in Bombay who could understand some English. Whenever foreign guests arrived and the Spiritual Assembly arranged meetings for them, Dawlat and her husband, who were both members of the Assembly, would undertake to



Dawlat-i-Írán

inform the Bahá'í community in Bombay. In those days the Bahá'ís had no telephones and so Dawlat's servant, Rama, who knew every Bahá'í household, would be sent to inform them about the meeting.

The passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in November of 1921, plunged the Bahá'ís of the world into a sea of grief. Shírín recounted to me the effect it had on her own family:

“My mother wept continuously for months. Our two pilgrimages had brought us in close touch with the Master. He had blessed us and shown great kindness. At the time of our departure, He had given us many gifts. We remembered all this and mourned the loss for a full year.”

The time and effort Dawlat had put into Shírín's spiritual training produced marvellous results when she grew up. She held a unique position as one of the first Eastern women to be able to speak in public in the East, and the National Spiritual Assembly sent her to talk on the Bahá'í Faith in almost all the



Dawlat-i-Írán

cities of India. She spoke at many, many conferences, colleges and universities, chambers of commerce and public meetings.

In 1931, when the women of Asia were holding their first conference—the All Asian Women's Conference—in Lahore, the Guardian asked the National Spiritual Assembly to send a representative, and they deputed Shírín to represent Írán at that gathering. She spoke on the important role that women have to play in the new era as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh. These views were greatly welcomed—so much so that in the year 1934 she was elected by the Executive Committee of the All Asian Women's Conference as its representative of Asia at the League of Nations in Geneva.

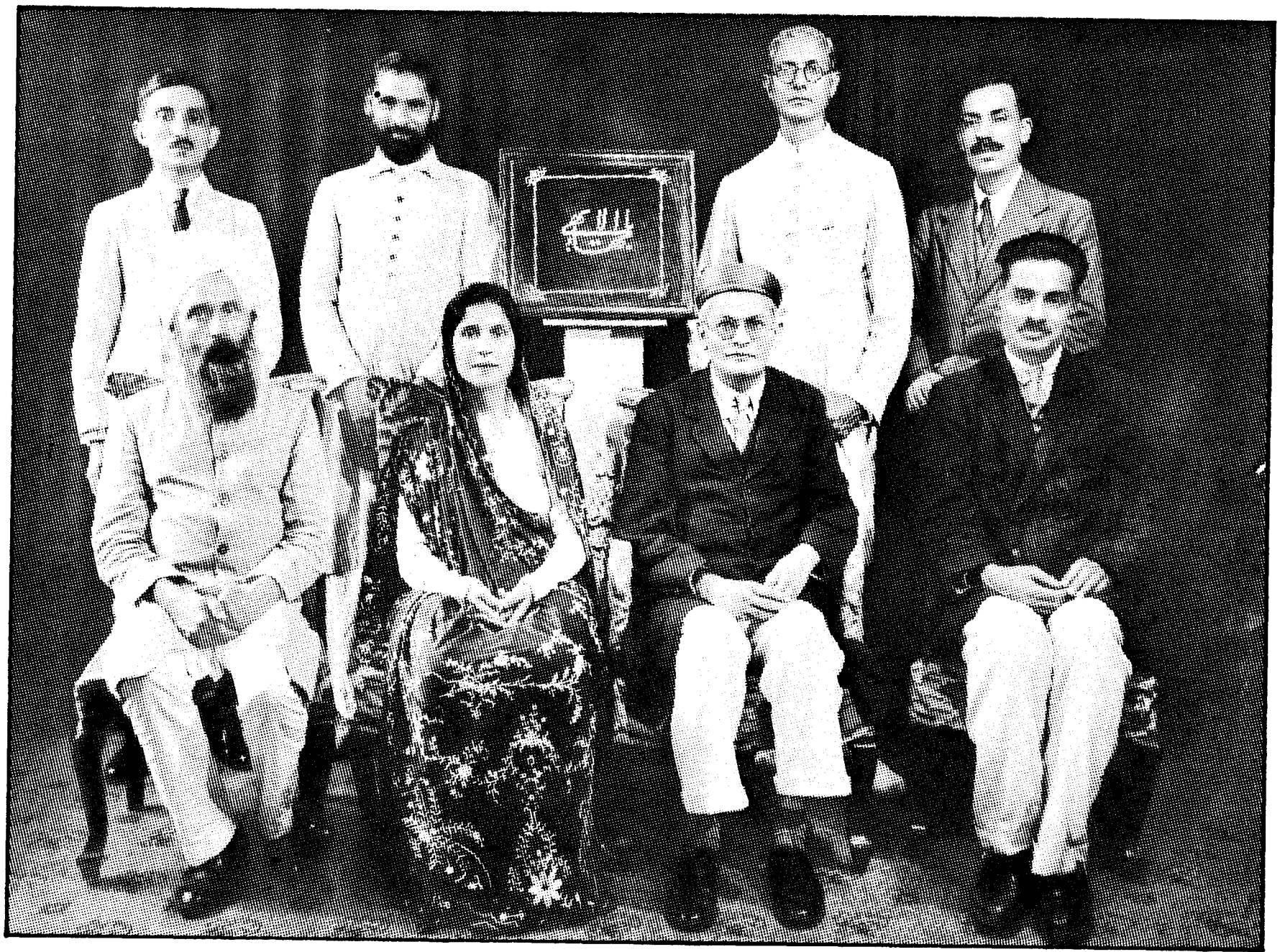
In the early nineteen-thirties, Shírín was elected as a member of the Executive Council of All Faith's League, and served as its secretary for ten years.

She was the first woman to be elected on the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma, in 1936, and she continued to be a member of that Assembly for many years, serving as its vice-chairman until 1951.

