

# From Persecution to Coexistence: The *Bahā'ism* in Iran and Bangladesh

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## Abstract:

*The Bahā'ism, emerging from 19th-century Persia through the teachings of Bahā'u'llāh, has developed into a globally recognized faith known for its emphasis on unity, peace, and progressive revelation. This paper traces the historical trajectory of the Bahā'ism from its origins in Persia (modern day Iran) to its establishment in Bangladesh, focusing on both the shared and divergent experiences of its adherents in different cultural contexts. The study addresses the significant challenges Bahā'is face, particularly the severe persecution in Iran due to theological conflicts with mainstream Islam, contrasted with their relatively accepted status in Bangladesh, a secular Muslim majority country. Drawing on qualitative research conducted at the Rajshahi Bahā'ī Center, Bangladesh, this paper highlights the personal narratives of Bahā'ī converts, their devotional practices, and the obstacles they encounter in maintaining their religious identity. The analysis extends to a comparison with Ahmadiyya, another religious movement with Islamic roots, to elucidate theological distinctions and the varying degrees of societal acceptance. While the Bahā'ī Faith and Ahmadiyya both emerged in the 19th century and share a backdrop of Islamic influence, the Bahā'ī emphasis on universal equality and an independent identity sets them apart. This paper argues that such distinctions, coupled with Bangladesh's secular policies, have allowed Bahā'is to practice their faith with fewer constraints compared to their coreligionists in Iran. By examining these interfaith dynamics, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of religious pluralism, the complex interactions between minority religious communities and their broader social environments, and the implications for religious tolerance and coexistence in contemporary Muslim societies.*

**Keywords:** Bahā'ism, Bāb, Bahā'u'llāh, Iran, Bangladesh, Ahmadiyya, Rajshahi Bahā'ī Center

## Introduction

The term “Bahā'ism” or *Bābism* is considered outdated by *Bahā'īs*, as it is deemed inappropriate. Similar to the terms “Christian” and “Muslim,” “Bahā'ī” functions as an adjective or a noun that denotes a member of the faith, but it is not the actual name of the religion itself. While “Bahā'ī religion” is an acceptable phrase, it may not be familiar to members who perceive their beliefs to encompass more than what is typically understood by the term “religion.” On the other hand, “Bahā'ī Faith” is the most commonly used term,

widely accepted among *Bahā'īs*, and increasingly adopted by non-members, including scholars and others.<sup>1</sup> Due to its considerable length, it is commonly abbreviated as 'the *Bahā'í* Faith,' and this research will utilize this term frequently. The *Bahā'í* Faith is the most recent of the faiths that are considered "revealed" or "classical." The origin of this event may be traced back to Persia, which is today known as Iran, in the year 1844.<sup>2</sup>

Although the *Bahā'í* Faith is relatively small in number, it is gaining increasing prominence worldwide as a result of its widespread and diverse followers. *David Langness* reports that the contemporary *Bahā'í* Faith is observed by over five million individuals, with National Spiritual Assemblies established in almost every country worldwide.<sup>3</sup> Over the last 150 years, the Faith has expanded its influence from its original *Shī'a* stronghold in Iran to nearly every corner of the world, encompassing a following of over seven million adherents. They encompass a total of 2,112 distinct ethnic and tribal groupings, residing in approximately 116,000 places throughout more than 188 sovereign nations and 45 subordinate territories.<sup>4</sup> The religious texts, consisting of over 16 million words in the original Arabic and Persian languages, are being compiled by the personnel at the *Bahā'í* World Centre in Haifa, Israel. Currently, these texts are undergoing authentication, classification, and publication processes, which include translations into English as well as preservation of the original languages. Currently, only around 10% of *Bahā'u'llāh's* extensive writings, which amount to over six million words, have been translated into English. Since the mid-1990s, the Faith has intensified its worldwide endeavors to educate and empower everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation, to actively engage in their own spiritual development and contribute to the progress of their communities. The reason for this is because the Faith has never depended on seminaries or other institutions to educate its leaders. Despite the scarcity of academic research on the Faith half a century ago, it is currently seeing a remarkable and rapid growth. Currently, there is a significant internal motivation to engage in experimentation, innovation, documentation, and sharing of novel concepts. However, the sociological study of these groups is still in its nascent phase.<sup>5</sup>

The genesis of the *Bahā'í* faith can be discerned in the urban center of *Shirāj*, situated in the southwestern region, where, in the year 1844, *Sayyid Mīrzā 'Alī Muḥammad Shirājī* divulged to an exclusive assemblage of adherents of the *Shī'a* sect of Islam that he was the *Bāb*, the esteemed gateway to the enigmatic Hidden *Imām* of the *Shī'a* tradition. The *Bāb* (*the gate*), a prominent figure in the *Bābī* Faith, assigned a group of eighteen individuals from the *Shaykhī* school of thought to become his disciples.<sup>6</sup> These individuals were bestowed with

<sup>1</sup> Robert H Stockman, *The World of the Bahá'í Faith* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 2.

<sup>2</sup> H. B. Danesh and H. B. Danesh, "THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH RELIGION RENEWED," 1, accessed April 19, 2024, [https://www.academia.edu/35005686/THE\\_BAHÁ'Í\\_FAITH\\_RELIGION\\_RENEWED](https://www.academia.edu/35005686/THE_BAHÁ'Í_FAITH_RELIGION_RENEWED).

<sup>3</sup> David Langness, "How Many Baha'is?," *BahaiTeachings.Org*, October 2, 2013, <https://bahaiteachings.org/how-many-bahais/>.

<sup>4</sup> "A Global Community," accessed June 4, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/national-communities>; Hooshmand Badee, "Baha'í Teachings on Economics and Their Implications for the Baha'í Community and the Wider Society," 2015, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Stockman, *The World of the Bahá'í Faith*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Shaykh Ahmad ibn Zayn al-Dīn al-Aḥsā'ī* (1753-1826) established the orthodox *Shaykhī* School of *Shī'a* Islam in Iran and Iraq. This school emphasized the eschatological and metaphorical interpretations of *Qur'ānic* remarks on the end of the days. As per *Sayyid Kāzīm al-Rashtī*, the second leader of the *Shaykhī* School, adherents should actively search for the *Mahdī*, who is already in existence, instead of appointing a successor because of the constraints of time. Following his demise, his disciples dispersed in search of the *Mahdī*. *Mullā Husayn* (1813-1849) was among the *Shaykis* who participated in the quest. During his time in *Shirāj*, *Rashtī* encountered 'Alī Muḥammad Shirājī, who had the same belief in the apocalyptic prophecies of *Shī'a* Islam. During the evening of May 22, 1844, he made his identity known as the *Bāb* ('the Gate'), the *Qā'im* of *Shī'a*

the title of the “Letters of the Living” by the *Bāb* himself.<sup>7</sup> The *Bābī* movement encountered considerable opposition from both *Qājār* authorities and religious establishments, as it sought to attract new followers and evolved into a formidable insurgency movement. In an endeavor to suppress the uprisings that were unfolding in various regions of Iran, the *Qājār* government proceeded carrying out the execution of the *Bāb* on the 9th of July, 1850.<sup>8</sup>

After the demise of the *Bāb*, the religious movement experienced a state of disintegration. One particular faction, under the leadership of *Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī* (1831–1912), commonly referred to as *Šūbh-i-’Azal* or the Morning of Eternity, emerged as the most prominent group.<sup>9</sup> The phenomenon of conflicting claims of leadership among the *Bābīs* compelled a significant number of them to reintegrate themselves into the broader *Shī’ism* community, or alternatively, to adopt the practice of *taqiyya*. *Taqiyya*, as a means of self-preservation, involves concealing one’s true religious beliefs behind a facade of conformity to orthodox norms.<sup>10</sup> In the year 1866, a significant event took place involving *Mīrzā Ḥusayn-’Alī Nūrī* (1817–92), who happened to be the older half-brother of *Šūbh-i-’Azal*. It was during this time that *Mīrzā Ḥusayn-’Alī Nūrī* made a public declaration, asserting his identity as “*Man yuzhiruhu’l-lāh*,” which translates to “He Whom God Shall Make Manifest.”<sup>11</sup> This declaration signified his claim to be the rightful successor of the *Bāb*, referred to as *Bahā’u’llāh*, a title denoting the Glory of God, this individual ascended to prominence as the foremost figure among the majority of adherents of the *Bābī* Faith, with his disciples subsequently adopting the appellation of *Bahā’īs*.<sup>12</sup> A diminutive assemblage of *Šūbh-i-’Azal*’s adherents who steadfastly pledged their allegiance to *Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī*, acquired the appellation of *’Azalis*, a religious faction that has progressively waned in prominence over the course of time, and is presently on the precipice of obsolescence.<sup>13</sup> In his scholarly article on *Bahā’u’llāh* featured in the *Bahā’ī Encyclopaedia*, *Juan Cole* posits a compelling notion. *Cole* suggests that *Bahā’u’llāh*, who engaged in correspondence with the *Bāb* via his younger half-brother, could potentially have assumed the role of the group’s true leader. In his statement, *Cole* asserts that *Azal* was recognized by numerous influential *Bābīs*

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Islam. The *Bāb* and his movement are considered separate prophets and religions, although they saw him as a forerunner to the forthcoming prophet, known as ‘He whom God Will Make Manifest’. The *Bāb* instructed his disciples to proclaim the reappearance of the Twelfth *Imām*. See for detail Lillith Osborn, “The Bahā’ī Faith,” *Handbook of Islamic Sects*, January 1, 2022, 761–62, [https://www.academia.edu/97526330/The\\_Bahā’ī\\_Faith](https://www.academia.edu/97526330/The_Bahā’ī_Faith); Marshall G. S. Hodgson, “How Did the Early Shī’a Become Sectarian?,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75, no. 1 (1955): 1–13, doi:10.2307/595031.

