

⁶⁷ Such a case (namely, that of the followers of Heme Sūr) is described in Shores (1992: 26f); see also above, n. 14.

⁶⁸ I am indebted for this information to Ms Christine Allison.

⁶⁹ See Leczenberg (n.p.).

⁷⁰ For a description of the proceedings of the *diwan* see Van Brulnessen (1992: 83-4).

⁷¹ On the tendency in Kurdish oral discourse to disregard such considerations as the time when a figure lived see p. 38.

⁷² Such claims are made about 'Ali by some Shi'ite groups, and recently by Naqshbandis about Ahmad Barzani. The Ahl-e Haqq tradition claims that a venerated leader may be the manifestation of a divine being; aspects of Yazidism are based on similar beliefs, but they are less explicit and less central there.

⁷³ The original number of the Vedic group of divinities known as *Ādityas* was also seven; see Oldenberg (1923: 178).

⁷⁴ See Vansina (1985: 170).

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6. Faith, Ritual and Culture among the Ahl-e Haqq

Ziba Mir-Hosseini

If you are asked where to find God's 'Mystery' say:
In Dalahu, the heart of Kurdistan, in the Zagros mountains'

For centuries the remote and spectacular mountains of Dalahu in southern Kurdistan have sheltered the adepts of an esoteric religious creed. There, the Ahl-e Haqq (lit. 'People of Truth'),³ as they now want to be known, shielded by high mountains and Kurdish tribal ethics, have held their secret assemblies, played their sacred lute, and buried their saints, whose tombs have become sanctuaries for others. The land and faith are now inseparable. The shrines of Bābā Yādegār and Dāwud and the caves of Bahlul and Khāmush are well known outside the area, but sites sacred to the adepts are scattered throughout Dalahu.

Both Shi'i and Sunni theologians have branded the sect's beliefs and practices as heresies, thus exposing the followers to religious persecution by their more 'orthodox' neighbours. The sect is sometimes included among the *ghulāt*, Shi'ite extremists who 'exaggerate' their veneration of 'Ali, the first Imam; the Ahl-e Haqq are popularly known as 'Ali-Elahis ('deifiers of 'Ali'). The adepts themselves refer to their faith as *din-e yāri*, (lit. 'religion of Yār', i.e. the Friend, God); and to themselves simply as *ṭāyefe* ('the sect'), or as Yāresān (in Iran) or Kākā'i (in Iraq). Male adepts can be easily identified by their bushy and unkempt moustaches. The Ahl-e Haqq believe that a man's moustache should not be interfered with under any circumstances, that is, its 'seal' (*mohr*) should not be broken. A 'sealed' moustache is the outward sign of their faith (*ramz-e yāri*), a potent marker of their identity, perhaps a celebration of their defiance.

An initial encounter with the sect can be marked by a deep sense of frustration: questions are either ignored or receive incoherent replies.⁴ One is always referred to the Sayyeds ('religious leaders'), who then pre-empt any further probing by telling you that their faith is a *serr*, an impenetrable mystery. Those who know it cannot tell you anything: their lips are 'sealed' (*mohr*). W. Ivanow, an orientalist who studied the sect early this century,

refers to this attitude as a 'mania for secrecy'.⁴ This mania must have developed as a logical reaction to centuries of persecution, and penetrated so deep that it has come to define the faith.⁵ The Ahl-e Haqq regard their creed as a *serr*, a secret accessible only to a select group, who in order to protect it had to transmit it in a secret language. In time the inner doctrines have become so esoteric that today adepts seem to have only a vague understanding of them; they are indeed 'sealed away'.

What strikes an outsider who manages to break through this wall of secrecy is the openness of the sect to other religious ideas, and its lack of a rigid theological basis. Adepts pride themselves on being people of *hāl* ('mystical ecstasy') not *qāl* ('theological debate'). Perhaps it is no accident that the sect has never developed a canonical unity, a central religious leadership and a church, in spite of its strong sense of religious identity. The fundamentals of their religion, encapsulated in a line of a Kurdish poem, are based on four principles: *pāki* ('purity of body and soul'), *rāsti* ('honesty with oneself and others'), *nisti* ('humility of mind and soul'), and *redā* ('fraternity and helping others').⁶

This makes it difficult, and at times impossible, to give an account of the sect which would capture something of the richness of its *hāl* without misconstruing its *qāl*. The adepts feel that their faith has been misconstrued by those who have studied them.⁷ This chapter, therefore, does not offer a theological account of a sect whose esotericism defies such attempts; neither does it trace the origins of its beliefs and rituals to pre-Islamic religions or seek to place these within the sphere of Islamic mysticism. Both approaches have been the focus of many studies on the Ahl-e Haqq.⁸ Instead, I aim to sketch the present conditions of the Ahl-e Haqq, as I encountered them in Kermanshah in 1992.⁹ In doing so, I hope to impart something of the subtlety of their esoteric universe and the harshness of their current experience of the outside world. But first a note on the history and mythology of the sect is necessary.

The Ahl-e Haqq and Kurdistan: A Historical/Mythical Note

There is little consensus on the sect's origin and early history, only that it started as a variant of Sufism in Kurdistan, where it remained a popular religion, appealing to nomadic tribesmen and peasants. Broadly speaking, scholars who have studied the sect fall into two groups. The first group consists of those who regard the sect as part of the Islamic tradition, and trace its rise and expansion to extremist tendencies of the Shi'a movements.¹⁰ In the second group are those scholars who see the sect's Islamic components as a thin veneer over its essential old Iranian core and who maintain that the sect's rise and expansion had much to do with a popular yearning to retain and practise the ancient Iranian religious

traditions which were defeated after the advent of Islam.¹¹ Interestingly, today the Ahl-e Haqq themselves appear to be divided along similar lines. While some distance themselves from Islamic traditions and define the sect as a separate creed, others are trying to align its dogmas with those of Shi'a orthodoxies, while highlighting its mystical core.

Although the exact time of the sect's origin is as yet unknown, most scholars tend to date its formation to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century.¹² This was an era of extreme proliferation of religio-political movements in the Irano-Turkic world, culminating in the establishment of the Safavid dynasty in Iran in 1501. The Safavids, originally a Sufi order, adopted Shi'ism as an ideology and later made it the official religion of Iran.¹³ Yet there is no reference to the sect in the contemporary sources of this and subsequent periods. Not even the name of its reputed founder, Solṭān Soḥāk, is mentioned. This silence can be taken as evidence that the sect's rise was both gradual and peaceful, not involving any events which could be of importance to outside chroniclers.

In sharp contrast to the paucity of its documented history, the sect itself possesses a rich tradition of oral texts (known as *kalām*, see below) depicting its early history and subsequent developments. A summary of the sect's founding legend, as told by the adepts and as revealed in their sacred narratives, follows:

Three dervishes, Dāwud, Benyāmin and Pir Musi, from different corners of the world, suddenly find themselves at a spring on Mount Shahu in Hawraman. Their inner eyes open and they recognise each other. They tell each other that, as promised, Solṭān (i.e. the Divine) will manifest himself in Perdiwar, so they begin their search for the Divine. With their spiritual eyes they inspect the entire world and see the place of Solṭān's manifestation to be the house of Sheykh Issi (a descendant of the Prophet, and a Naqshbandi Sheykh) in Barzanje, the region of Shahrezur in modern Iraq.¹⁴ The dervishes move towards Barzanje and when they arrive they find his three sons, Qādere, Khedshah and Salāmat, devoid of mystical yearnings, and the Sheykh himself to be 'sheer ignorance'. Disappointed, they wait in the Sheykh's house, engage in his service and encourage him to marry.

Using their *karāmat* ('spiritual power'), the dervishes persuade Hossayn Beg, chief of the Jāf tribe, to give his virgin daughter, Khātun Dāyerak, in marriage to Sheykh Issi, who is then one hundred years old. It is in Sheykh Issi's house that Khātun Dāyerak miraculously conceives and gives birth to a son, who is named Iṣḥāq (or Soḥāk) and is attended by the three dervishes until his father dies.

