

The Life and Works of Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh

The Socio-Political Situation of Sufism in Early 19th-Century Persia

Ḥāj Muḥammad Ḥusayn Iṣfahānī, known as Zayn al-Dīn, with the spiritual title of Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh (d. 1234/1818), became the master of the Ni‘mat-ullāhī Order during a critical period in the history of Persia, that is during the age of colonial expansion when Persia became the battleground for the competing political objectives of Russia and England.¹

Fath ‘Alī Shāh Qājār (r. 1176-1213/1797-1834) was the Persian monarch during this period. He was a superstitious person who believed in astrological signs, talismans and magic (as long as they were not in contradiction with orthodox Shi‘ite Islam),² who wanted to be known as a pious king but was in need of the influential Shi‘ite scholars religiously to legitimise the Qājār dynasty and thus consolidate his power. The volume of correspondence between the Shi‘ite ulama and the monarchy is evidence of their close relationship.³ These scholars expertly cultivated the monarch’s superstitious beliefs.⁴

During his 37-year reign, to a large extent he was preoccupied with the problems of internal rebellions, civil wars and the transgressions of foreigners.⁵ The long period of war with Russia and the subsequent loss of territory were bitter episodes in the history of Persia. The monarch was indebted to the ulama for inciting the common people to go to war against the ‘infidels,’ which led to a new genre of *jihādīyya* treatises.

The ulama became powerful to the degree that they sometimes challenged the state. The monarch was sometimes forced to pay ‘hush money’ (*haqq us-sukūt*) to the jurists (*fuqahā*).⁶ In many cases, their greed was justified, even glorified, by Shi‘ite historians and theologians such as Tunikābunī, who considered their blackmail of the sovereign a kind of miracle (*karāmāt*) that had been wrought by the ulama.⁷

Religious Opposition to Sufism in Early 19th-Century Persia

In return for their obeisance and obedience, Fath 'Alī Shāh allowed Shi'ite ulama to participate in state matters. In this respect, as Algar rightly remarks, 'The Shi'ism of his age was marked by a reassertion of the power of the *mujtahid*, judicially and socially.'⁸

The theological system elaborated by the Shi'ite Uṣūlī clerics during this period was aimed at making them the focal point of religious authority and power, emphasising their own importance as the religious, and sometimes political, guides within Persian society. Mīrzāy-i Qumī (d. 1231/1816), the influential cleric discussed in the last chapter, always emphasised the importance of the ulama, and reminded people that together the Shi'ite clergy and the monarch shared the complete directorship of the community. Qumī clarified that the monarch was not like an Imām, therefore, it was not obligatory for a Muslim to obey him, in the religious sense.⁹ However, a number of seminary scholars issued a fatwa that Fath 'Alī Shāh should be counted among 'those in authority' (*ulū'l-amr*),¹⁰ although Qumī argued against their stance.¹¹

Anxious that Sufis might try to infiltrate the royal palace and influence governmental officials, the ulama maintained close relations with the royal court.¹² The monarch also took some repressive measures against Sufis that were admired by the ulama.¹³ Due to his shariah-mindedness, Fath 'Alī Shāh was against Sufism in general, even if he occasionally admitted that he found Sufis to be highly spiritual people of prayer. There were numerous cases in which he persecuted Sufis, as can be seen from his request to Mu'aṭṭar 'Alī Shāh to curse his master Nūr 'Alī Shāh.¹⁴

Some of the ulama, such as Qumī and the bigoted Āqā Muḥammad 'Alī Bihbahānī (d. 1216/1801), both of whom were contemporaries of Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh, wrote treatises in refutation of Sufism. Qumī, for example, wrote a treatise called *Risāla al-Radd 'alā ṣūfiyya* (*Refutation of the Sufis*), and Bihbahānī, wrote *Khayrātīyya*,¹⁵ in which he called Nūr 'Alī Shāh the guide on the path of deviation (*hādī rāh-i ḍalāl*). On the martyrdom of Nūr 'Alī Shāh, Bihbahānī also wrote a poem in which he remarked, 'Nūr 'Alī passed away as if he were a dog that left the world.'¹⁶ Bihbahānī wrote satirical poems about Sufis and cursed masters like Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh and Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh.