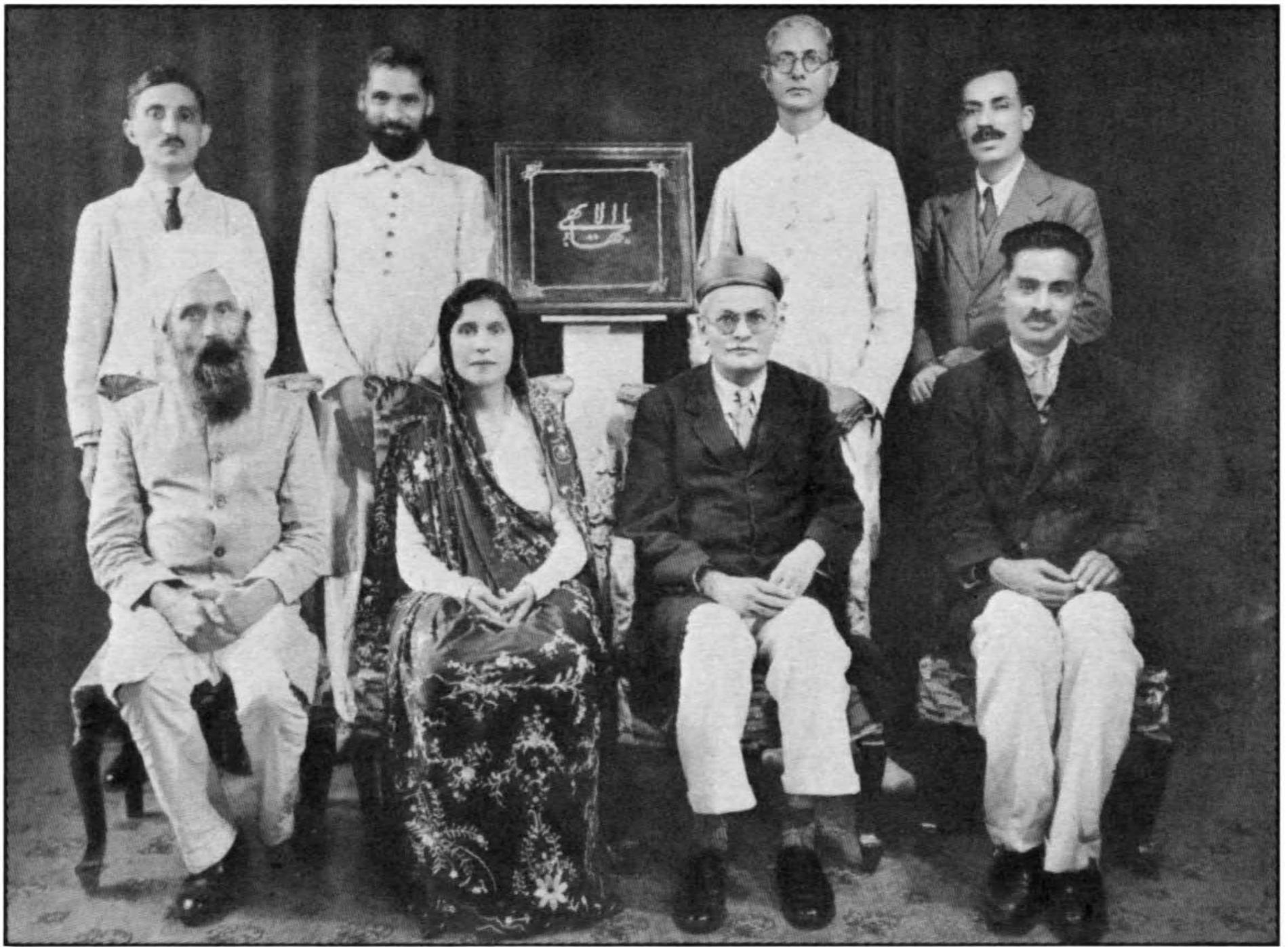
Shírín came in contact with all the important personages of India. These people arranged meetings and interviews for her all over the country, and she travelled extensively to give the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the people of India. Sir S. Radhakrishnan, then Vice-President of India, called her the “greatest woman orator of India”.

Shírín was married to Dr. K.M. Fozdar who was employed in the Railways as Medical Officer and was transferred from one city to another at regular intervals. When they were in Ahmedabad where Gandhiji had his “Ashram”, there were frequent opportunities for Shírín to see him and talk to him about the Bahá'í Faith. Gandhiji called her “my daughter”. In 1941, when there were Hindu-Muslim riots in Ahmedabad, Gandhiji put her in charge of the peace-making efforts, and she was very successful in her mission.

Because of her husband's position, Shírín could get a num-



National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma: 1935–1936
left to right, seated: Pritam Singh, Shírín Fozdar, N.R. Vakíl, A.A. Butt
standing: R. Thábit (son of Kh. Bimán) M.H. 'Ilmí, H. Qurayshí, I. Bakhtíyárí



National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma: 1935–1936

left to right, seated: Pritam Singh, Shírín Fozdar, N.R. Vakíl, A.A. Butt
standing: R. Thábit (son of Kh. Bimán) M.H. 'Ilmí, H. Qurayshí, I. Bakhtíyarí

ber of free railway passes which she fully utilized to travel all over India for many years; but, had it not been for her wonderful mother's constant help and support, she would not have been able to accomplish so much. It was Dawlat who travelled from Bombay, time and again, to take charge of Shírín's household duties so that she could be free to travel. It was Dawlat who looked after Shírín's five children and gave them the constant attention they needed while they were still young and their mother was away from home.

Dawlat was bed-ridden towards the end of her life. One day, when some Bahá'í friends had gone to visit her, one of them said to her before leaving, "What can I do for you? Is there anything you want?" Dawlat smiled and pointed to the picture of the Master. All she wanted was 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She passed away soon after that, on February 1, 1955, and is now once more in the presence of her beloved Master.

Dawlat's services to the Cause she loved continued through her daughter in many countries of both the East and the West.