<sup>7</sup> Denis Maceoin, “Peter Smith: The Babi and Baha’i Religions: From Messianic Shi’ism to a World Religion, Xiv, 243 Pp. Cambridge, Etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1987.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51, no. 3 (1988): 14; Hutan Hejazi Martinez, *Baha’ism: History, Transfiguration, Doxa* (Rice University, 2010), 20–34.

<sup>8</sup> Maceoin, “Peter Smith: The Babi and Baha’i Religions: From Messianic Shi’ism to a World Religion, Xiv, 243 Pp. Cambridge, Etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1987.” 29; Adam Berry, “The Bahā’ī Faith and Its Relationship to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: A Brief History,” *International Social Science Review* 79, no. 3/4 (2004): 137.

<sup>9</sup> Osborn, “The Bahā’ī Faith,” 762–63; Moojan Momen, *Baha’u’llah: A Short Biography* (Simon and Schuster, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Juan R. I. Cole, “Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic Thought in the 19th Century,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 1992): 1–26, doi:10.1017/S0020743800001392.

<sup>11</sup> Stockman, *The World of the Bahā’ī Faith*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Maceoin, “Peter Smith: The Babi and Baha’i Religions: From Messianic Shi’ism to a World Religion, Xiv, 243 Pp. Cambridge, Etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1987.” 57.

<sup>13</sup> Berry, “The Bahā’ī Faith and Its Relationship to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: A Brief History,” 137; For further information, see Abbas 1947- Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844 - 1850*, 1. publ. (Cornell University Press, 1989); William S. Hatcher and James Douglas Martin, *The Baha’i Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (Baha’i Publishing Trust, 2002); Moojan Momen, *The Baha’i Faith: A Short Introduction* (Oneworld Publications, 1999); Helen Hornby, ed., *Lights of Guidance: A Bahā’ī Reference File*, 2., rev.enlarged ed (New Delhi: Bahā’ī Publ. Trust, 1988).

as a “Mirror” and held a position of primacy among his peers. There is a lack of empirical evidence to support the notion that the *Bāb* designated him as a representative or pastor. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there existed numerous individuals who held the title of “Mirrors”.<sup>14</sup>

Multiple governments exerted pressure on *Bahā'u'llāh* to enter exile on multiple occasions, beginning well in advance of his proclamation in 1866. He departed Tehran for Baghdad in 1853 initially. He was subsequently exiled to Edirne, Rumelia, in 1863, after departing Baghdad for Istanbul in 1863. He was dispatched to *'Akkā* (Acre), contemporary Israel, situated north of Haifa, which was Ottoman Palestine at the time, five years later.<sup>15</sup> In the year 1877, it was the Ottoman governor of *'Akkā* who brought an end to the period of imprisonment endured by *Bahā'u'llāh*. The son of *Bahā'u'llāh*, *'Abbās Effendī* (1844-1921), commonly referred to as *'Abdu'l-Bahā*, acquired the *Mazra'ih* estate near *'Akkā* on behalf of his father. Subsequently, in 1879, he relocated to the *Bahjī* estate where he resided until his demise in 1892.<sup>16</sup> Following a legal dispute concerning the proprietorship of *Bahjī*, *Shoghī Effendī* (1897-1957), the grandson of *'Abdu'l-Bahā*, assumed leadership of the *Bahā'īs*. With a 1922 British court ruling in *Shoghī Effendī*'s support, the dispute was resolved.<sup>17</sup> Under the guardianship of *Shoghī Effendī*, the remarkable *Bahā'ī* Administration was established. This encompassed the formation of local and national institutions, the oversight of published materials, and the implementation of extensive coordinated missionary endeavors. During the period of the Guardianship, it is evident that the *Bahā'ī* Faith underwent significant development, transforming into a rapidly expanding international community. This transformation was characterized by an emphasis on modernity and social reconstruction.<sup>18</sup> Notably, various books were utilized as educational tools to disseminate the teachings of the new religion worldwide. Examples of such titles include “*Bahā'u'llāh and the New Era*” by *Esslemont*,<sup>19</sup> and “*Bahatism: The Modern Social Religion*” by *Holley*.<sup>20</sup>

The demise of *Shoghī Effendī* in 1957 gave rise to certain tensions, as it became evident that the will of *'Abdu'l-Bahā* had explicitly stipulated that the Guardianship was a hereditary position, with the incumbent serving as the leader of the community in conjunction with an elected legislative body known as the Universal House of Justice. This institution, as described by *Bahā'u'llāh* in the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas*,<sup>21</sup> holds significant importance. Upon the

<sup>14</sup> “Bahā'u'llāh,” accessed April 21, 2024, [https://bahai-library.com/cole\\_encyclopedia\\_bahaulah/](https://bahai-library.com/cole_encyclopedia_bahaulah/).

<sup>15</sup> Maceoin, “Peter Smith: The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion, Xiv, 243 Pp. Cambridge, Etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1987.,” 66–69.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Kark, ed., *The Land That Became Israel: Studies in Historical Geography* (New Haven : Jerusalem: Yale University Press ; Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1990), 120–32; Osborn, “The Bahā'ī Faith,” 763.

<sup>17</sup> Kark, *The Land That Became Israel*, 129–30.

<sup>18</sup> Osborn, “The Bahā'ī Faith,” 763–65.

<sup>19</sup> J. E. (John Ebenezer) Esslemont, “Bahā'u'llāh and the New Era,” (*No Title*), accessed April 21, 2024, <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1130000795779307520>.

<sup>20</sup> Horace Holley, “Bahatism: The Modern Social Religion,” (*No Title*), accessed April 21, 2024, <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1130282268989025408>.

<sup>21</sup> The *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* ('The Most Holy Book') is the major holy literature of the *Bahā'ī* Faith, authored by the founder *Bahā'u'llāh* in 1873. Although it is the primary source of *Bahā'ī* laws and customs, it also covers basic concepts, institution-building, mysticism, ethics, social principles, and predictions. *Bahā'ī* literature calls it “the Mother-Book” and the “Charter of the future world civilization” of their teachings. See for details Margit Warburg, *Citizens of the World: A History and Sociology of the Baha'is from a Globalisation Perspective*, vol. 106 (Brill, 2018); Moojan Momen, “FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE BAHĀ'Ī COMMUNITY: DEFINITIONS AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS,” *Fundamentalism in the Modern World Vol 1: Fundamentalism, Politics and History: The State, Globalisation and Political Ideologies*, 2001, 288.

demise of *Shoghī Effendī* without a designated successor, a situation arose that harbored the possibility of disharmony. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in the year 1951, *Shoghī Effendī*, the Guardian of the Bahā'ī Faith, had indeed designated a select group of individuals, both men and women, to serve on the International Bahā'ī Council. This particular council was established with the purpose of providing assistance to *Shoghī Effendī* in carrying out certain designated responsibilities, while also serving as a precursor to the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. In the year 1961, the International Bahā'ī Council, which had previously been appointed, underwent a reconstitution and transformed into an elected body. The council's ultimate objective was to establish the election process for the Universal House of Justice, which occurred in the year 1963.<sup>22</sup>

According to Osborn, this particular faith operates independently, refraining from seeking financial assistance from any external sources and deliberately avoiding any form of political engagement. The Bahā'ī Faith, in its essence, finds its origins in the millennialism that emerged during the nineteenth century within the context of *Shī'a* Islam in Iran. It is worth noting, however, that the majority of individuals who identify as Bahā'īs in contemporary times do not necessarily come from a Muslim background and may not possess a conscious awareness of the faith's Islamic foundations. The correlation between the Bahā'ī Faith and *Shī'a* Islam can be likened to the historical connection between Judaism and Christianity. This analogy holds true in the sense that the founders of the *Bābī* and Bahā'ī Faiths emerged within an Islamic society, and a significant portion of their initial adherents were born into the Islamic faith. However, it is important to note that their religious doctrine ultimately surpassed the tenets of Islam. In contrast to Jesus, it is important to note that Bahā'u'llāh, the esteemed founder of Bahā'ī, explicitly articulated his intention to establish a novel religious movement. This movement superseded the faith propagated by the *Bāb*, which, in its own right, had already annulled the teachings of Islam.<sup>23</sup>