At the same time, the king's regent in Fars, Ḥājī Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, gave the ulama complete independence with respect to issuing religious edicts (*fatāwā*) against anyone who displeased them, even if these involved death sentences.¹⁷ Therefore, it was a particularly critical period for Sufis in the history of Persia: they were constantly harassed, attacked and criticised

by different classes of society. Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh’s mission during this chaotic period therefore aimed less at furthering the propagation and more at maintaining the bare survival of the Ni‘matullāhī order.

Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh: Preacher and Mystic

In addition to being the master of the Ni‘matullāhī order, Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh had attained considerable fame as a seminary scholar (*‘ālim*), preacher and jurist. There are different opinions about his origins. Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Shīr-wānī put it about that he was from Khwansār, while Riḍā Qulī Khān Hidāyat said that he came from a family originating from Tabriz.¹⁸ What is clear is that Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh’s male family members mostly belonged to the class of Shi‘ite ulama. Ma‘šūm Shīrāzī indicated that there were some great Shi‘ite scholars (*‘ālimān*) among his ancestors and family.¹⁹ His grandfather was Shaykh Zayn Al-Dīn, a renowned jurist, whom Mast ‘Alī Shāh called the one who had gained a complete knowledge of the rational and traditional sciences (*jāmi‘ ‘ulūm-i ‘aqlī wa naqlī*), and who had migrated to Isfahan.

During his youth, Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh studied the religious sciences in Isfahan.²⁰ He was a distinguished student of his uncle, Āqā Muḥammad, the head of jurists in the area. It was during this stage of his life that he became a jurist in seminaries and a preacher in mosques.

After he had completed his studies, his spiritual thirst was not sated, so he started to travel to different places in Persia and Arabia, where he sought out many religious scholars and spiritual masters.²¹ At the end of his travels he met and became the disciple of Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh, Nūr ‘Alī Shāh and Fayḍ ‘Alī Shāh, and through their guidance and instruction obtained the enlightenment and gnosis he sought.²² He practised self-mortification under their instruction. As he advanced on the spiritual path, his masters allowed him to become a guide for other seekers within Persia. These Ni‘matullāhī masters saw in Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh a person whose juridical background could be influential for the order. He accompanied Nūr ‘Alī Shāh to Hirāt. Nūr ‘Alī Shāh then appointed him as a spiritual master and told him to return to his city and guide the seekers.²³ Nūr ‘Alī Shāh also directed him to continue preaching and praying in the mosque and religious seminaries as before. Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh in fact explicitly commanded that he not divest himself of the clerical robes worn by the exoteric Shi‘ite clerics. Therefore, he was able to continue his life as a cleric without anyone recognising him as a member of the Ni‘matullāhī order.²⁴

Finally, in the year 1212/1797 in the village of Dhahāb in Kurdistān, Nūr 'Alī Shāh appointed Hāj Muḥammad Ḥusayn Iṣfahānī as the sole leader (*quṭb*) of the order with the spiritual title of Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh.²⁵ When Riḍā 'Alī Shāh Deccanī died three years later in 1215/1800, Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh became the first *quṭb* of the Ni'matullāhī order who was a native of Persia, thus making the return of the Ni'matullāhīs to Persia complete after an almost 300-year diaspora of the order in the province of Hyderabad, India. However, since the situation for the Sufis was one of extreme tribulation, Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh was careful that his conduct did not arouse the suspicions of Shi'ite clergy; he always talked and behaved as if he were merely a jurist (*faqīh*) and preacher.

As mentioned in the last chapter, for most of the 18th century before Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh became master there had been considerable tensions and opposition between jurists and Sufis which eventually led to the martyrdom of Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, Nūr 'Alī Shāh and Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh. During Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh's leadership, on the other hand, none of his disciples were tortured or arrested. Although he himself was once arrested, owing to his family background and his knowledge of the religious sciences he was never tortured or imprisoned.