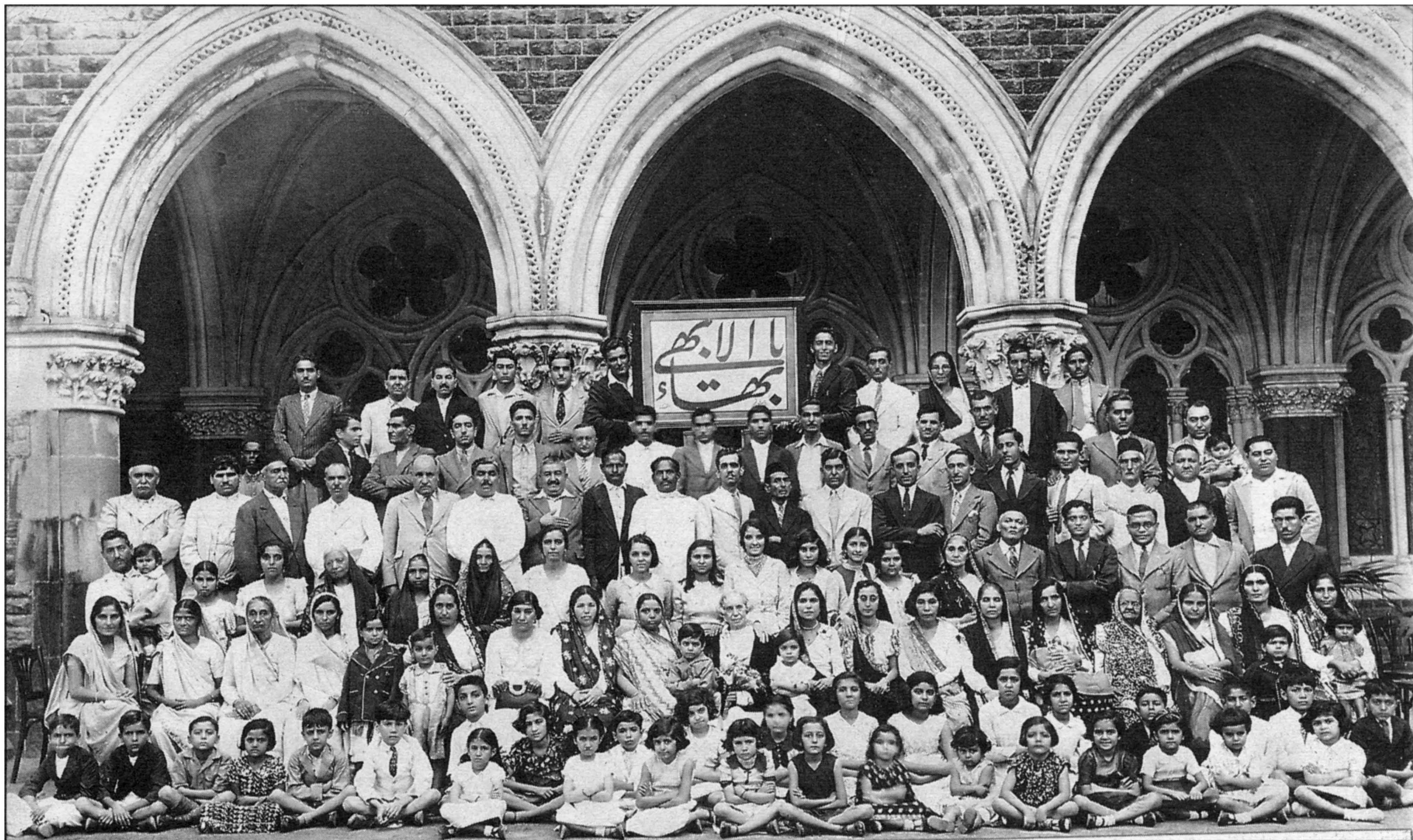
Shírín and her husband pioneered for the Faith to Singapore in 1950. While there, she formed the "Singapore Council of Women" and fought for the rights of women at a time when they were very cruelly treated. She was offered a seat in the Legislative Assembly of Singapore in 1952, but she declined the offer as Bahá'ís are forbidden to take part in politics.

Though she is now over eighty years old, Shírín continues to work for the Cause wherever she goes. Her children, too, are Bahá'ís and serving the Faith in different countries. Two of them, Dr. John Fozdar and Mrs. Zena Sorabjee, have been appointed as Counsellors by the Universal House of Justice.

In a letter to Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí, the beloved Guardian wrote that women like Shírín are a source of pride for the world. Much of the credit for what she has accomplished and continues to achieve, must go to her mother, Dawlat-i-Írán, who put the love of Bahá'u'lláh in her heart from the time she was born and trained her to serve His Cause.



Martha Root with Bahá'ís in Bombay—names are given on next page



Martha Root with Bahá'ís in Bombay—names are given on next page

Photograph on page 225:

left to right, seated: Dawlat Vajdí, 3rd; Jashodaben Vakíl, 8th;
Martha Root, 9th; Shírín Fozdar, 10th; Sushila Vakíl, 16th
standing, 1st row: Shírín Boman, 7th; Shírín Núrání, 8th;
Kapila Vakíl, 13th; Dawlat-i-Írán, 14th; Narayenrao Vakíl, 15th
2nd row: Ghulám-‘Alí Kurlawala, 9th
3rd row: Sháh Bahrám Mu’bidzádi, 3rd from the right
4th row: Gawhar Hákímíyán, 3rd from the right

Appendix I

Dear Friends in El Bahá,

You will be delighted to learn that in reply to the cablegram forwarded to our Beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the following cablegram was received:

“Khawari Bombay.

“Convention blessed hoping great results follow. ‘Abbás.”

These words are very significant and make us all feel very happy. All the friends in India including Burma, are earnestly requested to try their best, to send their representatives and do all in their power to assist the Convention. All efforts can be successful through the grace of God, divine confirmations and the unity of the friends.

Invitations regarding the Convention are already forwarded, and we hope that the friends and the assemblies have received the same. We propose to hold two sessions of the Convention every day, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The morning sessions may be exclusively devoted to the matters relating to the spread of the Holy Cause in India and subjects relating to the same will be discussed and such Committees as are deemed advisable to be formed will be formed by election or in such other manner as is unanimously or by majority agreed upon. Friends will address the assembly on the importance of Teaching, the words of His Holiness 'Abdu'l-Bahá referring to India, and various other subjects, the messages from the different Bahá'í assemblies that may be received will be read, the subject-matter of starting a Bahá'í monthly

magazine, of translating Bahá'í pamphlets into the vernacular languages of India or preparing short treatises about the history and the teachings of the Cause in the vernacular languages of India and getting the same published for sale or free distribution will be considered. We shall also consider what steps should be taken to send teachers to various different parts of India. These are a few suggestions which this servant wishes to place before the morning sessions of the Convention. All the friends will send their suggestions so that by the middle of December a programme may be prepared both for the morning and the afternoon sessions and the same may be circulated for the information of friends. Some steps may also be taken to open a depot of Bahá'í books for sale and libraries containing all the available English, Persian and Arabic Bahá'í literature may be opened in places where there are assemblies. Besides in some public libraries of India one or two Bahá'í books may be sent as a present or the attention of the secretaries may be drawn towards Bahá'í literature and they may be requested to order out the same.

The afternoon sessions of the Convention may be devoted to public addresses on the history of the Cause and the Teachings of this Most Great Cause, on the proofs of the Manifestation of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh (may the lives of all save Him be a sacrifice to His servants) from the Hindu, Mohammedan, Zoroastrian, Christian and Buddhist scriptures and other Bahá'í subjects of universal importance. All the friends who are going to attend the Convention will kindly let us know the subjects on which they will speak so that their names and the subjects may be inserted in the programme. We also propose to invite the members of the Theosophical Society, Brahmo Samaj, and other religious movements to attend the Convention and in the afternoon sessions we may also allow them to address the Convention if they wish to do so.

In about the middle of December the programme will be prepared and the same will be circulated for the information of

friends. Those friends who can come a little earlier before the days fixed for the Convention, viz., 27th to 29th December, will kindly do so and assist the Cause.