Upon Sheykh Issi's death, a dispute breaks out among his sons which leads to Soḥāk leaving Barzanje. He settles in the village of Shaykhān

on the banks of the River Sirawān, where he establishes the Ahl-e Haqq as a separate creed. This is done through a pact, named *Bayābas-e Perdiwari* ('the pact beyond the bridge'), signifying the side of the bridge where it was made. Solṭān lives for three hundred years during which he gathers many followers. After his death, they leave Shaykhān and disperse all over the world. Some go to Baghdad and establish the creed there (Shāh Ebrāhīm), some to Turkey (Hājl Bektāsh); some to India, and others (Bābā Yādegār) go to Sarāne, in the secluded and inaccessible mountains of Dalahu, where they continue Solṭān's path.¹⁵

However, today Solṭān's tomb in Shaykhān is the only relic of an Ahl-e Haqq presence in Hawraman. Likewise, apart from two conflicting genealogies of Sheykh Issi's descendants, there is no independent evidence of the existence of Solṭān, let alone of when he lived.¹⁶ However, the name of one of his successors, Bābā Yādegār, who was assigned to spread his message in Kurdistan, occurs in a *waqf* deed of 1526 CE, known as *Qabāle-ye Anzale*. This document tells us of the endowment of property by the same title by a Kurdish notable, Qamām al-Dīn, to 'Sheykh Yādegār'. More importantly, the deed tells us why the *waqf* was made, and thus throws light on the milieu in which the sect flourished.

On the Wali of Baghdad's orders, Qamām al-Dīn, the son of 'Oṭmān-e Kord from Zohāb, spends two years in prison, during which all efforts to release him are in vain, until his mother, a believer in 'Ali's house, tells him to appeal to 'the Sheykh of the time, Bābā Yādegār, a descendant of 'Ali'. This Qamām does, crying all night and imploring Bābā Yādegār, who appears in a dream and tells him that he is now free. The following day, the Wali frees Qamām, telling him: 'If I had not freed you, I would have died; last night Sheykh Yādegār came to me and put his stick to my throat and told me to free Qamām al-Dīn or he would destroy me.' After his release, Qamām goes to Sarāne to pay his tribute to Yādegār and to make over part of his property, known as *Anzale*, to his shrine.¹⁷

The deed is significant not only because it is the sole document from which an approximate date of the sect's origin can be inferred, but also because it lends support to the thesis of those scholars who place the sect within the sphere of Islam. It confirms that the Ahl-e Haqq faith had its roots in Shi'a sentiments, and was most probably among the nascent Shi'a movements of its time. It was presumably marginalised when Shi'ism became part of the state apparatus of the Safavids in the sixteenth century CE. As Shi'ism was transformed from a religion of protest into a religion

of power and underwent extensive theological reforms, its earlier views and attitudes, some of which are still adhered to by the Ahl-e Haqq, were pushed to the periphery. In time, these tendencies became more and more marginalised and their once admissible beliefs then became patent heresies. This in turn resulted in their further entanglement with popular traditions of mysticism as propagated by local mystics and the cults of wandering dervishes.¹⁸

It is important to remember this background, since it was in reaction against Islamic orthodoxies, whether Sunni or Shi'i, that many Ahl-e Haqq doctrines and practices came to be defined and took their present shape. The anti-establishment sentiments of the sect are embedded in its sacred traditions and its ethos, keeping alive a painful collective memory of centuries of persecutions. Even today, adepts do not fail to remind the outsider that their religion is one of miracles and mystical power (*ijāz wa karāmat*), not one of worldly compromises and force (*zur*). Their ancestors accepted it because of what they saw in it, not because they wanted power or because the faith was forced on them.

It is also in this context that one should place the theories of the second group of scholars who locate the sect in the old Iranian religious traditions, said to be best preserved by the Kurds. Such hypotheses are particularly popular with Iranian scholars, who try to prove them by internal evidence, that is, pointing to similarities between the doctrines and practices of the Ahl-e Haqq and those of the old religions.¹⁹ However, none has yet provided any piece of external evidence from either written or oral sources. Such evidence, argue some members of the sect, must be sought in its sacred sites, which are found mostly in the land of the Gurān. This takes us to another genre of Ahl-e Haqq oral tradition, distinct from the *kalām*, which has so far received little attention.²⁰ In this genre of tradition, the major players are the Gurān (a tribal population and their land), and a Sasanian princess.²¹

During the rule of the second Caliph, Omar, Iran was invaded by the Arabs; many Iranians were captured and taken as slaves. Among them were two daughters of Yazdegerd (the last Sasanian king), named Princesses Shahrbānu and Shahrzād. Both were taken to the court of Omar, who out of respect for their noble blood allowed them to choose husbands among the many who were keen to have them. Shahrbānu chose to marry Hossayn, grandson of the Prophet, and bore him a son, Zayn al-'Ābedīn (the only son of Hossayn to survive the tragedy of Kerbelā, and who later became the fourth Imam). On the eve of Tāsu'ā (i.e. two days before he was slain), Hossayn told Shahrbānu: 'in two days I will be martyred, you must now return to Iran, you are a stranger here'.

He then left her in the care of three soldiers. One of these was a

black slave of hers, named Aṣḥāb, who took her back to Iran and chose Gurān as his destination. There Shahrbānu settled in her father's castle, but soon had to be moved when the Umayyads consolidated their power. They were both anti-Iranian and against 'Alī's family, and thus the castle was an obvious target for them. Aṣḥāb found a cave nearby as a hiding place for Shahrbānu, where she finally died and was buried by Aṣḥāb, who himself was also buried further up on the road to Bābā Yādegār's shrine.

There are three facts which explain why Aṣḥāb (who is also known as Aṣḥāb-e Zangi, or 'Aṣḥāb the black man') chose Gurān, not anywhere else in Iran. First, Gurān territory was the easiest and nearest Iranian destination to reach from Kerbela. Second, he knew that the Gurān had not yet converted to Islam and had sheltered other Sasanian princes. Third, the Gurān had a close alliance with Sasanian kings, as a result of which they suffered most at the hands of the Arab invaders. Sasanian kings used to spend their summer among the Gurān, and some were brought up in the black tents of the Kurds. Yazdegerd had built a castle there, and Anushirwān had his summer court and his famous 'Chain of Justice' in the present location of the village of Qal'e Zanjir, hence the village's name, which means 'Castle of the Chain'. The Gurān also resisted Islam longest, and finally only accepted Shī'a Islam because of its Iranian connection: the fourth Imam was Shahrbānu's son. It was also because of this that Hossayn's descendants were instinctively drawn to Iran, their maternal home, where they were welcomed and protected.²²

There is much that can be inferred from the legend, but for our purposes it suffices to focus on its place and function within the sect's sacred narrative.²³ What the legend does is to reconcile the sect's Islamic elements with its Iranian heritage. In this sense it complements the sect's founding legend by telling us why the Gurān chose Shī'a Islam. In doing so, it not only explains the sect's anti-Arab – and by extension anti-Sunni – feelings, but also justifies its separation from the rest of Kurdish society. As far as the adepts are concerned, the cave (known as *Ghār-e Bibi Shahrbānu* or 'the Cave of Lady Shahrbānu'), the ruins of Yazdegerd's castle, and Aṣḥāb's tomb (known as 'Dāwud's Shrine'²⁴), constitute tangible and concrete evidences in their own right. All are located in Gurān territory, on the way to Bābā Yādegār's shrine, and they are among the sacred sites of the Ahl-e Haqq.

Ahl-e Haqq Communities in Iranian Kurdistan Today²⁵

Today Iranian Kurdistan is divided between three administrative provinces: Kordestān, Kermanshah and part of Western Azarbaijan. Although Ahl-e

Haqq communities are to be found in two of these provinces (Kermanshah and Azarbaijan),²⁶ the Kurdish centre of the sect is Kermanshah, whose population of one and a half million is more or less evenly divided between Shī'ite, Sunni, and Ahl-e Haqq Kurds. The Ahl-e Haqq of Kermanshah are grouped in two main clusters, located in the western and eastern extremes of the province.²⁷

The larger Ahl-e Haqq cluster is in the west, scattered in the mountainous territory of the Gurān, on the border with Iraq. Administratively Gurān comes under the sub-province of Islamabad (previously Shahabad) and has the densest concentration of the Ahl-e Haqq in Iran. The area has a population of tribes who used to be nomadic but are now settled: the Gurān and Qalkhāni (all of whom are Ahl-e Haqq), Sanjābi (90 per cent Ahl-e Haqq), and some sections of the Kalhor, Jalilwand and 'Osmānwand.²⁸ Because of both their geographical situation and their tribal structure, the Ahl-e Haqq communities of Gurān remained highly isolated and relatively autonomous until early this century. Since the mid-nineteenth century they have been under the religious leadership of one single Sayyed family, the Ḥaydaris, whose seat is the village of Tutshāmi, which is also the religious centre of the Gurān.