Ma'sūm Shīrāzī quoted from an unknown biographer that Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh was 'a compendium of the canonical law of Islam and the Sufi path' (*jāmi' shar'at wa ṭarīqat*).²⁶ He was a recognised scholar and instructor of sharia laws and Sufi mysticism. He received a small inheritance from which he supported his family and gave the remainder to charity.²⁷ This enabled him to stay in seminary schools and spend more time in the propagation and teaching of his beliefs among seminarians.

Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh diligently followed sharia laws in order to ensure that he would not attract the suspicion of Shi'ite ulama. He was always open to dialogue with seminary scholars and he used a conciliatory tone towards them.²⁸ Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh instructed his disciples in the practice of spiritual remembrance through invocation (*dhikr*) and spiritual contemplation (*murāqaba*) in such a way that enabled him to conceal his Sufism from the eyes of the vulgar and non-initiates. When Shi'ite seminary scholars who became close to him asked about these practices, he would reply that they were prayers and the repetition of the names of God that he had received during his travels, without any indication of their being part of Sufism.²⁹

He also instructed his novices and dervish disciples not to close their eyes while they were practising *dhikr*. He said to his followers, 'One must always consider maintaining the proper outer appearances (*marātib-i*

zāhir)’³⁰ which indicates how important it was for him to avoid any conflict with traditional Shi‘ites who rejected Sufism. His Sufi disciples thus viewed him as both a Sufi master and a Shi‘ite cleric. In his sessions Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh did not permit wandering dervishes who did not follow the sharia or were careless in its observance to participate. Because of this conservative attitude which was in accord with the hyper-orthodox spirit of the times, he became more popular among followers of the Ni‘matullāhī order.³¹

It is said that Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh’s wife and mother were ill-tempered, and their constant quarrels drove him out of the house. This family quarrel turned out to have positive consequences for the development of Ni‘matullāhī Sufism, because when he left home he moved into a seminary school — the Madrasa-i ‘Alī Qulī Āqā in Isfahan, where he taught and preached — thus allowing him to cultivate better relations with the exoteric Shi‘ite ulama.³² Nevertheless, Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh was not totally free and safe from the criticism, jealousy and attacks of the ulama. Mullā ‘Alī Nūrī (d. 1246/1830), who was a great philosopher with many students and disciples, was his greatest enemy. Mullā ‘Alī’s jealousy of Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh arose when some of his disciples left him and became devotees of Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh, confessing to the deficiency of their past beliefs.³³ Here we see how Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh’s bridging of shariah and haqiqah paths created the opportunity for mystical dialogues with Shi‘ite clerics, leading at times to the initiation of a number of jurists and philosophers.³⁴

Ḥāj Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khān Marwī, an influential noble who claimed to support the jurists, accepted Mullā Ali’s request to have Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh prosecuted for treason and so wrote a letter to Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh accusing Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh of treason and aspiring to become a king. The Shāh summoned Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh to Tehran and ordered his arrest.³⁵ Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh changed his mind while Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh was on his way to Tehran, ordering that he be escorted into his presence as a guest rather than a convict.³⁶ Strangely enough, he became Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh’s admirer after their meeting in Tehran, calling him a person of spirituality. During the interrogation of his beliefs, the Shāh was so impressed by Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh that he even asked to receive spiritual instructions from him. The Shāh eventually ordered Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh to return to Isfahan, and to continue to lead prayers in the mosques there.³⁷

In the year 1322/1818 Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh went to Karbalā on pilgrimage. He gathered all his followers and appointed Muḥammad Ja‘far Kabūdārāhangī, who held the spiritual title of Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh, as his successor. Dur-

ing his stay in Karbalā, on 10 November 1818 (11 Muḥarram 1234 A.H.), he passed away and was buried in the mosque of Kāzīm Rashtī, near Karbalā.³⁸

Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh's vigilant and cautious lifestyle served the cause of the revival of the Ni'matullāhī order in Persia. As a preacher and seminary teacher, he gained fame among his seminary disciples. His constant appearance in the garment of seminary scholars also attracted more mainstream Shi'ites to him, which inaugurated a period of growth after centuries of suppression of Sufism. The development of the order was continued by Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh and Mast 'Alī Shāh.

Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh and the Polemics of Henry Martyn

One of the important social and political events in the history of Qājār Persia that occurred during Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh's lifetime was the arrival in Persia in 1196/1781 of the Christian missionary, Henry Martyn, who eagerly commenced his religious mission to convert the Shi'ite Muslims of Persia to Christianity. The extent of his influence was described by Muḥammad Ma'sūm Shīrāzī as a calamity (*fitna*) for Persian society.³⁹ Due to the socio-political circumstances of the Qājārs, Protestant missionaries had many opportunities to come to Persia and propagate Christianity. As the Qājār monarchy was in debt to the great western powers, the monarch usually kept silent and did not make his objections to their presence public. Although Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh commissioned some scholars to write refutations of their doctrines, he avoided direct personal engagement in these theological disputes.⁴⁰

Christian missionaries were powerful in Azerbāijān, active in the fields of medicine and education, and belonged to a class of elites.⁴¹ As a consequence of the appearance of Christian missionaries like Joseph Sabastiani and Henry Martyn in Persia, the Shi'ite clergy inaugurated a new religious and literary genre devoted to the refutation of Christian doctrines.⁴²

Henry Martyn (1781-1812 C.E.)

Henry Martyn's family were followers of John Wesley (d. 1791), the founder of the English Methodist movement.⁴³ Like other Christian missionaries based in England, they carried out numerous religious activities abroad, especially in poor countries, such as helping the poor and sick, and setting

up schools to educate children as a means to facilitate acceptance of their missions and conversion of Muslims to Christianity.⁴⁴

During his youth Martyn was influenced by the beliefs of his Master, Charles Simeon (d. 1836). After graduating in 1802, Martyn was hired by the ‘Society for Missions to Africa and the East’, which was later renamed the ‘Church Missionary Society.’ He studied Eastern languages such as Arabic, Persian, Hindi and Bengali.⁴⁵ In 1806 he went to India as a priest in the employment of the British East India Company. He invested a great deal of effort into translating the New Testament into the local Indian languages, for which he became known as ‘the Holy Father’ (*Paderi*) in India.⁴⁶ His attitude to Muslims and Hindus was aggressive and intolerant, such that he called them the ‘enemies of God.’⁴⁷

Martyn left India for Persia, where he immediately continued his mission by revising an earlier translation of the New Testament into Persian.⁴⁸ Although John Malcolm warned Martyn about the danger of broaching and discussing theological controversies between Islam and Christianity, Martyn ignored his warning and started religious disputations with Shi‘ite scholars, which soon led to a strong reaction from them. The Persians were called ‘immoral’ by Martyn, and he remarked that his mission was to spread the message of Christ to the ‘Devilish Muhammadans’.⁴⁹

Out of political considerations, Fath ‘Alī Shāh and his followers did not publically oppose Martyn as he was supported directly by the English Royal Court. Nevertheless, Fath ‘Alī Shāh needed to satisfy the ulama and receive their approval. Therefore, he indirectly encouraged Shi‘ite scholars to write strong treatises (*jawābīyya*) in refutation of the Christian missionaries. Indeed, in the prefaces to their treatises many noted the support and encouragement of the Shāh and his court.⁵⁰ While in Shiraz from June 1811 to May 1812, Martyn completed his translation of the New Testament into Persian and then prepared two more copies of it in order to dedicate one to Fath ‘Alī Shāh and one to Prince ‘Abbās Mīrzā (d. 1212/1833). Martyn wanted to hand these copies to them personally; therefore, he left for Tehran. On his way to Tehran, he stayed in Isfahan where he edited the translated copies once again.⁵¹ On his way to Tehran, whilst in Qum, he had hoped to debate with Mīrzāy-i Qumī, but the latter excused himself, citing old age and sickness.⁵²

Ultimately, he could not meet Fath ‘Alī Shāh or ‘Abbās Mīrzā themselves in order to dedicate his Persian translation of the New Testament to them.⁵³ He left for England and he died on 16 October 1812 in Turkey of the illness he had developed during his journey.