With Bahá'í love and greetings,

I remain,

Yours faithfully in His Name,

N.R. Vakil.

(*Bahá'í News*, March, 1921)

Appendix II

Narayenrao Vakíl's Tour of North India

Praise be to God. Through His Grace and Bounty a weak soul was strengthened and an unworthy one was chosen to deliver the Most Great Glad Tidings. The desire to spread the News about the coming of the Promised One of all the religions and nations was fulfilled, and God confirmed this humble one to proceed as led by Divine Wisdom. On 1st January I started in the company of a very sincere soul, Mr. Pritam Singh for Allahabad by the passenger train at night. We reached Itarsi on the next day at 3 p.m. and had to wait there till 3 a.m. to catch a train for Allahabad. Here at the station we met some gentlemen from different parts of the Central Provinces and delivered the message to them. Some of them had already read a little about the Cause and we were much delighted to learn that the News had permeated in some parts of the Central Provinces. We left Itarsi at 3 a.m. on 3rd January and reached Allahabad at 10 p.m. In Allahabad I was the guest of Mr. Pritam Singh and through his efforts some public lectures were arranged. Mr. Pritam Singh was staying there for the last 3 years and had many friends among the B.A. and M.A. students and the Professors of various Colleges. I met many of them and found them very sincere seekers after truth. During my stay in Allahabad four public lectures were delivered. The first was in the Hindu Students' Hostel on "Universal Peace". Nearly forty students attended the lecture. The second was on the "Bahá'í Movement" in the Ewing Christian College where Prof. Dudgeon, Ph.D., presid-

ed. It was attended by about fifty students and a few gentlemen from the city. The next day I addressed the students of the Kayastha Pathshala College on “‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Universal Religion,” where the Principal of the College Mr. Sanjivrao presided. There were about 75 students and some gentlemen from the city. The last public lecture was delivered under the presidentship of Mr. Purshotamdas Tondon, M.A., LL.B., an eminent citizen of Allahabad, on the “Bahá’í Movement” in the Hindi language at Vidyapith, near Chowk. The leading daily papers of Allahabad, viz., *The Independent* and *The Leader* published summaries of two of these lectures and also published an article on the Bahá’í Movement. After spending six happy days at Allahabad I left for Benares on 10th January reaching there the same day.

Benares is a very sacred place of the Hindus and many old men go there to spend the last days of their life. In ancient days it was a centre for education and many students went there to study religious scriptures, grammar, Sanskrit and various other subjects. It is situated on the banks of the river Ganges and has a very fine scenery. When one walks in the small narrow lanes of Benares with high buildings on both the sides of the streets, one is reminded of the streets of Acre which are very similar. Here I was the guest of Prof. S.C. Dey, a very sincere and selfless soul. My genial host made my stay very comfortable, and I shall never forget his sincerity and hospitality. The Theosophical Society has a fine colony here and there is a large area of land near the city where they have built a School, a College for girls, and have erected a fine large Hall for the Lodge. Here I addressed them on the Bahá’í Movement and gave the message that the world-teacher had come; that the Sun had shone from the East and spread its Light in the West. The Theosophists are very sincere and pious souls, and those who belong to the Order of the Star of the East are anxiously awaiting a world-teacher. They believe that Lord Maitreya will come. They are very advanced souls and

are very near the threshold. A thin veil prevails and we pray to God that through His Mercy and Bounty this may be uplifted and they may recognize that the world-teacher has come. Another lecture was delivered in the Kashiraj Hall of the Central Hindu College on 15th January at 2 p.m., when 200 students and some professors were present. Prof. Adhikari, a very learned man and a great thinker, presided. He spoke very favourably and drew the attention of the audience to the high philosophy of this Movement which he said is the same truth preached in the Vedas. I had an informal talk with the students of the hostel and before I left Benares, Prof. Dey took me to the new beautiful University building that is being built at a distance of four miles from the city. I also addressed the students of the hostel situated there, and I left for Calcutta by the Punjab Mail at 1 p.m....

(*Bahá'í News*, April 1921)

Narayenrao Vakíl's Tour of North India (continued)

Bengal has produced many saints and philosophers. It is a land of poets and scientists whose fame has encircled the whole world. Men like Sir Rabindranath Tagore and Sir Jagdish Chandra Bose are spreading the light of true scientific and philosophical knowledge from this region.

It is a land where illumined teachers like Keshab Chandra Sen and Raja Ram Mohan Roy taught their lessons of love and peace. It was my long cherished hope to travel in Bengal and God assisted me to direct my steps towards it. I reached Calcutta on the 17th January and spent nearly 15 days during which time four public lectures were arranged. The Devalaya was the first to stretch its hand of real brotherhood and unity and although I addressed a very small number in its small room on the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh, the audience

was the most sincere and very illumined and it was no wonder that after the lecture was over one man from amongst them said that he was a Bahá'í, and embraced me on the public road before we parted, as a real lover of humanity.

During these days the colleges were closed because the non-co-operation movement had made the students vacate them and thus I could not address the college students, although I would have been very glad to do so. When I was there the annual *Utsav* ceremonies were going on in all the three different branches of Brahmo Samaj and thus it was not possible for these sincere lovers of peace and unity and real worshippers of universal brotherhood to arrange for lectures as their programme was already fixed. The New Dispensation Church was truly zealous to prove its admiration of any movement that preached love and unity and as so many of the followers of this Church had studied the Bahá'í Movement and learnt about the lives of its great teachers, they would not rest content without arranging for a lecture and on the 24th of January I addressed them on 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'í Movement in their very splendid Church. I had a very intelligent and sincere audience and was not surprised to find that the audience was not dogmatic but was willing to accept truth from wherever it shone.... I had the honour to know some of them personally and came in rather close contact with a few of them and found them very pious and self-sacrificing, sincere and devoted. May God increase the number of sincere souls in India and may we be sincere servants of humanity. A talk was arranged for a few students and the history and teachings of the Bahá'í Movement was given informally to a few young lovers of God. We are all aware of the great object of the Theosophical Society, viz., that of removing religious prejudices by a comparative study of the different Faiths of the world and thus trying to ignite in our hearts the love for truth and respect for the Faiths of all. These societies exist in many parts of India and wherever I went as far as possible I have not failed to address these sincere

seekers after truth. Many of them await the world-teacher, the Star of the East, and it gave me great pleasure to give them the glad tidings that the Promised One of all the religions of the world has come, the world-teacher has appeared. Awake! Awake! The Sun of Truth has shone and shed His light all over the world. Remove prejudices and see Him with an unbiased mind and a pure heart. Leave station and position, wealth and honour and be a servant at the feet of the Great Master.