However, the academic reception of Bahā'ism or Bahā'ī Faith, has been rather intriguing. During the 19th century, the Bahā'ī Faith and its precursor movement known as *Bābīsm* garnered significant attention from Western scholars. One such scholar was *Edward Browne*, a prominent Persian scholar. Browne dedicated numerous books and articles to the study of this subject matter, demonstrating the serious consideration given to it by certain Western intellectuals. However, as the *Bābīsm* movement gradually declined and transformed into a politically inactive *Baha'ism*, and as *Baha'ism* began to gain momentum beyond the borders of Iran, scholarly attention waned significantly. It was only after the esteemed sociologist *Peter Berger* completed his doctoral dissertation titled '*From Sect to Church: A Sociological Interpretation of the Bahā'ī Movement*' in 1954 that the notion of pursuing additional research on the topic was even considered.<sup>24</sup> However, it is worth noting that *Berger*, despite his rapid rise in reputation, chose not to publish his thesis. This lack of publication did not serve as an incentive for other scholars to delve into the realm of *Bahā'ism*, as *Berger* had done.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Osborn, "The Bahā'ī Faith," 764–65; Berry, "The Bahā'ī Faith and Its Relationship to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: A Brief History," 137; Stockman, *The World of the Bahā'ī Faith*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Osborn, "The Bahā'ī Faith," 761.

<sup>24</sup> Peter L Berger, *From Sect to Church: A Sociological Interpretation of the Baha'i Movement* (New School for Social Research, 1954).

<sup>25</sup> Denis MacEoin, "Making the Invisible Visible: Introductory Books on the Baha'i Religion (the Baha'i Faith)," *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013): 160–77.

Regardless, the *Bahā'ī* Faith can be described as an atypical religious movement. Based on the analysis of *Margit Warburg*, it is evident that the *Bahā'ī* faith does not have a significant presence in Western societies.<sup>26</sup> During the time of *Berger*, the *Baha'i* community was significantly underrepresented numerically in all regions, notwithstanding the considerable efforts that had been made to spread the religious beliefs worldwide. Amid the 1970s, religious scholars, especially those specializing in sociology, developed an increased inquisitiveness concerning religious organizations like the Church of Scientology, the International Society for *Krishna* Consciousness, and the Unification Church. Conversely, their inclination towards comparatively stable or uncontroversial new religious movements, such as the *Bahā'īs* or the *Ahmadis*, was diminished. Notably, scholars deficient in Persian and Arabic or with an incomplete comprehension of Islam were considered to be exceedingly challenged by these latter movements. Academics, in a manner consistent with their scholarly endeavors, frequently favored notorious or widely known groups over those that were more obscure. While the *Bahā'ī* community heavily relied on routine responsibilities like prayer and administration, their attention was frequently diverted to more substantial matters, such as the 'brainwashing' phenomenon. A significant dearth of scandals is discernible within the domain of the *Bahā'ī* community; if any did occur, they were skillfully obscured from the general populace. The *Bahā'ī* Faith undeniably endured the disadvantage of an exaggerated lack of controversy with regard to attracting attention and publicity.<sup>27</sup>

Following a comprehensive examination of the historical context of the *Bahā'ī* Bahā'ī Engagements in Iran, we intend to shift the attention towards the viewpoint of Bangladesh, our home country, about the presence of the *Bahā'ī* Faith inside its territory. The *Bahā'ī* community in Bangladesh consisted of many religious and ethnic groups, which is worth mentioning. According to figures from the *Bahā'ī* Centre in *Dhaka*, Bangladesh, and the *Bahā'ī* community in the country comprises around 300,000 adherents. These adherents want to foster a sense of cohesion and actively contribute to the maintenance of a harmonious society through collaboration.<sup>28</sup>

However, there is a dearth of research conducted on the *Bahā'ī* community in Bangladesh. Existing studies, including works by *Farid* and *Jahangir Alam*, only briefly discuss the community's historical roots and the challenges of maintaining its presence in Bangladesh since independence.<sup>29</sup> *Anik's* examination of the *Bahā'ī* Faith's contribution to interfaith cooperation underscores the movement's constructive social impact; however, it fails to address the challenges it encounters within a Muslim-majority setting.<sup>30</sup> These limitations in scholarship emphasize the need for a more nuanced understanding of *Bahā'īs's*

<sup>26</sup> Margit Warburg, "Becoming a Baha'i," in *Citizens of the World* (Brill, 2006), 285–330; Margit Warburg, "Approaches to Babi and Baha'i Studies," in *Citizens of the World* (Brill, 2006), 32–75; Ivan Ruff, "BAHAI-INVISIBLE COMMUNITY," *New Society* 29, no. 623 (1974): 665–68.

<sup>27</sup> MacEoin, "Making the Invisible Visible: Introductory Books on the Baha'i Religion (the Baha'i Faith)."

<sup>28</sup> "Contact – Baha'i Faith," accessed June 3, 2024, <https://www.bahaibd.org/contact-us/> (The data about the figures was collected through this official site).

<sup>29</sup> Md Shaikh Farid, "Bahai Faith: From an Obscure Movement to a Widespread Religion," accessed April 19, 2024, [https://www.academia.edu/625545/Bahai\\_Faith\\_From\\_an\\_Obscure\\_Movement\\_to\\_a\\_Widespread\\_Religion](https://www.academia.edu/625545/Bahai_Faith_From_an_Obscure_Movement_to_a_Widespread_Religion); Muhammad Jahangir Alam, "Bahai Religious Faith and Tradition in Bangladesh," *Bangladesh E-Journal of Sociology* 8, no. 1 (2011): 87.

<sup>30</sup> Salman Parsim Anik, "Baha'i Centre of Bangladesh, a Place of Inter Religious Interfaith, a Conceptual Movement of Harmony," n.d.

interaction with its social milieu in Bangladesh, where it persists as a little understood community despite its focus on religious diversity.

In addition, the *Bahā'ī* community in Bangladesh, comprising less than 1% of the population, is relatively unknown and is regarded as an ethnic minority group in the country. The majority of populations in Bangladesh, about 85% to 90%, identify as Muslims. Hindus make up over 8% of the total, while Buddhists and Christians account for 0.7% and 0.3%, respectively.<sup>31</sup> Due to the significant numbers of *Sunnī* Muslims, academics have not extensively studied this small community. Consequently, our research seeks to conduct a comparative analysis of the *Bahā'ī* Faith with Islam, with a specific focus on *Aḥmadiyya*, examining how *Bahā'īs* resemble and distinguish themselves from *Aḥmadiyya*, who claims to be a sect of Islam.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, this study examines the historical origins of the *Bahā'ī* Faith in Bangladesh and its expansion in the country.

This paper addresses several core inquiries: What are the fundamental mission and principles of the *Bahā'ī* Faith, and how do these shape its identity and influence its interactions within Muslim-majority societies, particularly in Bangladesh? In what ways do these beliefs align with or diverge from mainstream Islamic perspectives, and what factors contribute to the persecution of *Bahā'īs* in regions like Iran, leading to global migration? What role does the *Bahā'ī* Faith play in challenging superstitions, promoting gender equality, fostering unity, and advancing education, community development, and social progress? What are the key distinctions between the *Bahā'ī* Faith and Islam, especially considering the prevalent belief that the *Bahā'ī* Faith is a sect of Islam, akin to *Aḥmadiyya*?

In order to explore above inquiries, our study employs a qualitative approach, with a specific emphasis on acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the *Bahā'ī* Faith, analyzing various primary and secondary sources, and most importantly, serving a case study at the *Bahā'ī* Center in Rajshahi, Bangladesh, through in person interviews, analyzing *Bahā'īs*' official websites, news portals, scholarly publications, and social media engagement initiatives. However, we ensure strict adherence to the ethical standards of academic research, which include obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality.

Furthermore, this paper is structured into five scholarly sections. The first section provides an in-depth analysis of the historical context of *Bahā'ī* engagements in Iran, outlining the socio-political and religious challenges faced by the community. The second section delves into the emergence and expansion of the *Bahā'ī* Faith in Bangladesh, examining the factors that facilitated its growth and integration. The third section details the mission, core beliefs, practices, and operational activities of the *Bahā'ī* community, highlighting its distinct religious identity. The fourth section explores the dynamics of interfaith relations, with a particular focus on the comparisons among the *Bahā'ī* Faith, Islam, and *Aḥmadiyya*, analyzing their theological and social intersections. The final section

<sup>31</sup> Muenuddin Muhammad and Arshad Islam, "Ethno-Religious Minorities in Bangladesh: A Historical Analysis," *European Journal of Applied Sciences*—Vol 10, no. 3 (2022): 80–81.