The urban centre of Gurān is the town of Kerend, harbouring two Ahl-e Haqq shrines, those of Pir Benyāmin and Pir Musi. Until the early 1950s, the population of Kerend comprised an Ahl-e Haqq majority and a Jewish minority. By 1992 the town had lost its Jewish population (most Jews having migrated to Israel) and instead gained a Shī'a one, consisting of the families of civil servants, army personnel, and (since 1979) Revolutionary Guards, who are stationed there. Qasr-e Shirin and Sar-e Pol-e Zohāb, the two other towns of the sub-province, also have substantial Ahl-e Haqq communities, about one third of their population. Both towns were destroyed during the early years of the war with Iraq in the early 1980s, and a large majority of their Ahl-e Haqq inhabitants took refuge in Kerend, Islamabad or Kermanshah.

The second Ahl-e Haqq cluster is found in the eastern part of the province, in the town of Şahne and its surrounding villages. Administratively, Şahne is a district centre within the central sub-province of Kermanshah, and it is the only town there with a predominantly Ahl-e Haqq population. The Ahl-e Haqq of Şahne district are not only fewer but less isolated and more prosperous; here Ahl-e Haqq communities have a peasant composition and do not include any tribes of the region. Since the early nineteenth century the religious centre of Şahne has been the village of Jayhunābād, the seat of the Shāh Ḥayāsi Sayyeds, whose influence has diminished greatly in recent years. Unlike Gurān, Şahne now no longer comes under the leadership of any single Sayyed family, and it is riven by internal conflict. This conflict has its roots in the fierce competition for

leadership which dates back to early this century and resulted in the rise of the 'reformist' group. Since the mid-1970s the Ahl-e Haqq of Şahne have been divided into two opposing camps: those who follow the traditionalist leaders and those who are followers of Nur 'Ali Elâhi, the reformist leader. Influenced by the ideas of his reforming father, Nur 'Ali was the first learned member of the sect who attempted to reconcile its doctrines and rites with those of Shi'a orthodoxies, and succeeded in placing them within the context of Shi'ite mystical traditions. His book, *Borhân al-Haqq*, became the first authoritative account of the sect written by an insider, and gained the sect a number of converts.²⁹ After Nur 'Ali's death in 1974, his French-educated son, Bahrâm, introduced further reforms which gave the sect a more universal appeal.³⁰ But unlike his father's, Bahrâm's reforms met with a great deal of resistance, resulting in a serious rift within the sect and clashes in which some people were killed.³¹

The Ahl-e Haqq Sacred Universe: Kalâm

The Ahl-e Haqq believe that their religion – which is a *serr*, a mystery – is embodied in their *kalâm* ('word(s)'), which exist in the form of poetry, mainly in Gurani but also in other Iranian languages. *Kalâm* were preserved and transmitted orally from generation to generation until they were committed to writing, probably in the nineteenth century.³² There are now many written collections of *kalâm*, each relating to a specific period or 'cycle' of Ahl-e Haqq mythical history. The most important of these collections is the one belonging to the period of Solţân Sohâk, known as *Kalâm-e Saranjâm*. Until recently, *kalâm* were jealously guarded from outsiders, and even within the sect only a few people had access to them, namely the Sayyeds (the sect's religious élite) and the *kalâm-khwân* (lit. 'kalâm-reciters', who knew them by heart). Although this is no longer the case, and one can quite easily find copies of some collections for sale, the *kalâm* have retained their mystery.

The Ahl-e Haqq *kalâm* resemble Sufi poetry in that their language is allegorical and expresses a collective yearning. But whereas Sufi poetry provides a symbolic understanding of the Sufi 'mystery' through allegory, *kalâm* are understood by the adepts in a literal sense. To the Ahl-e Haqq, *kalâm* are divinely revealed and historically factual 'sacred narratives', in which one finds not only the sect's history and the roots and rationale of its secret rites, but also its very raison d'être. Yet it is important to note that the account of the sect's doctrines and rites contained in the *kalâm* is not coherent, and the history depicted there is not chronological. What *kalâm* aim to, and do, achieve is the blending of communal and personal aspects of the faith. They filter the adept's mystical experience – which is by definition highly personal – into the community and transform it into

collective knowledge. In order to understand *kalâm*, one first needs to understand the sect's conceptual universe and its peculiar understanding of history.³³

On a conceptual level, a salient feature of the Ahl-e Haqq is the division of their universe into two distinct but inter-related worlds: 'outer' (*zâher*) and 'inner' (*bâten*). Each world has its own order and is governed by its own rules; as ordinary human beings we are aware of the order of the outer world, yet our life is governed by the rules of the inner world where our ultimate destiny lies. This division is so deep-rooted that adepts tend to perceive and experience their religion, as well as their everyday life, in terms of pairs of binary opposites. For instance, their faith and their struggles are true (*haqq*) as opposed to false (*bâtel*); whatever is *haqq* belongs to the realm of *bâqi* ('eternal'), as opposed to *fâni* ('transient'). It is *zât* ('divine essence') as opposed to *sefât* ('attributes'), which defines and governs the eternal realm. Thus what is *haqq* and also *bâqi* is *haqiqi* ('real') as opposed to the *majâzi* ('illusory'). It is the King of *Haqiqat* ('Truth', i.e. Solţân Sohâk) and his various manifestations who rule in this realm, as opposed to those who possess worldly powers. Such oppositions, which remain unarticulated as such, inform all aspects of the sect's belief and ritual, and indeed allow adepts to experience a parallel world in which they are all-powerful.

To the Ahl-e Haqq the world of *bâten* is as real and as tangible as the world of *zâher*. Events are always seen in their dual aspect; it is somehow like a drama in which parts of the plot are unfolding on an invisible stage, the world of *bâten*, being revealed only to those whose inner eyes are opened. These are called *bâten-dâr* or *dide-dâr*, i.e. those who possess the ability to perceive the realm of *bâten*. *Kalâm* are the words of these men who have experienced the world of *bâten*, and they are often obscure to others. To understand them, the adepts have developed another body of oral narratives (already referred to), which can be best described as commentaries on *kalâm*. They contextualise the *kalâm* and, unlike the latter, are products of the world of *zâher*, narrated by ordinary believers.

In addition to embodying a conceptual universe, *kalâm* are based upon a notion of history which is shared and understood only by the adepts. *Kalâm* have little to do with chronology and accuracy of dates and events, but are concerned with the inner meaning of events as they unfold in the world of *bâten*. There are an inner logic and a distinct pattern by which events and characters from the world of *zâher* are appropriated and become part of the sect's sacred universe. What all Ahl-e Haqq historical-mythical characters have in common is their opposition to the establishment and the Islamic orthodoxies of their time. All are defeated by the dark forces ruling the world of *zâher*, but in the sect's traditions their defeats are transformed into victories according to rules of the world of *bâten*. They become the

King of Truth, Soltān of Haqiqat, or one of his companions. This is not to deny the value of *kalām* as a source of information regarding the sect's formation and development, but to stress that these texts narrate the history of the sect's inner rather than outer world.