Henry Martyn's Confrontation with Shi'ite Clerics

His first encounter with religious scholars was with some students of the chief mujtahid of Shiraz, Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Fasā'ī, in which they debated the validity of Islam and Muḥammad's prophecy. The result of these discussions was an exchange of polemical tracts and the composition of written responses. Fasā'ī wrote a response to Martyn's verbal refutations and Martyn countered with his treatises. He also had long debates with Sufi masters in Shiraz.⁵⁴ He also wrote a number of polemical tracts refuting Islam, in which he made use of the Qur'ān and the prophetic traditions to argue against Islam itself.⁵⁵ Henry Martyn was well versed in Islamic theology, Shi'ism and the seminary sciences in general, and this was acknowledged even by his most animated Shi'ite opponents. Ma'sūm Shīrāzī, himself a scholar of considerable repute, gave Martyn the title of 'Christian Sage' (*hakīm-i naṣrānī*) to indicate his respect for Martyn's knowledge and understanding.⁵⁶

Martyn's tracts played a crucial role in the social and religious history of this period and led to the formation of a new polemical genre in literature, known as responses. Martyn's treatise was written in fluent Persian, exhibiting Martyn's broad knowledge of hadith literature, the Qur'ān, as well as his acquaintance with the history of Islam based on precise references to historical events.

Refutations (jawābiyya) of Henry Martyn's tracts

Henry Martyn's stay in Persia and his composition of his tracts gave rise to a kind of new literary genre among Shi'ite scholars, known as 'Refutations of the Priest' (*radd-i pādri*). By the end of Fath 'Alī Shāh's era (1250/1834) 28 responses had been written by Islamic scholars, philosophers and Sufi masters.⁵⁷ Later, it became routine for many lay writers, such as Mīrzā Muḥammad Hāshim Āṣif, known as Rustam al-Ḥukamā', to write refutations of Martyn.⁵⁸ The Sufi masters who did so followed the same path as jurists, while adding their own spiritual doctrines.

Perhaps the most important response to Henry Martyn's treatise was that of Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh. Muḥammad Ma'sūm Shīrāzī contended, 'truly [Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh] responded in a clever and pleasing manner with fascinating phrases.'⁵⁹ From this citation one can conclude that one of the first responses to Henry Martyn was from Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh. But before embarking on a detailed explanation of his response, it will be helpful to

review a few of the other responses to Martyn’s work by other ulama and Sufi masters of this period.

Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā Hamadānī

Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā Hamadānī (d. 1247/1831) was well versed in the Shi‘ite religious sciences.⁶⁰ Mast ‘Alī Shāh mentioned him in the *Bustān al-Sīyāḥa*, saying that he was ‘the most learned among learned men of his time and the most knowledgeable among the ulama of the period. His high degree in respect to human virtues and his spiritual qualifications’, he stated, ‘were greater than all the clergymen of his time.’⁶¹

There were two treatises refuting Henry Martyn by Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā. The first was called ‘Guidance for the Misguided on the Proof of the Prophecy of the Seal of Prophethood’ (*Irshād al-mudhlīn fī ithbāt-i khātām-i al-nabī‘īn*), written with the encouragement of Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh and supported by the influential Mīrzā Buzurg Qā‘im-Maqām Farāhānī. It was completed in 1812 just before Henry Martyn left Persia.⁶² In this treatise Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā criticised Martyn by analysing his quotations from the New Testament. He considered that the Christians misinterpreted the word ‘Paraclete’ (*fārqilīt*) by translating it as ‘Holy Spirit’, whereas it really meant the Prophet Muḥammad.⁶³ The second treatise was called ‘The Key to Prophethood’ (*Miftāh al-nubuwwah*), which Muḥammad Riḍā wrote three years after *Irshād al-mudhlīn* as a kind of updated, revised and more complete version of the former work. It was written in six parts and was presented to Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh.⁶⁴ Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā criticised the fact that Henry Martyn followed his ‘ignorant carnal soul’ (*nafs-i jāhil*) by denying the Qur’ān. He also asserted that Martyn’s claims were unjust and were meant to deceive the masses.⁶⁵

Mīrzā Abū al-Qāsim (Sukūt)