<sup>32</sup> *Aḥmadiyya* is a contemporary Islamic sect. The group was established in Qādiān, Punjab, India, in 1889 by Mīrzā Ghulām Aḥmad (c. 1839–1908), who proclaimed his identity as the Mahdī (a messianic figure anticipated by many Muslims at the culmination of the world), the Christian Messiah, a manifestation of the Hindu deity Krishna, and a reappearance (burūz) of the prophet Muḥammad. see for details "Aḥmadiyyah | Islamic Movement, Beliefs & History | Britannica," April 12, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ahmadiah> See also the official website of the *Aḥmadiyya* ><https://www.alislam.org/messiah/>.

concludes the study by summarizing the key research findings and presenting recommendations for further scholarly inquiry.

### Historical Context of *Bahā'ī* Engagements in Iran

The history of the *Bahā'īs* and their engagements with other religious factions and governments throughout the last 150 years is as complex as the account of *Bahā'u'llāh's* missions. *Bahā'īs* in Iran often encounter hostility from adherents of other Semitic faiths, particularly religious minorities, who have made substantial contributions to the expansion of the faith through conversion. Yet, the *'ulamā'*, who are Islamic Scholars and clerics, demonstrate an exceptional level of antagonism in Iran, exceeding that of any other religious group in terms of its intensity. Within the diaspora, *Bahā'īs* have often been recognized in Christian society, but with a cautious and skeptical demeanor. Lately, the *Bahā'ī* community in Israel, mostly consisting of Jewish inhabitants, has been experiencing a very favorable response, deviating from the customary historical trends. This is a significant shift from the initial negative response of the Persian Jews who were displeased with their fellow believers' decision to abandon their religious convictions.<sup>33</sup>

Upon the emergence of the *Bābī* movement, the *Shī'ī 'ulamā'* had a deep-seated animosity against the *Bahā'īs*. Unsurprisingly, the notion that prophet Muḥammad would be followed by further prophets or that any written text, such as the "*Bayān* of the *Bāb*,"<sup>34</sup> could substitute the *Qur'ān*, was seen very contentious. The *Bāb* underwent a sequence of interrogations in the city of *Tabrīz* by the *'ulamā'*, who exploited his confinement to challenge his assertions while also publicly demeaning him. When analyzing the *Shī'ī*, *Bābī*, or *Bahā'ī* sources, there is a notable discrepancy in the accounts of this specific incident.<sup>35</sup> Historian Mongol Boyat states that all the evidence suggests that the investigators' main objective was to disprove the *Bāb's* assertions of being the anticipated *Imām*. They accomplished this by emphasizing his alleged deficiency in areas such as Arabic, theology, philosophy, medicine, and astronomy, as well as his incapacity to perform supernatural acts.<sup>36</sup> While the doctrinal differences between the *Bahā'īs* and *Shī'a* were clear, the *ulamā's* stance towards the *Bahā'īs* has become even more intense. The growing divide between the *'ulamā'* and the government also became evident due to their divergent perspectives on the *Bahā'īs* throughout the *Qājār* dynasty's reign (1796-1925).<sup>37</sup> The success of *Bahā'ī* missionary efforts and the extent of conversions to the faith are partially responsible for the clerical hostility towards the *Bahā'ī* faith. Initially, the *Bahā'ī* faith attracted the most

<sup>33</sup> Berry, "The Bahá'í Faith and Its Relationship to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: A Brief History," 137–38.

<sup>34</sup> Bayān of the Bāb (declaration, explication) refers to the Bāb's works in general. Additionally, he authored two significant, highly consequential, primarily legal-doctrinal works under the particular title Bayān, which were distinguished by the two languages in which they were written: al-Bayān-i Fārsī ("The Persian Bayān") was written in Persian, and al-Bayān al-'Arabī ("The Arabic Bayān") was written in Arabic. See for details "The Arabic Bayān," accessed May 27, 2024, <https://faculty.ucmerced.edu/slambden2/03-THE%20BAB/03A-The%20Bab/Bayan-Arabic.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> Berry, "The Bahá'í Faith and Its Relationship to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: A Brief History," 138.

<sup>36</sup> Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse University Press, 2000), 99–100.

<sup>37</sup> Berry, "The Bahá'í Faith and Its Relationship to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: A Brief History," 138; To know more about Qājār dynasty, see "Qājār Dynasty | Iranian Royalty & History | Britannica," accessed May 27, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Qajar-dynasty>.

enthusiastic converts from the long-standing religious minorities in Iran, such as Jews and Zoroastrians. This is partially due to the strategies and endeavors of the *Bahā'ī* missionary.<sup>38</sup>

However, the *Bahā'īs* were able to retain improved ties with the Iranian government regardless of *Bahā'u'llāh's* promotion of constitutionalism, parliamentarianism, and abolition to the unilateral exercise of governmental power—stances that opposed the authoritarian reign of the *shāh*.<sup>39</sup> This is an aspect of the *Bahā'īs* theological faith rather than just an impulsive choice on their part. Primarily, the Faith refrains from participating in any parties or rival systems of government.<sup>40</sup> As per *Shoghī Effendī* guidance, *Bahā'īs* are prohibited from participating in political campaigns that have partisan characteristics.<sup>41</sup> *Bahā'u'llāh* had this perspective, as evidenced by the following passage from the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas*:

“None must contend with those who wield authority over the people; leave unto them that which is theirs, and direct your attention to men’s hearts.”<sup>42</sup>

The *Qājār* government turned a blind eye to the mistreatment of *Bahā'īs* whenever it suited their interests, often by refusing to intervene in anti-*Bahā'ī* violence or persecution. During the early twentieth century, the government resorted to or supported acts of violence against the *Bahā'īs* in order to appease the religious authorities.<sup>43</sup> In 1955, the government initiated a campaign against the *Bahā'īs*, taking control of their central temple in Tehran to rally opposition among the '*ulamā*' against negotiations with the consortium of oil companies and Iran's involvement in the Baghdad Pact.<sup>44</sup> The government also exploited the *Bahā'ī* support for constitutionalism and reform to undermine the constitutionalists in the late *Qājār* period. During the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911, *shabnāmehs* (“Night letters” were discreetly posted in the darkness, evading the attention of law enforcement.) played a crucial role in conveying political ideas and expressing dissent. Conservative religious figures aligned with the *Qājārs* attempted to undermine their opponents who supported constitutionalism by circulating counterfeit *shabnāmehs* that falsely praised constitutionalism. These fraudulent documents were even adorned with fabricated signatures of well-known *Bahā'īs*.<sup>45</sup> In spite of their willingness to manipulate religious animosity for political gain, the *Qājārs* consistently appointed *Bahā'īs* to various governmental roles, showing a comparatively lower level of animosity towards them compared to the '*ulamā*'. During the late *Qājār* period, notable *Bahā'īs* were integrated into the civil elite, taking on

<sup>38</sup> Peter Smith, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions : From Messianic Shi'ism to Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 92.

<sup>39</sup> Shāh is a regal title that has traditionally been used by the monarchs of Iranian dynasties.

<sup>40</sup> Berry, “The Bahā'ī Faith and Its Relationship to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: A Brief History,” 139.

<sup>41</sup> “God Passes By | Bahā'ī Reference Library,” accessed May 28, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/god-passes-by/>; Rodney Richards, “Why Baha'is Don't Participate in Partisan Politics,” *BahaiTeachings.Org*, October 1, 2020, <https://bahaiteachings.org/why-bahais-dont-participate-in-partisan-politics/>; David Langness, “Religion and Politics: A Baha'ī Perspective,” *BahaiTeachings.Org*, October 28, 2013, <https://bahaiteachings.org/bahai-principles-religion-and-politics/>.

<sup>42</sup> “Kitab-i-Aqdas.Pdf,” 22, accessed May 28, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/kitab-i-aqdas/kitab-i-aqdas.pdf?7f57be30>.

<sup>43</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, “Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan, 1796-1925,” (*No Title*), 86, accessed May 28, 2024, <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1130282269266258560>.

<sup>44</sup> Ali Gheissari, “Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century,” in *Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century* (University of Texas Press, 2000), 75, doi:10.7560/728042; To know more about the Baghdad pact, see Ara Sanjian, “The Formulation of the Baghdad Pact,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 2 (1997): 226–66, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4283868>.