These features are, I believe, a part of the *serr*, the secrets that can be revealed only to those initiated into the sect's mysteries, in other words only to those who have come to share the sect's cognitive map and its notion of history. This gives a new perspective on the historical value and contribution of that which is revealed in *kalām*.³⁴

Ahl-e Haqq Teachings: Mazhariyat and Dunāduni

Further elements of the Ahl-e Haqq *serr*, as revealed in the *kalām*, are the beliefs in successive manifestations of the Divine Essence in human form (*mazhariyat*) and in the transmigration of souls (*dunāduni*). Both beliefs defy Islamic orthodoxies; they form the doctrinal core of sect, and establish a permanent passage between the worlds of *zāher* and *bāten*. In each manifestation the Divine Essence (*zāt-e Haqq*) appears in a different human form, likened to putting on a different robe (*jāme*), and is accompanied by four (or five) companions. Both cosmic time and the universe are conceptualised in terms of different cycles of divine manifestations.³⁵ The Ahl-e Haqq religion existed from the time before time began, when the Divine Essence was hidden in a pearl; the pearl in a shell; the shell in an ocean, encompassing the universe. The creation of the universe was the outcome of the first of these cycles, when the Divine Essence was manifested in Khāwandgār, the Creator. Islam is the product of the next cycle when the Divine Essence was manifested in 'Alī, the first Imam of the Shi'a. This established the stage of *Shari'at* ('Islamic law'). Then in the course of other cycles, the stages of *Tariqat* ('the Path', the teachings and rituals of the Sufi Orders) and *Ma'refat* ('gnosis', knowledge of the Divine Reality) were established. Finally the Divine Essence manifested itself in Soltān Soḥāk, who brought new laws, establishing Ahl-e Haqq as a separate creed. This is the stage of *Haqiqat* ('Ultimate Truth', mystical experience of the Divine Reality), which supersedes the previous stages and thus frees adepts from observing the Shari'a rules incumbent on Muslims.

These are the major cycles of manifestation, which are preceded and followed by numerous others on which there is no universal consensus among the followers. Some are major cycles (*zohur-e koll*), while others are minor cycles (*zohur-e khāss*) whose impact is confined to the group among which the manifestation is believed to have occurred.³⁶ Among the various cycles, the definitive point of reference for the sect's teachings and rituals is the cycle of Soltān Soḥāk, during which the final component

of the 'mystery' was revealed. This was done through the pact that Soltān made with his companions, *Bayābas-e Perdiwari* (see also above). The pact mirrors the one made in pre-eternity (*azal*) when the Divine Essence was in the form of Khāwandgār and his four archangels (Jebrā'il, Mikā'il, Esrāfil and 'Ezrā'il), which resulted in the creation of the world.³⁷ This pact was renewed with Adam, the human prototype, who was the first of a chain of prophets which ended with Mohammad (*serr-e nobowat*, 'the Mystery of Prophethood'), and then renewed with 'Alī (*serr-e emāmat*, 'the Mystery of Imamate'), who established a line of Imams. All pacts were renewed once again by Soltān in Perdiwar. His companions, incarnations of the four archangels (*chahār malak*), were the following: Pir Benyāmin (an incarnation of Jebrā'il), who is referred to as the 'Master of the Pact', and is the Eternal Pir ('Spiritual Master') for all; Dāwud (an incarnation of Mikā'il), who is the Eternal Dalil ('Guide') for all; Pir Musi (an incarnation of Esrāfil), who is the holder of the Golden Pen, the scribe of all thoughts and deeds; and Moṣṭafā Dāwudān (an incarnation of 'Ezrā'il), who is the seizer of souls. There is also a female angel, Ramzbar, Soltān's mother, who is in charge of selfless communal service (*khedmat*, see below).

Soltān further established a spiritual hierarchy among his followers, and vested each with special powers. The most important of these are two heptad sets: the *haft-tan* ('the seven bodies') and *haft-tawāne* ('the seven powers'), reflecting the inner and outer aspects of the Ahl-e Haqq universe. The highest rank belongs to the *haft-tan*, who govern the affairs of the inner realm; they are: Ramzbar, Pir Benyāmin, Dāwud, Pir Musi, Moṣṭafā, Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim.³⁸ The second rank belongs to the *haft-tawāne*, who are in charge of the outer world; they are in effect Soltān's descendants, each of whom is responsible for the affairs and guidance of a number of followers. Their names are: Sayyed Mohammad (Shāh Ebrāhim's father), Sayyed Abu 'l-Wafā, Hāji Bābusi, Mirsur, Sayyed Mostafā, Sheykh Shahāb al-Din, and Sheykh Habib Shāh (a woman companion, a 'relative' (*maḥram*) of Soltān and close to Ramzbar). These two heptads are very sacred to the Ahl-e Haqq, almost all of whom know their names and their successive manifestations. Among them Pir Benyāmin, Dāwud and Bābā Yādegār seem to have a special place and are certainly most invoked. There are others, less sacred, whose names and roles are not known to the ordinary Ahl-e Haqq, but merely preserved in the *kalām*, where each character recounts his previous incarnations. They comprise: *haftād-o-do pir* ('the seventy-two Pirs'); *cheltan* ('the forty bodies'); *nawad-o noh pir-e shāhu* ('the ninety-nine Pirs from Shahu', i.e. a mountain in Awramān), *shast-o shesh gholām-e zarin-kamar* ('the sixty-six golden-belted slaves'), *biwar hezār gholām* ('the ten thousand slaves'), and *biwan hezār gholām* ('countless thousands of slaves').

Just as the Divine Essence is reincarnated in different forms, so is the

human soul. According to the doctrine of *dunāduni* ('transmigration of souls'), life is a series of journeys in which the soul migrates from one world to another. In each of these journeys, the soul is incarnated in a different body, which is likened to putting on different garments (*dun*). Suffering and good fortune in this world can be understood only by knowing that the body (*dun*) in which one is reincarnated is determined by the accumulated actions and thoughts of one's previous lives. Death is a temporary passage to the world of *bāten*, as Sheykh Amir, an eighteenth century *dide-dār*, puts it in one of his poems:

Yārān, do not be afraid (of death). This is not a punishment,
surrendering one's lives is like the plunge of a duck (soon to re-emerge)."

The whole purpose of all these comings and goings is for the soul to gain perfection and join the divine source from which it has emanated. To return to its source, the soul needs to be perfected through learning the lessons that life on earth has to offer, that is, to fulfil its purpose. The soul thus comes back to tread the path towards perfection, but each time in a different *dun*, or body. The number of incarnations during which the soul gains perfection are fixed at a thousand and one in the course of fifty thousand years. Those who have completed this journey become perfect souls, part of the world of *bāten*; if they come back to the world of *zāher* it is always for a purpose, a mission. The Ahl-e Haqq believe that the *zāt* ('divine essence') is never absent from the world, but it is not manifest to all, only to those whose *bāten* eyes are open. The adept should cultivate a lively vigilance so as not to miss the coming of the *zāt*.

Ahl-e Haqq Spiritual 'Houses' (Khāndān)

On a sociological level, a distinct feature of the sect is a division along both vertical and horizontal lines. Ahl-e Haqq communities are divided into two broad strata, Sayyeds and commoners. Sayyeds are direct descendants (spiritual as well as biological) of the sect's founder or his later manifestations. They fall into eleven holy lineages, referred to as *khāndān*. Seven of these (Shāh Ebrāhimi, 'Alī-Qalandari, Yādegāri, Khāmushi, Mirsuri, Moṣṭafā'i, Ḥāji Bābusi) were formed at the time of Solṭān, by his miraculous intervention when he created the second heptad (*haft-tawāne*). The rest (Zunuri, an extension of Khāmushi, Ātashbegi, Shāh Ḥayāsi and Bābā Ḥaydari) were formed subsequently. The last three originated more or less at the same time, around two centuries ago. Sayyeds hold a kind of religious office; they are the only ones who can recite the special Ahl-e Haqq prayers. This means that no Ahl-e Haqq ritual can be conducted without the presence of a male Sayyed, regardless of his religious

knowledge or social standing.

Among the prominent *khāndāns* in Kermanshah are Shāh Ebrāhimi, Khāmushi, Yādegāri, 'Alī-Qalandari, and Ātashbegi, each headed by a certain Sayyed family referred to as *pir*. One of the many functions of a *khāndān* is to ensure a personal connection between the holy lineages of Sayyeds and the commoners, a connection which is similar to that between a Sufi master and his disciples and suggests the Sufi origins of the Ahl-e Haqq. Sayyeds are believed to have inherited the *zāt* of their ancestors in whom the Divine Essence was once manifested. It is their divine ancestry that enables them to act as *pir* ('spiritual master'), leading the commoners along the right path. Every Ahl-e Haqq individual must recognise as *pir* a Sayyed from the *khāndān* into which his/her father was initiated. The initiation is called *sar-sepordan*, which literally means 'dedicating one's head', hinting at the willingness to dedicate one's life to Haqq.