I delivered the last lecture in their Hall at College Square on Universal Religion and was very happy to give them the Most Great News that the Desired One had come. During my stay in Calcutta I paid a short visit to Dacca and Mymensingh and spent three very useful days in these places. In Dacca a lecture on Universal Religion was arranged in the Bar Library where Mr. N.C. Sen, the Vice-Principal of the Law College, a very well-read man presided. The audience consisted of many teachers who were studying in a training college, some professors and students of the college and some lawyers. There were about 250 very intelligent souls: The learned President spoke very favourably and gave proofs in support of the Bahá'í Movement for a full half hour. His address was very eloquent, very thoughtful and powerful. I wish it was taken down and published. He said this Movement quenches the thirst of the human world and satisfies the hunger of the soul of the whole human race.... Its history is the present day history of the world.

In Dacca I was invited to tea by a few students of the Training College and I must express my thanks to these lovers of God for the great trouble they took in arranging for this lecture in the Library and giving me an opportunity to meet the people of Dacca. From Dacca I went to Mymensingh where I spent only eight hours, during which period I met some old Brahmos and delivered an address in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj Hall at 2.30 p.m. on the Bahá'í Movement and left for Calcutta at 4 p.m. After spending about four days in Calcutta

I left for the well-known school of Sir Rabindranath Tagore situated in Shantiniketan near Bolpur.

(*Bahá'í News*, May, 1921)

Narayenrao Vakíl's Tour of North India (concluded)

Shantiniketan is a very sacred spot in India. Its scenery is very charming and here one finds himself in tune with the infinite. I reached this place on the fourth and put up in the guest house specially built for the visitors. This place is known to many for the school opened here by Sir Rabindranath Tagore. This school is unique and excellent. The students are taught underneath the trees, on the verandahs and in the open. The teacher carefully watches the natural inclination of the boys whom he teaches and tries to develop their natural inclinations and tastes, rather than force a set of theories and ready-made lessons on them. The students take delight in their studies because education is a pleasure to them and not a task. They love knowledge and receive it abundantly. During my short stay here I met the elder brother of Sir Rabindranath Tagore, Mr. Dijendranath Tagore.... I gave a talk on the Bahá'í Movement to the teachers and advanced students, and left for Patna on the 5th February. I spent only 12 hours in Patna visiting the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and the New Dispensation branch of the Brahmo Samaj, where I gave a short account of the history and teachings of the Bahá'í Movement. Here I was received very cordially by the Brahmos of the New Dispensation and am much obliged to them for the love and kindness they showed to me.

I then went to Lucknow where I met many sincere seekers after truth. Through the efforts of Mr. Sooraj Narayen, a talk on the Bahá'í Movement, its history and teachings, was arranged in the Theosophical Society on 7th February at 6 p.m. and as the members expressed a desire to know more about the Movement

for two evenings I spoke to them giving proofs from various scriptures and showing that the prophecies relating to the world teacher are all fulfilled in the manifestation of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh.

On the 10th February I left for Agra where I spent nearly a week. Mr. Pritam Singh and Mr. Shiavax had been to Agra shortly before I went there and had met some people individually and explained to them the message of the Bahá'í Movement. Agra is a place of historical importance and God willing, it may become a place of religious importance in future. Its well-known Taj Mahal is a piece of excellent ancient architecture and is a magnet that draws many foreigners towards Agra. Here Mr. Hashmatullah arranged for three public lectures. The first lecture was on universal education under the auspices of the St. John's College Union Society on the 16th.

On the 17th a lecture on the subject of 'The Promised One of all the Religions has Come' was delivered in the verandah of Hindu temple at 6 p.m., and thereafter at about 7-30 p.m., in the Bhargab Boarding House, an address was delivered on the Bahá'í Movement under the auspices of the Agra College, when the Principal of the College Mr. T.F.O. Donnell presided. I also met the leader of the Radha Swami Math, a polite gentleman of advanced views, at his bungalow and visited the Industrial Works and the school carried on by this institution. On the 17th February I left Agra for Karachi where the Bahá'í Movement is known very widely through the untiring efforts of Prof. M.R. Shirazi. Here two lectures were delivered in the Theosophical Hall on 'The Bahá'í Movement and the World Teacher' through the efforts of Mr. P.L. Vaswani. India is ready, nay, rather the whole world is ready to learn the great truth that the Bahá'í Movement offers. May God assist us all to deliver the message and serve humanity.

(Bahá'í News, June, 1921)

Appendix III

Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí, who has left a diary full of precious records of Bahá'í events in the Indian sub-continent, writes under the date June 23, 1930, that Kaykhusraw Rúzbihíyán had been buried in Mazang, a suburb of Lahore. Later, however, no one seemed to be able to locate his grave. Once, when he was in Lahore, Bakhtíyárí went to the cemetery in Mazang and asked the grave-digger about it. The grave-digger, Chirágh-Dín by name, said, "You are enquiring about an old happening. During the days when cholera had broken out in Lahore, a white-skinned man was also afflicted with this deadly disease. A man from Bombay came to Lahore to nurse him. But it so happened that the white-skinned man was saved and the man who came to save him died."

Since Bakhtíyárí knew the story, he was sure that Chirágh-Dín was speaking the truth. He was then taken to the place and shown the exact spot where Rúzbihíyán had been buried. Bakhtíyárí had the following words carved on a stone to mark the grave: "He is the Ever-Abiding One! Dear Kaykhusraw ascended to the Abhá Kingdom."

The next time Bakhtíyárí visited Rúzbihíyán's resting place was on June 24, 1930. He was with Martha Root, and a quarter of a century had passed from the day Rúzbihíyán had offered his life for his Western brother.

The story does not end here. Between the years 1905 and 1953 our pioneers made note-worthy strides and many countries were opened to the Faith. Those who were the first to settle in virgin territories during the Ten-Year Crusade—1953–1963—became known as "Knights of Bahá'u'lláh". Among them was

Fariburz, the son of Kaykhusraw Rúzbihíyán, who went to Africa and opened the country of Gambia to the Faith.

Fariburz records in *The Paradise on Earth*, chapter 4, that he was in the Holy Land in 1909 when Dr. Susan I. Moody and Sydney Sprague came there on their way to Írán. One day ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called Fariburz, put his hand in the hand of Dr. Moody, and said to him, “She is your mother and you must go with her to Írán to assist her there in her work.” Then turning to Dr. Moody, He said, “He is your son”.