<sup>45</sup> Said Amir Arjomand, “The Ulama’s Traditionalist Opposition to Parliamentarianism: 1907-1909,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 2 (1981): 185, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4282826>.

roles such as provincial viziers, financial administrators, and even governors.<sup>46</sup> The *Bahā'īs'* interactions with the Iranian government during the *Qājār* and *Pahlavī* periods were characterized by varying levels of official animosity, which fluctuated based on the ruler's demands.<sup>47</sup>

Clerical perceptions of the *Bahā'ī* faith were negatively impacted by the government that was founded during the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and its actions against the *Bahā'īs*. Prominent government figures, like as *Āyāt Allāh Rūh Allāh Khumaynī*, issued explicit statements outlining official opinions of the *Bahā'īs*. The following conversation, which took place in December 1978 between *Khumaynī* and Rutgers University professor James Cockroft, demonstrates this:

“Question by Cockroft: “Will there be either religious or political freedom for the *Bahā'īs* under an Islamic government?” Answer from *Khumaynī*: “They are a political faction; they are harmful. They will not be accepted.” Question: “How about their freedom of religion-religious practice?” Answer: “No.””<sup>48</sup>

Consequently, the Iranian authorities officially classified the *Bahā'īs* faith as a defamatory political entity and declined to recognize it as a legitimate religion. This depiction served as a rationale for the persecution and bias targeted at the *Bahā'īs* who remained in Iran after the revolution. The Islamic Republic of Iran invoked several provisions of its constitution, particularly the final clause of Article 14, to legally justify its denial of official religious status to the *Bahā'ī* Faith and its persistent belief that the *Bahā'īs* are a seditious movement. This invocation effectively resulted in the denial of any rights to *Bahā'īs*. These legal protections are further diminished by additional sections, such as Article 22, which clearly grants the government the authority to employ legislation to infringe upon the constitution. The pronouncement made by *Āyāt Allāh Muḥammad Ṣadūqī*, a former assistant of *Khumaynī*, openly labeling *Bahā'īs* as “*mahdūr al-dam*” (those whose blood is uselessly squandered), thereby implying that the blood of *Bahā'īs* is *ḥalāl* (permissible) and can be lawfully shed, is potentially more alarming than the political maneuvering taking place in the constitution.<sup>49</sup>

The Iranian government has been harshly persecuting the *Bahā'īs* since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, as proven by a plethora of evidence. Human Rights Watch claims that *Bahā'īs* have continued to experience persecution, which includes being denied access to public spaces for community activities and places of devotion. At least four *Bahā'īs* were imprisoned as a result of their religious beliefs.<sup>50</sup> Amnesty International reports that over 200 *Bahā'īs* have been executed since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 in Iran.<sup>51</sup> After the Iranian Revolution, a significant number of *Bahā'īs* felt forced to leave Iran and relocate to other countries as a consequence of this maltreatment.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Smith, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions : From Messianic Shi'ism to Religion*, 92.

<sup>47</sup> Berry, “The Bahá'í Faith and Its Relationship to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: A Brief History,” 140.

<sup>48</sup> Douglas Martin, “Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran 1844-1984,” 31, accessed May 29, 2024, [https://bahai-library.com/martin\\_persecution\\_bahais\\_iran/](https://bahai-library.com/martin_persecution_bahais_iran/).

<sup>49</sup> Berry, “The Bahá'í Faith and Its Relationship to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: A Brief History,” 140–41.

<sup>50</sup> “Human Rights Watch World Report 2003: Middle East & Northern Africa: Iran,” accessed May 29, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k3/mideast3.html>.

<sup>51</sup> “AI Worldwide Appeals April 1997,” *Amnesty International*, accessed May 29, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/nws22/002/1997/en/>.

## The Emergence and Expansion of the *Bahā'ī* Faith in Bangladesh

The emergence of the *Bahā'ī* Faith in Bangladesh occurred during its period as a part of India, before its attainment of independence. The beginnings of the *Bahā'ī* Faith in the area may be traced back to 1844, when the *Bābī* Faith was first founded.<sup>52</sup> During this early age, there were four *Bābīs* in India. The exact sub-region of their origin is obscure, but some of them were called *Şufīs* while others were referred to as *Sayyid*.<sup>53</sup> *Shaykh Sa'in Hindi*, one of the *Letters of the Living*, was born in a place that used to be part of India.<sup>54</sup> Four more Indians are recognized as members of the 318 *Bābīs* that took part in the *Battle of Fort Ṭabarsī*.<sup>55</sup> Over the course of his life, *Bahā'u'llāh*, the founder of the Faith, urged a number of his adherents to travel to India. It is commonly recognized that in 1872, he dispatched an esteemed Persian individual named *Sulaymān Khān-i-Tunukābanā*, also known as *Jamāl Effendī*, to India. Having explored numerous renowned towns in India, he eventually reached Kolkata in 1878. While on his journey in India, the person came across an adolescent named *Siyyid Muştafā Rūmī* in Madras, India. Due to his profound spiritual inclination, *Rūmī* wholeheartedly embraced the new faith and joined him on his journey to Bengal and Burma. During his travels to Burma,<sup>56</sup> he had the opportunity to visit Dhaka and Chittagong, where he had the honor of meeting influential individuals from these places,<sup>57</sup> one of whom was an Arabic professor at Dhaka College. Undoubtedly, with *Effendī's* guidance, *Muştafā Rūmī* played a crucial role in bringing the *Bahā'ī* Faith to Bangladesh.<sup>58</sup>

In 1910, American *Bahā'ī* organizations encouraged the Indian/Burmese national group to distinguish itself from Islam. The inaugural All-India *Bahā'ī* Convention took place in Bombay over a span of three days in December 1920, signifying the commencement of nationwide collaborative endeavors that reached their pinnacle. Delegates from various regions of India, along with representatives from the major religious communities in the nation, were present at this event.<sup>59</sup> A regional National Spiritual Assembly for India and Burma was established in 1923 when the region was still a part of India. At that time, Bangladesh and Pakistan were included.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, a Bengali group from Chittagong adopted the Faith while visiting Burma, thereby becoming the first *Bahā'īs* in the region that

<sup>52</sup> "Bahā'ī Faith in India," *The Bahā'ī Faith*, October 10, 2023, <https://www.bahai.in/bahai-faith-in-india/>.

<sup>53</sup> "Historical Account of Two Indian Babis: Sa'in Hindi and Sayyid Basir Hindi," accessed May 31, 2024, <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/notes/vol5/hunud.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> The term "The Letters of the Living", known as *Ḥurūf-al-Ḥayy* in Arabic, was used by the *Bāb* to refer to the first group of eighteen *Bābīs*. The Letters played a pivotal role in the original formation of the *Bābī* community in Persia and Iraq, and their significance extends beyond their literal manifestation. See "The Practice of Taqiya (Dissimulation)," accessed May 31, 2024, <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/notes/vol3/taqiya.htm>; Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Bāb* (Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 2010), 268.

<sup>55</sup> To know the details of the Battle of Fort Ṭabarsī, see Moojan Momen, "Jamāl Effendī and the Early Spread of the Bahā'ī," *Bahā'ī Studies Review* 9 (2000); Moojan Momen, "The Social Basis of the *Bābī* Upheavals in Iran (1848-53): A Preliminary Analysis," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15, no. 2 (1983): 157-83, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/162988>.

<sup>56</sup> To know more about their Burma's journey, see Shoghī Effendī and July 14 1945, "Siyyid Muştafā Rūmī - Bahaipedia, an Encyclopedia about the Bahā'ī Faith," accessed June 1, 2024, [https://bahaipedia.org/Siyyid\\_Muştafā\\_Rūmī](https://bahaipedia.org/Siyyid_Muştafā_Rūmī).

<sup>57</sup> "Bahai - Banglapedia," accessed June 1, 2024, <https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Bahai>.

<sup>58</sup> Md Shaikh Farid, "Bahai Faith: From an Obscure Movement to a Widespread Religion," 164, accessed April 19, 2024, [https://www.academia.edu/625545/Bahai\\_Faith\\_From\\_an\\_Obscure\\_Movement\\_to\\_a\\_Widespread\\_Religion](https://www.academia.edu/625545/Bahai_Faith_From_an_Obscure_Movement_to_a_Widespread_Religion); See for details "Bahaipedia," n.d., [https://bahaipedia.org/Bangladesh#cite\\_note-11](https://bahaipedia.org/Bangladesh#cite_note-11).

<sup>59</sup> "Bahaipedia," *Pakistan*, n.d., <https://bahaipedia.org/Pakistan>.