The initiation is more commonly referred to as *jowze-ye sar shekastan*, 'breaking the nutmeg representing the head'. It is conducted by a Sayyed who places the nutmeg on a coin and then cuts it into pieces and distributes it among the those present, who should not be fewer than five. Apart from the Sayyed who represents Pir Benyāmin in his capacity as the eternal Master (*pir*), one person represents Dāwud in his capacity as the eternal Guide (*dalil*). In theory, a *dalil* should be a descendant of one of the seventy-two, but in practice anyone can take his place. The ceremony is believed to mirror the one that took place in pre-eternity (*azal*), when a nutmeg was broken into pieces to symbolise the covenant made between the Creator and the created. The ceremony takes place in the course of a *jam* in which a special offering known as *khedmat* is shared among the participants (see below).

In theory the initiation should take place not later than a year after a child is born, but in practice it is quite common to delay it until the parents are ready. In this way the relations between certain Sayyed families and commoners extend over generations. This relationship, referred to as *pir-moridi* ('master-disciple relationship'), is the focus of the Ahl-e Haqq community and is regulated by a network of mutual obligations and duties. Two salient aspects of these duties are a kind of religious due and a marriage-ban. The due, called *sarāne*, is paid by a commoner to the Sayyed-e Pir who has performed his/her initiation ceremony. This is done at the end of the fasting period which marks the main Ahl-e Haqq festival (see below). The ban on marriages between Sayyed families and commoners has acquired a dimension not far from an incest taboo: the Ahl-e Haqq consider their community to be a large family in which Sayyeds are seen as spiritual parents of commoners.

In time the Ahl-e Haqq *khāndāns* became so intimately tied and grafted onto Kurdish tribal structures that their fortunes appear to have suffered the same vicissitudes as the tribal chiefdoms with the advent of the modern

state. Today, the authority and sanctity of the *khândāns*, the organisational core of the sect to which the faith owes much of its survival against all odds, are being undermined by the reformist group. They argue that holy descent in itself is not sufficient for spiritual leadership, as the 'effect of the *zâr*' does not last beyond three generations after the manifestation, and that the time has now come for the unification of all *khândāns*. In line with the teachings of Nur 'Ali, and his movement for rapprochement with Shi'a orthodoxies, the unified *khândân* they established is named after the Twelve Imams (*dawâzdah-emâmi*). In challenging the very legitimacy of the claims to sanctity of the different *khândāns*, the reformists are in effect undermining not only the sect's flexibility in relation to dogma, but even the organisational framework within which its different power centres could be accommodated.

Ahl-e Haqq Forms of Worship

The background against which the sect emerged and survived is also evident in its forms of worship, which all appear to have been shaped in harmony with its mystical core and in defiance of Islamic orthodoxies. For instance, in place of *namâz* ('daily prayers'), the Ahl-e Haqq have *niyâz* ('offering' or 'supplication'); they often refer to themselves as *niyâzi* as opposed to Muslims who are *namâzi*. Instead of mosques, they go to their own place of worship, *jamkhâne*; instead of Ramadan, they hold their own fast during the winter; and finally, instead of making the pilgrimage to Mecca, the adepts become Hâji by going to Solţân's shrine in Shaykhân.

Although the Ahl-e Haqq rites share certain features with those of Sufis, they have developed their own distinct characteristics. They are all marked by a strong communal and egalitarian ethos, in which offering and sharing food are an important elements. The offerings made can be divided into three broad categories: *niyâz*, *qorbâni* and *khedmat*; they are also called *nazr*, a generic term for any offering.⁴⁰

Niyâz (lit. 'supplication') is the most important of the Ahl-e Haqq offerings; it can consist of anything edible, from sugar lumps to fruit and nuts, except cooked food. Although *niyâz* can be offered anywhere and any time, it is usually done on Friday nights when a *jam* (see below) is held, or when a shrine or a sacred spot is visited. *Niyâz* is then distributed and consumed among those present, after being blessed by the Sayyed. Offerings made to mark the end of harvest, the onset of the milking season, the change of season, etc., are called *shokrâne* ('thanksgiving'). They are intended to express one's gratitude for God's bounty.

Qorbâni can be a 'bloodless' or a blood sacrifice; any animal may be sacrificed, provided it is male; the usual sacrifice is a cock, an ox, or a ram. The animal must be in its prime, intact (neither castrated nor missing

a limb) and not less than one year old (six months in the case of cocks). A 'bloodless' sacrifice usually consists of one of the following: fish, nutmeg, *gerde* (special bread made with ghee and sugar), *qâwit* (a mixture of several roasted grains and sugar), watermelon and pomegranate. *Qorbâni* is often made in fulfilment of a vow or in times of distress, when the adept appeals to the power of the *jam* for divine intervention.

Khedmat is an offering required on specific occasions, such as the initiation ceremony or the end of the fasting period. *Khedmat* (lit. 'service') consists of cooked rice (at least three kilos prepared with seven hundred and fifty grams of ghee) and a blood sacrifice (at least a cock); its ritual rules are the same as for the sacrifice.

Blood *qorbâni* and *khedmat* must always be accompanied by a sufficient amount of bread, made from the best quality of flour – not less than three kilos. The bread, called *tiri*, a thin flat sheet, is cooked by women, as are the rice and the cock for *khedmat*. For other blood sacrifices, men take on all the work. All things designated as part of an offering become 'sealed' (*mohr*), and must not be consumed until the seal is broken by the Sayyed, when they must be shared among the community according to the rules of *jam*, as described below.

Jam and Jamkhâne⁴¹

The *jam* (lit. 'assembly, gathering'), the central ritual of the sect, can be held anywhere and any time as long there are three members, and a Sayyed or his deputy is present to officiate. In fact every Ahl-e Haqq community has a special place for *jam*, known as *jamkhâne*. Like a mosque, a *jamkhâne* is communal space to which every Ahl-e Haqq has the right of entry. A *jamkhâne* is often built in the house of the Pir, the leading Sayyed of that *khândân*, with the help (financial or otherwise) of the *morids* (the Pir's 'followers', i.e. his initiates). There is at least one *jamkhâne* in every village, and more in towns where the dominant *khândāns* each have their own *jamkhâne*.⁴² A *jamkhâne* usually has two rooms: a larger one where the *jam* is held and a smaller one which becomes an ante-room between the *jam* and the outside, where those not attending the *jam* wait and where offerings brought to the *jam* are kept until the proper time.

The *jam* has its own special rites, embodying many aspects that both divide and unite the Ahl-e Haqq as a community. The *jam* always forms in the shape of a circle which has no high and no low point, symbolising the equality of all men of Haqq and the presence of the *zâr-e Haqq* in the heart of any such circle, as the Ahl-e Haqq believe that whenever they hold a *jam*, the Divine Essence will be present there. Only those male Ahl-e Haqq who are *sar-seporde* (i.e. 'initiated') can attend; neither women nor uninitiated men can join the circle.⁴³ Those who attend must be pure both

in body and mind, cover their heads and gird their waists, symbolising their respect and readiness to serve. Apart from the Sayyed who officiates at the *jam*, there are four other ceremonial offices: (1) the *kalām-khwān*, who knows the *kalām* by heart and chants them to the accompaniment of a *tanbur* ('lute'); (2) the *khalife*, who in theory should be a descendant of one of the seventy-two Pirs (see above), though in practice any person can take his place; he is in charge of the distribution of food; (3) the *khādem*, whose duty is to serve the *jam-neshin* ('those seated in the *jam*'); and (4) the *farrāsh*, who stays in the ante-room to help the *khādem*. The Sayyed is often the first to enter the room; he sits opposite the door. On his right sits the *kalām-khwān* and on his left the *khalife*. Apart from this, there is no other special seating arrangement; whoever enters first, bends and kisses the threshold of the *jamkhāne*, then proceeds to kiss the hands of those already present, and takes his place. Throughout the ceremony, all should remain still, either kneeling (in Şahne) or sitting cross-legged (in Gurān). From the moment that the *jam* is declared closed no one can leave the room, and no one can move or change their position, apart from the *khalife* and the *khādem*, who have tasks to perform. If the *jam* is large, there is always more than one *khādem*, assisted by an equal number of helpers who remain outside.