Mīrzā Abū al-Qāsim (d. 1239/1823),⁶⁶ known as Sukūt, was a Sufi master with heterodox views who also wrote a treatise in response to Martyn. He had met Nūr ‘Alī Shāh in Isfahan⁶⁷ then he became a disciple of Ḥāj ‘Abd al-Wahāb Nā‘īnī (d. 1212/1797).⁶⁸ Nā‘īnī, known as *Pīr Nā‘īn* was a Nūr-bakhshī master in the city of Nā‘īn.⁶⁹ He interpreted Christian ideology based on the Sufi belief in the ‘unity of being’ (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Sukūt

maintained that the differences between prophets and other creatures are matters of relative perfection. Amanat states, 'Sukūt even seems to imply that organized religions and the Islamic *Sharī'a* in particular, are of no eternal validity.'⁷⁰ This is likely to be true as Sukūt had certain heterodox views about Islam and Muslims.⁷¹

Ali Nūrī (d. 1245/1830)

One of the best-known scholars and philosophers of this period was Mullā 'Alī Nūrī, whom Riḍā Qulī Khān Hidāyat referred to in his *Riyāḍ al-Ārifīn* as a divine philosopher (*Hakīm-i ilāhī*).⁷² He wrote a refutation of *Mizān al-Haqq* in a philosophical manner,⁷³ at the request of Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh and 'Abbās Mirzā, called 'the Proof of Islam' (*Hujjat al-Islām*).⁷⁴

Mullā Aḥmad Narāqī (d. 1245/1829)

Mullā Aḥmad Narāqī, a well-known jurist (*faqīh*) and contemporary of Henry Martyn, also wrote a treatise in refutation called 'The Sword of the Nation' (*Sayf al-ummah*),⁷⁵ in which he presented a perfect example of what came to be known as 'scriptural argument' (*iḥtijāj kitābī*) being based on a textual analysis of the Qur'ān and the New Testament.⁷⁶

Abū al-Qāsim Qumī (d. 1231/1816)

Another well-known Uṣūlī scholar was Mirzā-yi Qumī (1151-1231/1738-1815), who was mentioned in the last chapter. He wrote an incomplete response to Henry Martyn, arguing against some key Christian beliefs. Qumī intended to write a fuller response to Martyn but he died before its completion, so he did not have time to title his treatise.⁷⁷ In many parts of it he based his exposition on the same theory of 'scriptural argumentation' (*iḥtijāj kitābī*) that had been used by Narāqī.⁷⁸ He maintained that Christians denied the soundness of the Qur'ān and, therefore, it was impossible to expect Muslims to believe in the past prophets, including Jesus.⁷⁹

Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh’s Response to Martyn (1248/1833)

As an Islamic scholar, Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh felt obliged to write a theological response to Martyn. In this regard, Muḥammad Ma‘ṣūm Shīrāzī stated that after Martyn’s disputation with many of the Shi‘ite ulama and citizens, Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh invited him for *mubāhilah*.⁸⁰ He quotes from Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh, ‘You are a Christian and I am Muslim, come thou that we go to the fire, whoever does not burn, his religion is based on the Truth.’⁸¹ In response to Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh, Martyn remarked, ‘I must be persuaded with knowledge and not with action’, stating he would only be persuaded by arguments based on reason.⁸²

The importance of Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh’s treatise is that it was his only written work and one of the first written refutations of Martyn. It became the basis and source for all the other treatises that followed.⁸³ He said that he wrote the treatise because of the numbers of requests made by his companions.

His treatise, following the style of other jurisprudential and theological treatises, started by praising God and continued with a salutation to the Prophet and the ‘People of the House’ (*ahl al-bayt*), before eulogising Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh and Abbās Mīrzā. He referred to ‘the Abode of Peace’, *Dār al-Islām* [Persia], which was in a state of holy war (*jihād*) with Russia under the leadership of the Shāh and his heir; he called the Russians ‘enemies of the religion of Prophets’.⁸⁴ He then responded to the ‘futile’ objections of Henry Martyn who refuted the miracle of the Qur’ān and other miracles from the Prophet Muḥammad. Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh proposed that Martyn was motivated by ‘carnal desires and temptations from Satan’.⁸⁵