<sup>60</sup> India et al., "NSA:India and Burma - Bahaipedia, an Encyclopedia about the Bahā'ī Faith," accessed June 1, 2024, [https://bahaipedia.org/NSA:India\\_and\\_Burma](https://bahaipedia.org/NSA:India_and_Burma).

would eventually become Bangladesh.<sup>61</sup> Under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, John Esslemont's *Bahā'u'llāh* and the New Era was translated by 'Amīr al-Islām (An ardent Bengali adherent of the *Bahā'ī* Faith) and published in Bengali (*Bahā'u'llāh o nabajug*) in Chittagong in 1936/1937. This book is widely regarded as the definitive guide to the Bengali *Bahā'īs* community.<sup>62</sup>

'Amjad 'Alī, a resident of Bihar, India, relocated to Dhaka in December 1948 with the intention of fostering the development of the *Bahā'ī* community in East Pakistan. His family members and a small group of *Bahā'īs* from West Bengal were by his side. In 1952, he utilized the peaceful setting to establish the local governing body (local spiritual assembly) in Dhaka. This was the inaugural local council to be elected in the eastern region of Pakistan. In 1955, a local assembly was elected in Chittagong, and later followed by a third assembly in Mymensingh in 1961, as the *Bahā'ī* community continued to experience steady growth. In 1965, a significant endeavor was made to promote the *Bahā'ī* Faith among rural populations. Additionally, Bangladesh had around ten local assemblies by 1971. Thus, in April 1972, a *Bahā'ī* center was formed in *Shanti Nagar* in Dhaka in an attempt to make the activities more vibrant. In April 1972, the *Bahā'īs* of Bangladesh elected their own National Spiritual Assembly after the country's independence. On June 2, 1972, this assembly and thirteen local assemblies were merged.<sup>63</sup>

However, in order to focus specifically on a *Bahā'ī* Center situated in *Rajshahi*, Bangladesh, which is the crucial part of our research, we intend to present a brief account of the center's foundation. Because of our extended stay in *Rajshahi* for academic purposes, we were able to effortlessly do our research at this center. As a result, we exerted ourselves to ascertain the precise narrative underlying the center's establishment. We contacted Mr. *Ḥaydar*, the officer in charge of the *Bahā'ī* Center, and asked him to provide a detailed account of the center's history.<sup>64</sup> According to his findings, the *Bahā'ī* center was founded in *Rajshahi* city of Bangladesh, following the country's independence in 1975. The *Bahā'ī* community has been living in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, since 1950. Subsequently, two persons, *Shamsar 'Alī* and *Nasīm al-Hudā*, frequently commuted from Dhaka to *Rajshahi* for their employment. Both of these persons were adherents of the *Bahā'ī* Faith. Because of their occupations in *Rajshahi*, they were unable to form any enduring structures to practice their Faith. They later purchased land near *Rajshahi Medical*, a prominent institution in the city, situated opposite *Rajshahi Paramedical*. They purchased this land with the goal of permanently establishing the *Bahā'ī* Faith in *Rajshahi*. They built a small abode to serve as their sacred sanctuary and began practicing their Faith here. Subsequently, they constructed a permanent structure to establish a fully operational *Bahā'ī* center and endeavored to acquaint the indigenous populace with the *Bahā'ī* Faith.

<sup>61</sup> "Bahai - Banglapedia."

<sup>62</sup> Bahá'í International Community, "'Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era' Editions and Printings Held in Bahá'í World Centre Library Decade by Decade 1920 -2000," *General Collections*, n.d., <http://library.bahai.org/gc/bne.html>; "Bahaiopedia-Bangladesh," n.d., [https://bahaiopedia.org/Bangladesh#cite\\_note-bw18-15](https://bahaiopedia.org/Bangladesh#cite_note-bw18-15); Alam, "Bahai Religious Faith and Tradition in Bangladesh," 90.

<sup>63</sup> Farid, "Bahai Faith," 164; "Bahaiopedia-Bangladesh"; See also Alam, "Bahai Religious Faith and Tradition in Bangladesh," 88-89.

<sup>64</sup> Ḥaydar, Bahā'ī Inception in Rajshahi, In person, May 24, 2024 Ḥaydar, "Bahā'ī Inception (Since the Rajshahi Bahā'ī Center does not have an official website or any written documents, We had to gather information about its inception by reaching out to the official in charge). To further investigate, visit the official site of the Bahā'īs in Bangladesh > <https://www.bahaibd.org/>.

Over time, a growing number of people began to embrace their religious convictions and become adherents of the *Bahā'ī* Faith. They were all actively involved in spreading their religious beliefs. The national *Bahā'ī* center in Dhaka facilitated the essential assistance and cooperation required to manage the *Bahā'ī* center in Rajshahi and supplied most of the financial aid. Religious officials from the national *Bahā'ī* center frequently visited Rajshahi to coordinate various assemblies, workshops, and seminars. Additionally, *Bahā'ī* religious educators from the national center traveled to Rajshahi with the goal of delivering religious instruction, enlightening people about the *Bahā'ī* Faith, and encouraging and motivating them to embrace this Faith. Consequently, a significant number of locals promptly adopted the *Bahā'ī* faith due to their proactive efforts. Although Bangladesh is predominantly Muslim country, the *Bahā'ī* Faith has not been successful in converting a large number of Muslims. Nevertheless, the *Bahā'ī* community has consistently and diligently strived to promote the *Bahā'ī* Faith by elucidating its significance, objectives, goals, and mission in a peaceful manner. At first, they struggled to persuade people to adhere to their Faith through discursive proposals, so they began offering financial assistance to numerous impoverished individuals and consistently encouraging them to embrace the *Bahā'ī* Faith. Afterwards, they introduced the *Bahā'ī* Faith to a large number of destitute people. This process led to the gradual establishment of the *Bahā'ī* Faith in Rajshahi

### **The Mission, Beliefs, Practices and Operational Activities of the *Bahā'īs***

In pursuit of our study purpose, we engaged with the Rajshahi *Bahā'ī* Center to investigate their mission, activities, practices, beliefs, and institutional structure. Under formal authorization, we conducted interviews with two officials from the center. *Rūḥ al-Amīn*, who is the center's administrative officer. The other, *Nāz Raḥmān*, whose family is originally from India, resides in Bangladesh because of his marriage. *Raḥmān* said that his grandpa underwent a conversion from Islam to the *Bahā'ī* Faith, and as a result, his parents and siblings have embraced the *Bahā'ī* Faith.<sup>65</sup> However, as part of our study, we conducted an inquiry in which we asked them various questions about the *Bahā'ī* Faith, including its aim, beliefs, and activities. we translated and summarized whatever they told us in the interview from Bengali into English, with additional relevant references:

They state that the *Bahā'īs* believe in the spiritual evolution of individuals and respond to *Bahā'u'llāh's* call through self-discovery, spiritual excellence, virtue acquisition, and potential development. Principles such as prayer, meditation, self-reflection, and adherence to moral and ethical standards guide this journey. *Bahā'īs* aim to align thoughts, words, and actions with spiritual values, nurturing their souls and developing inner peace and harmony. *Bahā'u'llāh's* teachings emphasize the unity of humanity, the establishment of justice, and a just world order.<sup>66</sup> Following His call entails actively engaging in endeavors to enhance society, fostering harmony, fairness, and parity within their local community and beyond. *Bahā'īs* actively participate in the progress of civilization and the fulfillment of *Bahā'u'llāh's* vision of a globally unified society by engaging in service, providing assistance, and collaborating with persons and organizations that share similar goals.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Rūḥ al-Amīn and Nāz Raḥmān, Understanding the Bahā'ī Faith: A Study on Their Activities, Practices, Beliefs and Institutional Structure- Rajshahi Bahā'ī Center, In person, February 6, 2024.

<sup>66</sup> Warburg, *Citizens of the World: A History and Sociology of the Baha'is from a Globalisation Perspective*.

<sup>67</sup> Stockman, *The World of the Bahá'í Faith*.

The *Bahā'ī* Faith views the Creator (God) as the ultimate reality, the creator of the universe, and the source of all existence. The Creator is characterized by qualities like love, mercy, justice, and wisdom, and the purpose of creation is to reflect these qualities. The Creator reveals Himself to humanity through divine messengers or revelations, including figures like Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Jesus Christ, *Muhammad*, the *Bāb*, and *Bahā'u'llāh*. *Bahā'u'llāh* emphasizes the progressive nature of these revelations, building on the foundations laid by previous ones and addressing the spiritual and material needs of humanity in its time.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, *Bahā'u'llāh* places a high value on the spiritual aspect of existence, which he describes as “*the life of the soul*.” *Bahā'u'llāh* posits that the existence of the soul encompasses a deep expedition of spiritual discovery, growth, and metamorphosis. He imparts that spiritual advancement can be impeded by attachment to material possessions and worldly desires. The existence of the soul entails cultivating spiritual qualities and virtues, as well as establishing a sense of detachment from materialism. *Bahā'u'llāh* further asserts that the fundamental purpose of the soul's existence is to acknowledge and embrace the divine revelations sent by God's prophets across different eras. He claims that God sent messengers to guide humanity and disclose spiritual truths tailored to each era and civilization. *Bahā'u'llāh*'s teachings also underscore the unity of humanity, affirming that all people are equal in God's eyes and worthy of respect, love, and justice. They call upon humanity to overcome divisions of race, nationality, and religion to build a more just and peaceful world.<sup>69</sup>

The *Bahā'ī* community places utmost importance on a life dedicated to prayer and a harmonious combination of service and worship, aligning with their all-encompassing understanding of the teachings. *Bahā'ī* worship covers a diverse range of customs and expressions aimed at deepening spiritual consciousness and establishing a direct connection with God. A key aspect of *Bahā'ī* worship is the observance of sacred texts from several religious traditions, including those authored by *Bahā'u'llāh*. *Bahā'īs* often hold devotional gatherings where people from many backgrounds come together to participate in prayer and meditation. Worship essentially manifests as an act of action, showcasing true devotion through selfless service to others. *Bahā'u'llāh* teaches that prayer serves as a mechanism for developing a connection with God and soliciting His guidance and assistance. Meditation enables individuals to calm their thoughts, contemplate spiritual realities, and cultivate a profound understanding of their soul and their relationship with God.<sup>70</sup>

The *Bahā'ī* Faith emphasizes the significance of family life and education for individual and social well-being. It teaches that the family is the foundation of civilization, transmitting moral and spiritual values from generation to generation. *Bahā'īs* are encouraged to foster harmonious relationships within their families, characterized by love, respect, and

<sup>68</sup> Christopher Buck, “Fifty Bahá'í Principles of Unity: A Paradigm of Social Salvation,” *Baha'í Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2012): 3–44; Christopher Buck, “Islam and Minorities: The Case of the Baha'ís,” *Studies in Contemporary Islam* 5, no. 1–2 (2003): 83–106.