The beginning of the *jam* is announced by the *khādem*, who stands in the middle of the circle while facing the Sayyed, bows, and says in a loud voice: *awwal ākhar Yār* ('first and last is the Friend, i.e. God'). This is to remind the participants that they come from *Yār* and it is to him that they return, and that they are all united in their journey. If the *jam* involves a *qorbāni* or *khedmat*, the *khādem* brings a ewer of water and a bowl to wash the participants' hands. He starts with the Sayyed and then proceeds to his right until he completes the circle, before washing his own hands. He then bows once again and hands the ewer and the bowl to his helper (*farrāsh*), who is standing outside the room.

The hand-washing has both an outer and an inner significance. Outwardly, it assures the purity of all hands touching the offering. Inwardly, it symbolises the adept's ridding himself of worldly preoccupations while present in the *jam*. Having announced the completion of the hand-washing by repeating the formula *awwal ākhar Yār*, the *khādem* then brings the *sofre* ('table-cloth') and spreads it in the middle of the *jamkhāne*. He then brings salt, bread and the *qorbāni* in the pot in which it was cooked, and places them in front of the *khalife*, who then starts to separate the meat from the bones (which should not be broken), helped by the *khādem* or other participants if necessary. Then the *khalife* adds some broth to the meat and, if the offering is a *khedmat*, mixes it with rice which he then places in front of the Sayyed, who recites the first prayer, breaking its *mohr*. The offering can now be divided among the participants in equal

shares by the *khalife*. Each share, known as *bash* ('share') or *nawāle* ('sandwich'), is wrapped in one sheet of *tiri* bread. The first share (called *sarjam*, 'head of the *jam*'), is offered to Soljān, whose essence is always present in every *jam*. It is handed to the *khādem*, who holds it in his two hands while the Sayyed recites the second prayer. The *khādem* then bows and places the *sarjam* in front of the Sayyed, having said *awwal ākhar Yār*. He then goes to help the *khalife* to distribute the other shares among those present, starting with the Sayyed and proceeding from his right; shares are also put aside for those waiting outside the room, usually women and children. All those who receive their share hold it in both hands and wait to hear *awwal ākhar Yār* from the *khādem*, which signals the end of the distribution. Then the *khādem* stands on the threshold of the *jam*, as the Sayyed, holding his own share, recites the final prayer, which gives permission to eat.

When all have finished eating, the Sayyed signals to the *khādem*, who comes and collects the *sofre* and the pot containing the bones; he takes them to the threshold, saying *awwal ākhar Yār*, bows and recites the *takbir* (a special prayer).⁴⁴ All participants bow with him and say *amin*. The *khādem* once again brings the water and ewer to wash hands and brings in a bowl of water known as *āb-e charkh* ('circulating water'), from which all participants drink. The water represents the river Kowsar (a river in Heaven) and is believed to be healing. A *jam* always ends with the *khādem* going round the room, starting with the Sayyed, and kissing the hands of those present. The act expresses his selfless *khedmat* ('service'), and is supposed to end all ill feelings that might have existed among the group.

Throughout the ceremony *kalām* are chanted, either by the *kalām-khwān* or by the Sayyed (if he knows them), to the accompaniment of the *tanbur*; participants join in at specified intervals. Apart from the *kalām* and the prayers, no word can be uttered throughout the entire ceremony, which can last for hours depending on the number of participants and the size of the offerings made. Some participants experience moments of ecstasy, brought about by the sacred words and music as well as the entire ambience. The *jam* induces a strong sense of togetherness and belonging among the participants, whose belief in the presence of the Divine Essence in their gathering becomes a sacred tie, extending into every aspect of their lives. This is further reinforced by the fact that all are treated equally throughout the *jam*, and everything offered is shared. In the past, the *jam* was the only occasion on which the poor could add meat to their diet, and were generally provided for without incurring personal expense or losing face in the community. The act of offering is often referred to as *sabz kardan* ('to make green, to grow') which implies the notion of sowing a good act in the hope of harvesting its fruits.

Ahl-e Haqq Fast and Celebrations: 'Ayd-e Khāwandgāri

The main celebration of the Ahl-e Haqq is known as 'ayd-e khāwandgāri, commemorating an event in Soljān's time, which also marks the establishment of the sect. The story runs as follows:

When Sheykh Issi dies, Soljān's brothers say 'we do not befriend Sohāk', and tell him to take his share and leave Barzanje. Soljān asks for only three items from his father's inheritance: a pot, a *sofre* and a carpet, to which the brothers happily agree. When Soljān leaves, his mother, Dāyerak, tells the brothers that the *barakat* ('blessing'), *nejābat* ('nobility') and *shaykhiyat* ('religious leadership') of their father's house were in those three items. Realising that they have lost everything, the brothers go to their maternal uncles, the Chiefs of the Chichak tribe, and ask for help. They then go after Soljān who, with the three dervishes (Pir Benyāmin, Pir Musi and Dāwud), has reached Shender, a mountain in Hawraman where a cave miraculously opens up to shield them. Soljān and his companions remain in the cave, surrounded by the Chichak army. Benyāmin implores Soljān to intervene; he tells Dāwud to take a fistful of dust from under the carpet and throw it at the army. The dust creates such a storm that the sun becomes dark for three days, and the Chichak men start fighting among themselves and are thus destroyed. During those three days and nights Soljān and his companions hold a *jam* and fast. When they emerge from the cave, which is now known as Maranow ('the New Cave'), they break their fast by eating rice and the meat of a cock prepared by an old woman. The next day is declared a holiday (*ayel*) to celebrate Soljān's victory.⁴⁵

From that time onwards, a three-day fast became incumbent on his followers, to commemorate the three days and nights which Soljān and his companions spent in Maranow. The fast is also known by that name, and although its proper time is disputed among the different groups, it takes place in winter.⁴⁶ During the fasting period a *jam* is held every night, and each household brings a *niyāz*, with which the fast is broken. The first night is dedicated to Dāwud (the Eternal Dalil), the second night to Benyāmin (the Eternal Pir), and the third to Mustafā Dāwudān (the Seizer of Souls; this is done to avert calamity). The following day is the 'Ayd-e Khāwandgāri; at night a *jam* is held in the name of Soljān, the *Pādeshāh-e Haqiqat* ('King of Truth'). That night every household must bring a special offering (*khedmat*) known as *dāwat-e pādeshāhi*,⁴⁷ and pay the *sarāne* ('religious dues').⁴⁸

On the day of 'ayd, a special bread, known as *gerde-ye Ramzburi*, is

made and offered to the *jam* in the name of Ramzbar, Soljān's mother. In some communities a fifth night is dedicated to Pir Musi (the Scribe of all Deeds), sometimes immediately and sometimes later in the same month. In Gurān, on the day of 'ayd, many go to Tutshāmi to pay homage to the Pir of the Haydari family, whom most Ahl-e Haqq in Gurān regard as their spiritual leader regardless of whether they were initiated by him or not. They all gather in the *tekiye* ('lodge'), where they are served with the special broth and bread prepared in its sacred hearth. In Şahne, in addition to the Maranow fasting, some communities observe another three-day fast, known as *Qawwalās*, which commemorates the rescue of seven of Soljān's disciples who were trapped on Mount Shāhu when on their way to join him for 'ayd-e *pādeshāhi*.⁴⁹

Coda: Dilemmas of the Ahl-e Haqq and Kurdish Culture

The above is an account of the Ahl-e Haqq practices and beliefs as I encountered them in 1992, in communities that were experiencing rapid social change. From a purely sociological point of view, the sect's teachings and practices represent the long and deep-rooted struggle of a simple people to retain their identity. In this sense their faith and the Kurdish culture of which they are a part show many similarities, although at times in curious and seemingly contradictory ways. Perhaps the most striking of these is that both have been forced to define their identity in opposition to those who subdued them. Both have done so by holding on to their ancient roots, from which they draw their inspiration.