Fariburz went with Dr. Moody and became her translator when she opened a clinic in Tīhrán and patients came to her in large numbers for treatment. Later on he taught English in the Bahá’í school for boys where Sydney Sprague was also a teacher. Fariburz was a loving son to Dr. Moody and looked after her in her old age until the day she passed away in Tīhrán in 1934.

Fariburz was a most loving and respectful son towards his own father too. In *The Paradise on Earth*, chapter 8, he gives an account which is interesting:

“... I went to India in 1951... to remove the remains of my father from the Islamic graveyard where he was buried, to the Gulistán-i-Jávid.¹ I was confronted with much opposition and difficulty in obtaining the permit to exhume his grave from Pakistani authorities because it is forbidden in the Islamic religion to exhume a grave. It took me nine days of strenuous work, meeting all the Pakistani Government officials. I chanted the Tablet of Aḥmad every morning begging God and Bahá’u’lláh to help me. At the same time I did not waste these nine days but got the workmen to level the ground of Gulistán-i-Jávid because it had been recently purchased and had only four walls.

“I got a room built, a well dug for water, and also a pond. I

¹ Bahá’í Cemetery

also allotted plots for burial according to the Bahá'í law. On the ninth day as I was going to meet the Mayor of Lahore, I met a Muslim lawyer of my recent acquaintance who asked me why I looked so worried, so I related my difficulties. After hearing my story he said that in the Civil Code of Pakistan there was an article which permitted the Mayor to exhume a grave, but he did not remember the number of the paragraph or the page on which it was to be found. I accompanied him to his office. He took out the Civil Code book from his book case. It was a very thick book with hundreds of pages, and to find this special article was like searching for a needle in a haystack, but as soon as he opened the book at random and read a part of the page he had opened, he suddenly shouted in surprise because it was wonderful to find that special article on the very page he had opened. He said that some mysterious power had made him open the book on that very page, otherwise it would have taken hours of work for him to find this article. I told him that it was by the help of Bahá'u'lláh that he was able to find it so quickly. I made a note of the page and the number of the article and, thanking the lawyer heartily, I went to the Mayor of Lahore and mentioned to him the page and the number of the article of the Civil Code which gave him the authority to permit me to exhume the grave. After referring to the Civil Code and finding my statement to be correct, he at once gave the necessary order to the Sanitation Officer to supervise the work of exhumation of the grave. Ultimately I was successful in removing the remains of my father from the Islamic graveyard and burying them in the Gulistán-i-Jávid. In this ceremony some of the Bahá'ís of Lahore participated and several prayers were chanted. A suitable marble monument was placed on his grave on which was inscribed his service."

References

found in Indian Bahá'í publications

Narayenrao R. Shethji Vakíl

writes to Bahá'ís before first Convention; BN,¹ March 1921, pp.4,5

tours North India; BN, March 1921, p.6

reports his tour of North India—part I; BN, April 1921, p.1

reports his tour of North India—part II; BN, May 1921, p.1

reports his tour of North India—part III; BN, June 1921, p.1

visits Bombay on the Báb's Birthday; BNL,² Oct. 1935, p.3

—letters to him from the Guardian; BNL, Jan.1936, pp.3–6

writes on the Faith in newspapers; BNL, Dec.1936, p.2

celebrates Day of the Covenant in Surat; BNL, Dec.1936, p.4

receives Martha Root in Surat; BNL, Dec.1937, p.1

goes on teaching tour and meets the Maharaja of Mysore; BNL, Sept.1940, pp.1,2

goes on teaching tour with wife and daughters; BNL, Jan.1941, pp.1,2

—letter to him from the Guardian; BNL, April 1942, p.2

—in memorium and photograph; BNL, July 1943, p.9

—article about him; BNL, Dec.1943, p.4

—reference to his address at religious conference in Allahabad; BNL, May–July 1945, p.11

—his life sketch; BN, Sept. 1975, p.21

References made to him in the Guardian's letters:

dated June 1, 1923; DND,³ pp.4,5

dated March 1, 1930; DND, p.28

¹ *Bahá'í News*

² *Bahá'í News Letter*

³ *Dawn of a New Day*

dated Dec. 27, 1933; DND, p.47
dated May 5, 1943; DND, p.179
dated June 22, 1943; DND, p.103
cable dated May 6, 1943; DND, p.211

Jashodaben Shethji Vakíl

accompanies her husband on teaching tour; BNL, Jan.1941, p.1
—her devotion and steadfastness are appreciated by the Guardian;
BNL, May 1944, p.1
serves the Cause in Surat; BNL, May 1944, p.5
is member of the first L.S.A. of Surat (photograph); BNL, May
1944, p.17
serves the Cause in Surat; BNL, Nov.1948–Feb.1949, p.7

Khusraw Bimán Thábit

—in memorium; BN, March 1937, p.6
—his life sketch; BN, Sept.–Oct.1976, p.17
was a delegate to the first Convention; BN, July–Aug.1980, p.34

Muḥammad-Riḍá Shírází

leaves India for some months; BN, March 1921, p.6
is the Chief Editor of *Bahá'í News*; BN, March 1921, p.6
serves on editorial board of the *Bahá'í News Service*; BNL, April
1921, p.24
writes from Írán; BN, June 1921, p.63
speaks at Convention; BN, Jan.1922, pp.130–132
is elected president of the Executive Committee of Convention;
BN, Jan.1922, p.131
—article by him; BN, May 1922, p.9
—article by him; BN, Sept.1922, p.59
speaks at third Convention; BN, Jan.–Feb.1923, p.119
leaves India for Haifa and the U.S.A.; BN, March–April 1923, p.145

—in memorium; TD,¹ June–July 1925, p.89
 —his speech in Hyderabad (Dn.); BNL, July 1950, pp.10–11
 —reference made to him in Martha Root’s “Letter Report Home”;
 BNL, Dec. 1938, Sup.² p.7
 —his life sketch; BNL, Nov. 1976–Feb.1977, p.24
 was a delegate to the first Convention; BN, July–Aug.1930, p.34

Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí

sent for the poems of Ṭáhirih from Írán; BNL, June 1936, p.2
 is asked to broadcast the poems of Ṭáhirih; BNL, June 1936, p.2
 is preparing calendar for production; BNL, June 1936, p.2
 goes on teaching tour to Kashmir; BNL, July 1937, p.5
 goes on teaching trip; BNL, Sept.1937, p.4
 speaks on Birthday of the Báb in Karachi; BNL, Dec.1937, p.2
 accompanies Martha Root on teaching tour; BNL, March 1938,
 pp.2,3
 goes to Madras; BNL, March 1938, p.4
 is invited with Martha Root and others by Sohrab Katrik; BNL,
 Aug.1938, p.2
 goes with his wife to Kashmir; BNL, Sept.1940, p.2
 goes with his wife to Srinagar; BNL, Jan.1941, p.3
 offers Dáru’s-Surúr building to the Guardian; BNL, Jan.1942, p.4
 gives talks at Summer School; BNL, Dec.1942, p.6
 gives suggestions at Convention; BNL, July 1943, p.2
 gives financial report at Convention; BNL, July 1943, p.6
 is appointed on various committees; BNL, July 1943, p.9
 is to take Vakíl’s family to Karachi; BNL, Dec.1943, p.4
 assists pioneers; BNL, May 1944, p.14
 visits Bahá’í Centres; BNL, May–July 1945, p.3
 goes to Calcutta; BNL, Aug.–Oct.1945, p.5
 attends opening of Bahá’í Hostel in Panchgani; BNL, Aug.–
 Oct.1945, p.8
 is elected chairman of Convention; BNL, May–June 1948, p.6

¹ *The Dawn*

² Supplement

appeals for funds; BNL, May–June 1948, p.7
 joins Pritam Singh on teaching tour; BNL, Nov.1948–Feb.1949, p.2
 goes on teaching trip; BNL, March–April 1949, p.7
 visits Dehradun; BNL, July 1949, p.9
 is deputed by N.S.A. to teach in certain cities; ABR,¹ 1949–1950, p.7
 goes on a tour to Northern India; BN, April 1950, p.5
 goes on teaching trip; BNL, Aug.1953, p.9
 goes on teaching trip; BNL, Sept.1953, pp.3,4
 visits Calcutta; BNL, Jan. 1954, p.2
 travels with Dorothy Baker; BNL, Jan. 1954, p.5
 is photographed with the first two Bahá'ís of Sargodha; BNB,² Jan.1955
 is a pioneer in Sargodha; BNL, Feb.–March 1955, p.4
 as president of N.S.A. inaugurates All-South India Teaching Conference; BNL, Oct.–Dec.1955, p.5
 is photographed with participants of All-South India Teaching Conference; BNL, Oct.–Dec.1955, p.6
 speaks at All-South India Teaching Conference; BNL, Oct.–Dec. 1955, p.6
 travels with the Hand of the Cause, General 'Alá'í; BNL, July–Oct.1956, p.1
 speaks at conference in Indonesia; BNL, July–Oct.1956, p.5
 is elected secretary of National Archives Committee; BNL, July–Oct.1956, p.13
 teaches at Summer School in Montgomery (W. Pakistan); BNL, Dec.1956, p.6
 goes on extensive tour of Bahá'í Centres of W. Pakistan; BNL, Dec.1956, p.6
 speaks at St.Mira High School in Poona; BNL, Jan.1957, p.3
 is photographed with Bahá'í children in Rangoon; BNL, Jan.1957, p.4
 inaugurates the first Convention in Pakistan; ABR, 1957–1958, p.46
 accompanies the Hand of the Cause Khádim to Rangoon; BNL, April 1958, p.7

¹ *Annual Bahá'í Reports*

² *Bahá'í News Bulletin*

accompanies the Hand of the Cause Khádim to Poona; AR,¹ 1958–1959: Sec.² II, p.5
 accompanies the Hand of the Cause Samandarí to Convention in Burma (photograph taken); BB,³ June 1959, p.2
 accompanies the Hand of the Cause Samandarí in India; BB, June 1959, p.4
 —his life sketch; BN, July–Aug.1975, p.18
 —reference made to him in the Guardian's letter dated Nov.28, 1940

Pritam Singh

assists Mírzá Maḥmúd in teaching children in Bombay; BN, April 1921, p.24
 is the guest of N.R. Vakíl in Surat; BN, May 1921, p.43
 starts a series of pamphlets in Urdu; BN, Sept.1922, p.62
 speaks at third Convention; BN, Jan.–Feb.1923, p.118
 reports on his teaching tour; BNL, Jan.1936, pp.7–9
 gives talks in Surat on his way to Bombay; BNL, Dec.1936, p.2
 speaks at religious conference; BNL, March 1937, p.5
 gives talks in colleges; BNL, July 1937, p.5
 teaches in Kashmir; BNL, Sept.1937, p.4
 accompanies Martha Root on her travels in North India; BNL, March 1938: Supplement
 gives talks at colleges in Punjab; BNL, March 1940, p.4
 goes with Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh to the Jubilee Celebrations of the head of the Qádíyání Movement in Lahore; BNL, March 1940, p.4
 talks at Summer School; BNL, Jan.1941, p.4
 plans to go to Allahabad; BNL, Aug.1941, p.4
 goes on teaching trip to Allahabad and other places; BNL Jan. 1942, pp.5,6
 writes about "National Bahá'í Library"; BNL, Dec.1942, p.5
 teaches at Summer School; BNL, Dec.1942, p.6

¹ *Annual Reports*

² *Section*

³ *Bahá'í Bulletin*

goes on teaching tour; BNL, July 1943, p.5
 is appointed on various committees; BNL, July 1943, p.9
 is member of first L.S.A. of Lahore (photograph); BNL, May 1944, p.9
 assists pioneers; BNL, May 1944, p.14
 visits village Bahá'ís (photograph); BNL, Feb.–March 1946, p.6
 pays a visit to Amritsar; BNL, May–Oct.1946, p.7
 pioneers to Amritsar; BNL, Feb.–April 1948, p.6
 goes on teaching tour; BNL, Nov.1948–Feb.1949, p.2
 teaches in Surat; BNL, Nov.1948–Feb.1949, p.7
 speaks at first Summer School in Pakistan; BNL, March–April 1949, p.13
 visits Kashmir; BN, July 1949, p.8
 goes on teaching tour; BNL, Dec.1949, pp.9,10
 is deputed by N.S.A. to teach in certain cities; ABR, 1949–1950, p.7
 speaks at Benares and Delhi; ABR, 1949–1950, p.12
 invites a group to meet Mrs.Fozdar in Amritsar; BN, April 1950, p.4
 tours cities in the North; BN, April 1950, p.6
 holds meeting in Amritsar; BN, April 1950, p.9
 —his article appears in newspaper in Hyderabad (Dn.); BN, July 1950, p.10
 speaks in Poona; BN, July 1950, pp.11,12
 —his article on the Martyrdom of the Báb; BN, July 1950, p.13
 goes on extensive teaching trip; BN, Aug.1950, p.15
 speaks in Poona; BN, Aug.1950, p.20
 conducts classes in Summer School; BN, Nov.1950, p.10
 —his *Second Coming of Lord Krishna* is printed; BNL, July–Aug.1956, p.16
 spends one month teaching in Poona; ABR, 1957–1958, p.21
 —in memorium; BNL, Aug.1959, p.4
 —the Hands of the Cause appreciate his services; BNL, Sept.–Oct.1959, p.1
 —his *Second Coming of Lord Krishna* is reprinted; BNL, Sept.–Oct.1959, p.15
 —his life sketch; BN, May–June 1976, p.24
 was a delegate to the first Convention; BN, July–Aug.1980, p.34