<sup>69</sup> To know more, see “The Human Soul | The Life of the Spirit | What Bahá'ís Believe,” accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/life-spirit/human-soul>.

<sup>70</sup> For further investigating their devotional lives, see “Devotion | The Life of the Spirit | What Bahá'ís Believe,” accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/life-spirit/devotion>; “Walking a Spiritual Path,” accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/action/response-call-bahaullah/walking-spiritual-path>; Kenneth E. Bowers, *God Speaks Again: An Introduction to the Baha'í Faith* (Baha'í Publishing Trust, 2004).

understanding. Education is a fundamental responsibility of parents and society, encompassing intellectual, spiritual, moral, and socio-overall development. *Bahā'ī* parents are encouraged to provide a balanced education, nurturing children's intellectual curiosity, moral character, and spiritual insight. The *Bahā'ī* community supports and empowers families in raising and educating children, organizing spiritual and moral development classes and youth activities.<sup>71</sup>

The *Bahā'ī* Community's administrative structure is crucial for achieving *Bahā'u'llāh's* vision of a unified world community. It consists of elected and appointed institutions at local, national, and international levels, with local spiritual councils overseeing community affairs and spiritual and social development. At the national level, National Spiritual Assemblies offer guidance and coordination, while the Universal House of Justice, elected every five years, provides overall guidance and protection. Consultation is a central tenet of *Bahā'ī* administration, emphasizing collective decision-making and truth-seeking through dialogue. *Bahā'ī* institutions seek community members' views in order to reach decisions that reflect the community's will. Training programs, workshops, and resources are provided to help members develop the necessary skills and abilities for various administrative capacities. *Bahā'ī* administrative processes are continually refined and improved in response to changing circumstances and growing needs.<sup>72</sup>

### Interfaith Dynamics: Exploring the Comparisons Within *Bahā'īs*, Islam, and *Aḥmadiyya*

We conducted a thorough study at the *Rajshahi Bahā'ī* Center in Bangladesh to investigate the devotees' perspectives on the *Bahā'ī* Faith. Conversations with individuals who strongly adhered to their beliefs revealed unique insights, especially among those who had previously followed other religions before converting. Notably, *Mazdar* and *Harder*, who converted from Islam to the *Bahā'ī* Faith, shared their experiences.<sup>73</sup> *Mazdar* completed his transformation in the 1980s, while *Harder* embraced it during his undergraduate years. Our

<sup>71</sup> To know details, see "Children's Classes," accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/action/family-life-children/childrens-classes>; "Family Life," accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/action/family-life-children/family-life>.

<sup>72</sup> For anyone seeking accurate information on *Bahā'ī* activities, practices, beliefs, and institutional structure, it is recommended to look into "Bahā'ī Activities – The Bahā'ī Faith," accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahaibd.org/action/>; To access all the quotes and original texts pertaining to the provided information from the religious writings of the *Bahā'ī* Faith, see "Quotations | Universal Peace | What Bahā'īs Believe," accessed June 5, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/universal-peace/quotations>; "Bahā'ī Administration | Bahā'ī Reference Library," accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/bahai-administration/4#607107240>; "Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh | Bahā'ī Reference Library," accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/tablets-bahauallah/5#545364905>; "Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh | Bahā'ī Reference Library," accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/gleanings-writings-bahauallah/4#690847010>; "The Secret of Divine Civilization | Bahā'ī Reference Library," accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/secret-divine-civilization/4#034825054>; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace | Bahā'ī Reference Library," accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/promulgation-universal-peace/12#691012778>; "A Partial Inventory of the Works of the Central Figures of the Bahā'ī Faith," *Afnan Library*, accessed June 6, 2024, <https://afnanlibrary.org/a-partial-inventory/>; "Downloads – Authoritative Writings and Guidance | Bahā'ī Reference Library," accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/downloads>; "The Tabernacle of Unity | Bahā'ī Reference Library," accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/tabernacle-unity/>; "Kitab-i-Aqdas.Pdf."

<sup>73</sup> *Mazdar* and *Harder*, Investigating the Devotee's Perspectives on the *Bahā'ī* Faith-Rajshahi *Bahā'ī* Center, In person, May 24, 2024 (All quotations of both interlocutors are translated by the author from Bengali to English).

exploration focused on their personal journeys, the obstacles they encountered, their devotional practices, and the factors that drew them to the Faith, alongside comparisons between the Bahā'ī Faith, Islam, and *Aḥmadiyya (Qādiānī)*.

*Mazdar* described his reasons for converting, stating, "I was a Muslim. Islam emphasizes human rights and equality, but as I immersed myself in the *Bahā'ī* Faith, I found it prioritized social bonds, interpersonal engagement, egalitarianism, and gender equality more overtly. This deeply resonated with me." He highlighted gender equality as particularly impactful: "In Islam, the law of inheritance grants a brother twice the share of his sister (*Qur'ān* 4:11). In contrast, the *Bahā'ī* Faith upholds full equality between brothers and sisters regarding inheritance rights."

*Harder* spoke about the transformation in his worldview after embracing the *Bahā'ī* Faith: "I consider it a great blessing. Embracing this faith allowed me to appreciate concepts like human equality, human rights, women's rights, and the development of human relations. It enriched my ability for social interaction and deepened my care for the welfare of others."

*Mazdar* also described the social isolation he faced after converting: "My family misunderstood the Bahā'ī Faith and warned me against it. Only my father supported me, never resorting to coercion. However, my neighbors and relatives distanced themselves, labeling me an infidel (*kāfir*). My social circle shrank as friends stopped including me in their conversations, leaving me often feeling lonely. Despite this, I never wavered in my commitment."

Both *Mazdar* and *Harder* discussed their devotional practices, stating, "We perform an obligatory prayer daily, which we can do at any time. We also have morning prayers at 2 p.m., where we pray for family, the vulnerable, and the well-being of everyone. This routine fosters a sense of peace and connectedness." They emphasized the guiding influence of Bahā'u'llāh's life, aspiring to embody his qualities consistently.

Finally, while inquiring about one of the key aspects of our study, we sought clarification on the distinctions between *Bahā'īs* and Islam. This is because there is a prevalent belief among many people that the *Bahā'ī* Faith is a sect of Islam, similar to *Aḥmadiyya*. In response, they stated that "there is a prevalent misconception among other religious communities, who mistakenly perceive us as being similar to the *Shī'a* or *Aḥmadiyya (Qādiānī)* sects, both of which are considered controversial within Islam. Perhaps they do not perceive us as a distinct and autonomous religious entity. Undoubtedly, we are a distinct and autonomous religious entity, neither affiliated with nor associated with Islam in any way." However, we argue that despite their self-proclaimed independence from Islam, unlike *Aḥmadiyya*, they share some similarities with *Aḥmadiyya* in certain aspects. For example, both movements emerged from Islam in the 19th century due to their founders' affiliation, but their theologies differ from those of *Sunnī Islam*. As an illustration, *Mīrzā Ghulām Aḥmad*, the founder of the *Aḥmadiyya* sect, diverges from *Sunnī* Muslims primarily on three key aspects:

(1) *Ghulām Aḥmad* challenged the notion that Prophet *Muḥammad's* prophethood (nabuwwah) was ultimate (seal of the prophets), proposing the existence of primary and secondary prophethoods. He drew parallels between his own relationship with *Muḥammad*

and the relationship between Jesus and Moses, suggesting that he marked the end of *Muhammad*'s era.<sup>74</sup>

(2) He made the audacious claim of being the resurrected Jesus, which contradicts the teachings found in both the New Testament and the *Qur'an*. He presented a controversial theory suggesting that Jesus may have survived the crucifixion and embarked on a journey to Afghanistan and Kashmir to share his teachings. He even made the bold assertion that he had discovered Jesus' grave in Srinagar, Kashmir. This belief was pivotal to his assertion to be the *Mahdī*/Messiah.<sup>75</sup>