What traditionally set the Ahl-e Haqq apart from the rest of Kurdish society was their ability to create a parallel world, an inner world into which they could retreat. In doing so, they not only developed their own special notion of history, but also a whole series of dogmas and rites which represented their own interpretation of Islamic traditions, and which they preserved in their sacred narrative, *kalām*. Their inner world gave them a different sense of reality, and also an inner strength which enabled them to defy outside pressures and sustain a faith in defiance of the emerging orthodoxies surrounding them. This antagonism sustained the inner world and kept it intact.

The isolation of their mountainous and frontier territory, and their tribal society, further helped them to keep the outside world at bay. Neither is there any longer. The breakdown of their isolation and the demise of their tribal structures, which started early this century, are now complete. Today the Ahl-e Haqq communities are part of a national culture with which they have to deal on a daily basis. In doing so, adepts have had to leave their inner world and engage with the outer one: through the schooling of their children, military service of their sons and their eventual employment. In

the process, the outer world was confronted, tackled, manipulated, tamed and eventually lost its hostile aura. This paved the way for an internal challenge which, although originally posed by the reformist tendencies dating back to early this century, finally succeeded in dividing the sect in the late 1980s.

Today, the enemy is inside and nothing has prepared adepts to deal with it: their inner world can shield them from the outside pressure, the persecutions, but not from disunity within. Although it is true, as I have argued elsewhere,³⁹ that the reformist group has so far failed to gain ground in Kurdistan, it has succeeded in facing adepts with some fundamental issues concerning their identity. It has done so by exposing and redefining the sect to outsiders, thus forcing adepts to focus on aspects of their identity which they had hitherto taken for granted. Today the Ahl-e Haqq feel that their faith has not only been distorted by outsiders, but is also being manipulated by insiders.

In this way, the sect mirrors the vicissitudes of the Kurdish society of which it is a part, and shares some of the dilemmas inherent in being a minority part of a modern nation-state.

Notes

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¹ The first line occurs in a Khāksāri Dervish treatise, edited by Ivanow (1953: 199); the second is a *verbatim* translation of Mokri (1966a: 7). Both lines are given in Ṭabibi (1349/1970, 1: 1126), without reference to his source.

² Ahl-e Haqq is a generic term used by many Muslim mystics. Note that the term *Haqq* has many other connotations, such as 'justice', 'one's right', in addition to 'Divinity' and 'Ultimate Truth'.

³ An exception appears to be Martin Van Bruinessen's encounter. In the mid-1970s he came into contact with some young adepts in Gurān who befriended him and talked openly about their religion. As Van Bruinessen suggests, it was probably his own unkempt moustache and his knowledge of Kurdish which led some to take him for a fellow believer. See Van Bruinessen (n.p.: 6).

⁴ Ivanow (1953: 2, 7).

⁵ Secrecy appears to be a feature of other Muslim mystical traditions; for discussion of this, see Mokri (1962).

⁶ The very similarity of these principles to Zoroastrian ones has been taken by

some scholars as internal evidence to argue that the sect belongs to the old Iranian religious tradition; see Ṭabibi (1971); Şafizāde (1982); Hamzeh'ee (1990); cf. Kreyenbroek 1992. See also Kreyenbroek's chapter, Chapter 5, elsewhere in this volume.

⁷ In particular they object to Ivanow, whose collection of Ahl-e Haqq texts was made available in Iran, causing the educated Ahl-e Haqq a great deal of embarrassment. They deny the authenticity of Ivanow's texts and their connection to their faith. More recently the *Encyclopaedia of Shi'ism* (1990: 613), in its entry on the sect, has defined a large majority of the sect as 'those who worship Satan, for whom the pig is sacred, and who do not conform to the purity laws of Islam'.

⁸ The sect is relatively well studied, particularly by orientalist, beginning with de Gobineau (1859), followed by Minorsky (1920, 1921), Edmonds (1957), Ivanow (1953), and Mokri (see Bibliography). All these authors approached the sect through its texts, and their attempts to define its beliefs and rites, as depicted in their sacred tradition, have influenced all subsequent studies.

⁹ My fieldwork was conducted from April to October 1992 in Kermanshah Province.

¹⁰ See Minorsky (1920, 1960) and Mokri (1963, 1967); Ivanow (1953: 74) considers the Ahl-e Haqq to be an offshoot of the Nizāri Ismā'ilis.

¹¹ See for instance Yasami (1984: 122-31), Ṭabibi (1971, 1972), Khwāje al-Dīn (1983), Şafizāde (1982), Hamzeh'ee (1990: 76-89), and Izady (1992: 143).

¹² See for instance Minorsky (1960: 9) and Mokri (1963).

¹³ See Mazzaoui (1972) and Moosa (1987).

¹⁴ Shahrezur plays an important role in the sect's tradition, and is believed to have been the name of a region between Erbil and Hamadan at the time of the Abbasids. See Şafizāde (1982: 103-17).

¹⁵ Here I have relied on four sources, two of which (Nik-Nezhad n.d.: 90-4, and al-Qāṣi 1979: 23-5) were written by Ahl-e Haqq for Ahl-e Haqq; the others (Anon. 1943, Afzali 1992), were written to introduce the sect to the outsiders. *Ālam-e Haqiqat* (Anon. 1943) was written by three *kalām-khwāns* of the Ḥaydari family in Tutshāmi in response to a request from R. Yasami to introduce the sect to the Iranian Parliament. Afzali (1992) was written by a learned Sayyed of Kermanshah to refute the account of the sect published in a previous volume of the *Encyclopaedia of Shi'ism* (see note 7, above). There are many other versions but, with minor modifications, they all accord with the short version which I have given here. The first two paragraphs are taken *verbatim* from Anon. (1943: 51-2).

¹⁶ According to Minorsky's document, studied by Mokri (1963: 241), Sheykh Issi died in 1442 CE and was survived by twelve sons. According to the genealogy found by Ṭabibi (1970: 1219-21), Sheykh Issi had three sons, two of whose names are known: Mir Sayyed Eshāq and Mir Sayyed 'Abd al-Karīm. While Ishāq's descendants are Ahl-e Haqq Sayyeds, the latter's are members of the Qādiriya, the Sunni Sufi Order named after Sheykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilāni.

¹⁷ This is a summary drawn from the text given by Mokri (1963).

¹¹ On the role of the popular dervish orders see Van Bruinessen (1991), Ivanow (1953).

¹⁹ In doing so, some of these writers have gone to extremes. The most notable case is that of Izady (1992) who, in his eagerness to distance the Ahl-e Haqq from Islam and to give it a purely Kurdish pedigree, asserts that the sect is a denomination of a religion of great antiquity which he calls 'the Cult of Angels'. This 'Cult', he states, is 'fundamentally a non-Semitic religion, with an Aryan superstructure overlaying a religious foundation indigenous to the Zagros. To identify the Cult or any of its denominations as Islamic is simply a mistake, born of a lack of knowledge of the religion, which pre-dates Islam by millennia.' He fails, however, to produce any evidence at all in support of his theory, and some of his assertions can only be called preposterous. He states, for example, that 'Hak or Haq' is a Kurdish word meaning 'universal Spirit', which has no connection with the Arabic *Haqq*; even more astonishingly, he claims that the founder of the Babi religion, which later evolved into Baha'ism, was among the three avatars of the 'Cult' in this century (Izady 1992: 137).

²⁰ Most studies of the Ahl-e Haqq show a '*kalām*-bias', which can be regarded as an extension of the dominant textual bias in studies of Middle Eastern religious beliefs and practices. This is the case even with recent and more sociologically orientated works such as those of Beik-Baghban (1975) and Hamzeh'ee (1990). Van Bruinessen's work (1991, n.d.) is a notable exception.

²¹ On Gurān see Minorsky (1943).

²² The legend is known to many, and was told to me by several informants. The above account is based on the version told by an educated informant from Kermanshah. Although I could not find any reference to the story in the *kalām*, I came across a very similar account in a conference paper on the 'Tribes of Kermanshahan', presented to a Tribal Affairs Seminar in summer 1976 (Anon. 1976: 51-3). I suspect that the paper was produced (or inspired) by the same informant.