References made to him in the Guardian's letters:

dated June 1, 1923; DND, p.5
dated July 10, 1926; DND, p.13
dated May 6, 1928; DND, p.21
dated Feb. 12, 1929; DND, p.25
dated Aug. 29, 1931; DND, p.31
dated March 1, 1932; DND, p.33
dated March 28, 1932; DND, p.35
dated Aug. 6, 1933; DND, p.44
dated Nov. 15, 1935; DND, p.55
dated Oct. 22, 1936; DND, p.62

Kaykhusraw Rúzbihíyán

—reference to him in conference; IBC,¹ Oct. 7–15, 1953, p.57
—his life sketch; BN, Jan.–Feb.1976, p.23

Mawlaví M. ‘Abdu’lláh Vakíl

teaches in Lahore; BNL, March 1940, p.2
is member of Bahá’í group in Srinagar; BNL, Jan.1941, p.3
initiates an intensive teaching campaign; BNL, July 1942, p.4
is an active Bahá’í in Srinagar; BNL, May 1944, p.4
is member of the first L.S.A of Srinagar (photograph); BNL, May 1944, p.6
is teaching constantly in Kashmir; BNL, May–Oct.1946, p.7
goes on teaching tour; ABR, 1946–1947, p.37
goes on teaching tour; BNL, March 1947, p.6
teaches in Sukur; BNL, May 1947, p.12
—the Guardian prays for his recovery and sends cable after his passing; BNL, Feb.–April 1948, p.1
—his life sketch; BNL, Feb.–April 1948, p.5

¹ *Inter-Continental Bahá’í Conference*

Mihrabán R. Bulbulán

—his life sketch; BN, Jan.–Feb. 1975, p.21

Shyamdulari Bhargava

—article on her by Mehroo Fádíl and photographs; BNL, May 1944, p.10

lived a Bahá'í life; BNL, May 1944, p.18

Dawlat Vajdí

—reference to her in the Guardian's letter; BNL, Jan.1936, pp.3,4

accompanies Shírín Fozdar to Kashmir; BNL, Jan.1942, p.5

contributes for Six-Year Plan; BNL, Dec.1942, p.6

serves on Relief Committee; BNL, March 1947, p.10

visits Shrijalpur; BNL, Nov.–Dec.1958, p.10

accompanies Shírín Boman to Indore; AR, 1958–1959: Sec.II, p.1

—her life sketch; BN, Sept.–Oct.1974, p.18

Ghulám-‘Alí I. Kurlawala

offers to pioneer to Indore or Baroda; BNL, July 1943, p.2

pioneers to Jaipur; ABR, 1949–1950, p.6

is a pioneer in Jaipur (photograph); BNL, Dec.1949, p.20

pioneers to Daman; BNL, Aug.1953, p.5

is a pioneer in Daman (photograph); BNB, Oct.–Nov.1954, p.4

—his obituary note; BN, May–Aug.1978, p.36

—in memorium; BN, May–Sept. 1979, p.33

Sháh Bahrám Mu'bidzádh

translates at Summer School; BNL, Jan.1941, p.5

gives suggestions at Convention; BNL, July 1943, p.1

assists pioneers; BNL, May 1944, p.14
 visits the South; BN, Dec.1949, pp.8,9
 speaks in Surat; BN, Dec.1949, p.18
 is deputed by N.S.A. to teach in certain cities; ABR, 1949–1950, p.7
 helps to settle pioneer in Madras; ABR, 1949–1950, p.13
 tours Northern India; BN April 1950, p.5
 assists in establishing a Centre in Trivandrum; BN, Dec. 1950, p.5
 is secretary of L.S.A. of Poona; BD,¹ 1950–1951, p.3
 relates his pioneering and teaching experiences; IBC, Oct.7–15, 1953, p.49
 offers to pioneer; IBC, Oct.1953, Sup., p.3
 visits the South; BNL, Feb.–March 1955, p.4
 moves to Coimbatore from Madras; BNL, Sept.1955, p.7
 speaks at All-South India Teaching Conference; BNL, Oct.–Dec. 1955, p.6
 —his services in the South are acknowledged; BNL, July–Oct. 1956, p.8
 attends South India Teaching Conference; BNL, Dec.1956, p.4
 visits Centres in the South; BNL, Dec.1956, p.6
 attends South India Teaching Conference; BNL, Jan.1957, p.1
 visits Assam; BNL, Aug.1957, p.5
 visits Bangalore; BNL, Sept.–Oct.1957, p.9
 goes to assist pioneers in Shillong; ABR, 1957–1958, p.21
 teaches in the South; ABR, 1957–1958, p.23
 visits the South; BNL, July 1958, p.3
 opens Salem to the Faith; BNL, Sep.–Oct.1958, p.1
 chairs the Teaching Conference at Deolali; BNL, Sep.–Oct.1958, p.7
 visits Centres in the South; AR, 1958–1959, p.5
 visits Punjab; BN, Sept.–Oct.1972, p.9
 is photographed with Mr. & Mrs Grover; BN, Nov.1976–Feb. 1977, p.21
 —an article by him about the Temple; BN, May–June 1980, p.4
 —his life sketch; BN, March 1981, p.46

¹*Bahá'í Directory*

Gawhar Ḥakímíyán

serves on Relief Committee; BNL, March 1947, p.10
is a pioneer in Miraj (photograph); BNL, June 1954, p.8
is visited by friends in her pioneering post; BNL, June–July 1955, p.7
—her move to Miraj from Bombay is mentioned; BNL, Sept.1955, p.7
is photographed with friends in Miraj; BNL, July–Oct.1956, p.14
—her life sketch; BNL, Jan.1957, p.5

Mullá Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Kitábí

is very active in proclaiming the Faith in Indore and Ujjain (photographed with his wife); BN, Jan.–April 1978, p.19

In Memorium
printed in *The Bahá'í World*

Narayanrao Shethji Vakíl Vol. IX, p.637
Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí Vol. XVI, p.554
Pritam Singh Vol. XIII, p.874
Mawlaví 'Abdu'lláh Vakíl Vol. XI, p.515
Ghulám-'Alí Kurlawala Vol. XVII, p.460
Sháh Bahrám Mu'bidzádh Vol. XVIII, p.731