(3) He put forward a peaceful interpretation of *jihād*, emphasizing that his position as a divine prophet necessitated that the only permissible form of *jihād* was through missionary efforts. He adamantly refused to engage in any form of jihad against the British.<sup>76</sup>

In a comparable manner, the *Bahā'īs* hold that *Bahā'u'llāh* is a new manifestation of God, following a line of prophets that includes Moses, Jesus, and *Muhammad*. This belief positions the Bahā'ī Faith as a universal religion aimed at unifying humanity. The invocation "*Allāh-u-Abhā*" ("God the All-Glorious") embodies this focus on divine unity.<sup>77</sup> In Islam, there is a tradition of multiple names for God, but the specific identity of the supreme name is unknown. *Bahā'u'llāh* has stated that the supreme appellation is "*Bahā*," which is considered the most significant designation. This term is conveyed in a letter written by the secretary on behalf of *Shoghī Effendī*:

"The Greatest Name is the Name of *Bahā'u'llāh*. "*Yā Baha'u'l-Abhā*" is an invocation meaning: "O Thou Glory of Glories!" "*Allāh-u-Abhā*" is a greeting which means: "God the All-Glorious." Both refer to *Bahā'u'llāh*. By Greatest Name is meant that *Bahā'u'llāh* has appeared in God's Greatest Name, in other words, that He is the supreme Manifestation of God."<sup>78</sup>

In addition, the *Bahā'ī* community in Bangladesh experiences relative acceptance compared to their coreligionists in Iran, where severe persecution persists due to their perceived challenge to Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>79</sup> Although they maintain their identity as distinct from Islam, Bangladesh's secular constitution allows *Bahā'īs* the freedom to practice their

<sup>74</sup> To know more on Ghulam Ahmad's notions on the seal of prophets, see "Finality of Prophethood – Some Points (1)," accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.alislam.org/articles/finality-of-prophethood-some-points/>; "Finality of Prophethood – Some Points (2)," accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.alislam.org/articles/finality-of-prophethood-some-points-2/>.

<sup>75</sup> For further investigating Ahmadiyya's claims of being Mahdī, see "Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad," accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.alislam.org/messiah/>; "Establishing the Truthfulness of the Promised Messiah (as) from the Holy Quran," accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.alislam.org/articles/establishing-truthfulness-of-promised-messiah-from-holy-quran/>; "Coming of The Messiah – The World Is Waiting for Saviour," accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.alislam.org/video/coming-of-the-messiah-the-world-is-waiting-for-saviour/>; "Second Coming of the Messiah – True Concept about Promised Messiah," accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.alislam.org/video/second-coming-of-messiah-true-concept-about-promised-messiah/>; "Promised Messiah's Deep Anguish for the Victory of Islam," accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.alislam.org/video/promised-messiah-deep-anguish-for-victory-of-islam/>.

<sup>76</sup> Francis Robinson, *Varieties of South Asian Islam* (Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick Coventry, 1988), 10; See also "What Does the Term 'Jihad' Mean?," accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.alislam.org/question/what-does-jihad-mean/>.

<sup>77</sup> Peter Smith, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions : From Messianic Shi'ism to Religion*.

<sup>78</sup> (33) "The Kitāb-i-Aqdas | Bahā'ī Reference Library," accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/kitab-i-aqdas/15#228755893>; Buck, "Islam and Minorities: The Case of the Baha'is."

<sup>79</sup> To know about the recent reports of persecution, see Nahid Naghshbandi, "The Boot on My Neck," *Human Rights Watch*, April 1, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/04/01/boot-my-neck/iranian-authorities-crime-persecution-against-bahais-iran>; Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2013: Iran," in *World Report 2013*, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/iran>.

faith openly and organize community activities. On the other hand, *Ahmadis* in Bangladesh experience societal discrimination,<sup>80</sup> though not as institutionalized as in Pakistan, where legal decrees classify them as non-Muslims and restrict their religious practices.<sup>81</sup>

These distinctions illustrate the complexities of religious identity and acceptance in predominantly Muslim societies like Bangladesh. While the *Bahā'īs* focus on separation from Islam and global unity, *Ahmadiyya* maintains an identity rooted in Islamic reform, resulting in varied levels of acceptance and marginalization. Understanding these dynamics offers deeper insights into religious pluralism and interfaith interactions in contemporary Bangladesh.

## Conclusion

The study traces the historical development and current status of the *Bahā'ī* Faith from its emergence in 19th-century Persia to its contemporary presence in Bangladesh. While sharing historical and theological roots with Islam, the *Bahā'ī* Faith has evolved to establish a unique identity characterized by its emphasis on egalitarian principles, unity, and progressive revelation. The findings underscore the significant variations in how the *Bahā'ī* community is perceived and treated in different socio-religious contexts. In Iran, the community faces systematic persecution stemming from theological and political conflicts with mainstream *Shī'ī* Islamic doctrines. Conversely, in Bangladesh, the *Bahā'īs* experience relatively more accepting environment, attributed to the country's secular policies and broader recognition of religious diversity.

Fieldwork conducted at the Rajshahi *Bahā'ī* Center illuminated the daily practices and challenges of Bangladeshi *Bahā'īs*, revealing how they navigate their minority status through an emphasis on social harmony and community engagement. This study's comparative analysis with the *Ahmadiyya* community further highlights that *Bahā'īs*, by defining themselves as a separate faith rather than a sect within Islam, experience different societal

<sup>80</sup> Ashrafuzzaman Khan and Mrinmoy Samadder, "Struggling Insecurity: Ahmadiyya Community in Bangladesh," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 20, no. 3 (2013): 371–79, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24675871>; Ashek Mahmud and Sadeka Halim, "Minority Discourse and Social Exclusion: A Study on the Ahmadiyya Community in Bangladesh," *Journal of Underrepresented & Minority Progress* 8, no. 1 (April 5, 2024), doi:10.32674/jump.v8i1.6077; Atalayar, "Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Denounces Violent Attacks in Bangladesh," *Atalayar*, August 16, 2024, <https://www.atalayar.com/en/articulo/society/ahmadiyya-muslim-community-denounces-violent-attacks-in-bangladesh/20240816170000204147.html>.

<sup>81</sup> For details, see Ali Usman Qasmi, *The Ahmadiis and the Politics of Religious Exclusion in Pakistan* (Anthem Press, 2014); Humayun Kabir, "The 'Othering' of the Ahmadiyya Community in Bangladesh," in *Faith-Based Violence and Deobandi Militancy in Pakistan*, ed. Jawad Syed et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 423–52, doi:10.1057/978-1-349-94966-3\_15; Rafia Jalil, "Issues of the Integration of the Baha'is and Hindus in Pakistan: A Case Study of the Twin Cities (Islamabad- Rawalpindi)" (M.Phil Development Studies, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics Islamabad, 2015), <https://file-thesis.pide.org.pk/pdf/mphil-development-studies-2015-rafia-jalil--issues-of-the-integration-of-the-bahais-and-hindus-in-pakistan-a-case-study-of-the-twin-cities-islam.pdf>; Uzma Jamil, "Minorities and 'Islamic' states: explaining Baha'i and Ahmadi marginalization in Iran and Pakistan" (McGill University), accessed October 24, 2024, <https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/7p88cj52h>; Amjad Mahmood Khan, "Persecution of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan: An Analysis under International Law and International Relations," *Harv. Hum. Rts. J.* 16 (2003): 217; Rafiq A. Tschannen, "Persecution of Ahmadiis Escalates in Pakistan as Mosques Are Targeted and Hate Speech Incites Violence," *The Muslim Times*, September 15, 2024, <https://themuslimtimes.info/2024/09/15/persecution-of-ahmadis-escalates-in-pakistan-as-mosques-are-targeted-and-hate-speech-incites-violence/>.

responses; while *Ahmadis* often face marginalization linked to their Islamic association, the *Bahá'í* approach has facilitated a more accepted position in Bangladeshi society.

This study suggests that the relatively stable coexistence of the *Bahá'í* community in Bangladesh can offer meaningful lessons for other Muslim-majority societies aiming to enhance religious tolerance. Implementing policies that uphold secular governance and safeguard minority rights could strengthen social cohesion and foster environments that support religious diversity. To further enrich the academic discourse on *Bahá'í* experiences and interfaith relations, future research could explore areas such as the socio-political factors impacting *Bahá'í* acceptance in various Muslim-majority societies, the effects of secular policies on community integration, and the resilience strategies employed by *Bahá'í* communities under different socio-religious pressures. Comparative studies on persecution patterns, interfaith engagement, and the influence of media on public perception would also contribute to a deeper understanding of religious tolerance and community resilience.

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