²³ The question of its historical accuracy seems irrelevant, and is certainly beyond my competence and the scope of this study.

²⁴ According to the Ahl-e Haqq sacred narrative, Dāwud is the reincarnation of Aṣḥāb, which enables Aṣḥāb to become part of the sect's sacred universe; see below.

²⁵ It is only in Kurdistan that Ahl-e Haqq have a continuous population; elsewhere they exist as small pockets, or dispersed communities. There are sizeable Ahl-e Haqq communities in Iraqi Kurdistan, such as in Suleymaniyeh, Kirkuk, Mosul and Khaneqin. For an account of their beliefs see Edmonds (1957, 1969). It is also said that there are Ahl-e Haqq communities in Turkish Kurdistan, but no clear references could be found. It is important to note that the Ahl-e Haqq are different from both the Alevi of Turkey and the Alawi of Syria.

²⁶ The Ahl-e Haqq of Azarbaijan belong to the Turkish tradition of the sect, which is more recent than the Kurdish one. For a study of an Ahl-e Haqq village

there see Sā'edi (1964). There are also sizeable Ahl-e Haqq communities in Lorestan, in Delfān and Posht-e Kuh; these belong to the Lori tradition, which is believed to be older than the Kurdish one.

²⁷ Kermānshāh (singular of Kermanshāhān) is the name by which the province is commonly known, and is also the name of the provincial centre. Here I follow the popular usage and refer to the province too as Kermanshah.

²⁸ It appears that the Kalhor tribe was predominantly Ahl-e Haqq at the turn of this century; see Rawlinson (1839: 36), Edmonds (1957: 193), Moosa (1987: 191). In 1992 only one section of the Kalhor, Menishi, was Ahl-e Haqq. Their land is known as Kofrāwar (lit. 'bringers of heresy').

²⁹ For an English commentary on this book see Weightman (1964).

³⁰ He published two books in French, which have both been translated into English; see B. Elahi (1976, 1985, 1987, 1993).

³¹ For a more extended account of this rift, see Mir-Hosseini (1995).

³² The oldest manuscript known is the one found by Minorsky, dated 1843. Since then, other *kalāms* have found their way into the hands of outsiders, notably Ivanow and Mokri.

³³ See further the discussion of the sect's cardinal dogmas, *maḥariyat* and *dunāduni*, below; these concepts represent the Ahl-e-Haqq interpretation of the Sufi doctrines of *tajalli* and *waḥdat-e wujud*.

³⁴ *Kalām* are sometimes invoked as historical evidence not only by the followers of the sect but by those who have studied them (Ṣafizāde, Hamzeh'ee and Tabibi), while others have dismissed their historical value (Ivanow, and to some extent Mokri).

³⁵ This appears to be influenced by Isma'ili beliefs; see Minorsky (1960: 10) and in particular Mokri's interesting discussion (1967: 47-53).

³⁶ For one of the minor cycles among the Gurān see Mir-Hosseini (1994).

³⁷ On the concept of the pact in the Ahl-e Haqq and in Islamic tradition see Mokri (1977a).

³⁸ There is a long-standing dispute in Gurān as to the inclusion of Shāh Ebrāhīm among the *hafi-tan*; see also Van Bruinessen (n.d.).

³⁹ Sheykh Amir's shrine is in Qazwīn, a village near Ṣāhne. His *kalāms* are among the more recent ones, dating back 250 years. For a French translation and commentary on some of his most famous verses see Mokri (1956).

⁴⁰ Among the Shi'a the *nazr* ('vow') is an offering made in fulfilment of a vow, but among Ahl-e Haqq it is not necessarily tied to a vow.

⁴¹ For another description of the *jam* see Hamzeh'ee (1990: 156-60), who relies heavily on the account provided by Nur 'Ali Elahi in his *Borhān al-Haqq*, which is more prescriptive than descriptive.

⁴² In 1992 there were four *jamkhānes* in Kerend, six in Ṣāhne, two in Kermanshah, and one in Eslāmābād.

⁴³ Although as a woman I could not participate in a *jam*, I was able to observe the ceremony by being 'behind the *jam*'. In fact, where the sect constitutes a majority

there is little concern for keeping the rituals secret. In both Gurân and Şahne, as well as on pilgrimages to Bâbâ Yâdegâr and other sacred sites, I was always able to observe a *jam* from close by, and my presence did not appear to be disturbing.

⁴⁴ The *takbir* can have various forms but all must contain the following words: *Haqq, al-Hamdu li-'llah Rabb al-'Âlamîn, Sofre-ye Solţân, Karam-e Khânedân, Dam-e Pir, Takbir*. See Nur 'Ali Elahi (1975: 113).

⁴⁵ I have taken this version from '*Âlam-e Haqiqat* (Anon. 1943: 58-61). Other versions differ only in details; for instance, in one the Chichak army catches the plague and perishes in three days; in others, the handful of dust thrown turns into swords and destroys the army.

⁴⁶ The exact timing of the fast is a bone of contention among the different *khândâns*, each basing its argument on a different interpretation or different copies of the *Kalâm*. Nur 'Ali Elahi (1975: 145-61) tackles the problem and discusses it at great length, but this was to no avail. Generally speaking one can say that in Gurân the fast starts six days later than in Şahne, and that only the Maranow fast (see below) is observed there.

⁴⁷ The authors of '*Âlam-e Haqiqat*, who are from Gurân, write *dâwat*, spelled with *alif*, and explain the word as a synonym of *nazr* (Anon. 1943:59), whereas Nur 'Ali Elahi (1975:145) spells *da'wat*, with '*ayn*', and explains it as an invitation to the faith.

⁴⁸ According to Nur 'Ali Elahi (1975: 62) the minimum amount of *sarâne* at the time of Solţân was two riyals of Perdiwar, a sum which is now worth about ten grams of pure silver. Two thirds of the *sarâne* should go to the Pir and one third to the Dalil. In practice, however, none of this is observed and there seem to be no rules. In Gurân, since the early 1940s, following a ruling by the chief Haydari Sayyed, it became forbidden to use *sarâne* and other religious dues for any purpose except the purchase of *nazr* or offerings for the *jam*. See Mir-Hosseini (1994).

⁴⁹ According to Nur 'Ali Elahi (1975: 45), *qawwâlîs* means 'to acquire knowledge of goodness'.

⁵⁰ See Mir-Hosseini (1995).

7. Kurdish Costume: Regional Diversity and Divergence

Maria T. O'Shea

Introduction

It has been remarked that several erroneous notions are widely credited about Middle Eastern costume generally. Scarce (1981: 5) draws attention to the idea that regional costume variations throughout the Middle East are minimal, and that the regional costumes are unchanging and unaffected by fashion. Such ideas are certainly widely held as far as Kurdish costume is concerned. Of course, if the immense variations in costume throughout the Middle East are not widely appreciated, it is hardly surprising to find that the variations in costume traditions within a smaller region like Kurdistan are rarely discussed in print, even by Kurds themselves.

The belief that regional costumes are unchanging and not subject to fashion is as false in the case of Kurdistan as anywhere else. As will be shown below, as Kurdish costume is still in daily use in many parts of Kurdistan, and not just worn for festivals and special occasions, it is as prone to fashion trends as are European clothes. The possible permutations of fashion are enormous, given the variety of regional costume elements that can be pressed into service, and the number of 'European' fashion elements which may also be utilised. The increasing variety of fabrics available in Kurdistan – sometimes produced locally but more often imported – also aids the evolution of new variations in costume. Increased contact with other ethnic groups and exposure to the mass media further stimulate ideas for costume variations.

Literature describing Kurdish costume is sparse. As far as can be ascertained, no comparative work exists which lists the various regional Kurdish costumes. Probably the most detailed account is that of Henny Harald Hansen (1961: 65-95), who discusses dress both in a village milieu and in the city of Sulaymaniye (Iraqi Kurdistan). The clothing described of course belongs to the time of writing, and such costumes are now only to be found amongst the elderly. Nevertheless, there is a wealth of detail,