After establishing the validity of the pillars of Islam, Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh asserted that he would not rely exclusively on Islamic sources, such as the hadith or stories about the Prophet, to provide evidence for prophecy, but would employ rational ways of proving his ideas that would be acceptable to anyone from any religion. Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh confirmed his firm belief in Judgment Day and, contrary to the beliefs of philosophers and many Sufi masters, he asserted that the spiritual and corporeal resurrections would happen together.⁸⁶ His methodology was first to summarise Henry Martyn’s beliefs and then reject them all methodically and rationally, providing different quotations from Martyn’s tracts before adding his response to or rebuttal of each quotation. What follows is a thematic summary of his riposte to Henry Martyn’s polemic.

The Unity of Religions

In his treatise Martyn claimed that the Old and the New Testaments do not negate each other. Therefore, one cannot believe in one and reject the other. Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh concurred and added that, similarly, if one negates Islam, then one negates all other religions because their essence is the divine light.⁸⁷ Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh remarked, 'Also, I say that he whose light was in Adam's forehead, was transferred to Eve's forehead. And continuously, it was transferred from fathers to mothers until he [Muḥammad] was born. Always and in all eras, prophets gave the good tidings of the manifestations of the light and they were proud of it. The priests of Judaism and Christianity have given the good tidings about his [Muḥammad's] coming.'⁸⁸ Even though Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh noted the good tidings of the appearance of the 'Prophet at the end of time', he still maintained that there was always a light which was transferred through the prophets and their spouses down to the next prophet. With the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad this light reached its perfect manifestation. The philosophy of 'Muhammadan Light' will be explained in detail later.

Miracles

Henry Martyn proposed that a miracle should be defined as an extraordinary act that no human being can perform, which is one sign of prophet-hood.⁸⁹ Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh did not see any problem in this statement. He maintained that miracles (*mu'jiza*), wonders (*karāmat*) and sorcery (*siḥr*) were extraordinary acts, but there were differences between the first two and the last type.⁹⁰ One could perform miracles and wonders while in a state of proximity of God, while sorcery was due to distance from God and proximity to Satan.⁹¹

Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh proposed that God was obligated not to let his people be led astray by a mendacious sorcerer.⁹² He advocated that those who did not follow the prophets for their behaviour and attributes understood the sincerity (*ṣidq*) of the prophets through their miracles.⁹³ Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh criticised Martyn's definition of miracles as defective and nonsensical.⁹⁴ He stated that he did not need to investigate the miracles of previous prophets because of the certitude he felt for the authenticity of Muḥammad and all the prophets, while asserting that Martyn was obligated to investigate these miracles so that their truthfulness would be revealed to him.

Henry Martyn remarked that Muslim historians proposed that the miracles of the prophets must be appropriate to the common understanding of people, which was a false belief because none of the prior Christian historians had written about this. Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh rejected Martyn’s claim and countered that many miracles, such as the miracle of Ṣāliḥ’s camel, were not in accordance with the accepted norms and manners of their respective ages.⁹⁵

Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh addressed Henry Martyn and commented, ‘If Paderi believes in religion, he must be aware that the claim of prophethood from the immaculate Muḥammad was proven many times.’⁹⁶ Only those who had enmity towards Muḥammad did not become believers and denied his prophethood. Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh stressed that the Qur’ān is the eternal miracle of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁹⁷

He also explained that prophecy had been divided into ‘general prophecy’ (*nubuwwat-i āma*), which is divine inspiration from the divine realm, and ‘specific prophecy’ (*nubuwwat-i khāṣa*), which belongs to the group of prophets who brought new laws and a new way of life to their followers.⁹⁸ ‘Specific prophecy’ and ‘general prophecy’ have been the subject of disputes between different theological schools of Islam.⁹⁹ Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh wrote:

Our prophet, peace be upon him . . . claimed to be a prophet during his own era and this is proved to be so for both those who agree and disagree with him, as there are a series of narrations about it. No one denies these narrations. Also he performed miracles as a sign of his claim [to prophecy] and there are numerous narrations about the miracles among those who agree and also those who disagree and doubt the miracles of prophet.¹⁰⁰

Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh pointed out that no one can deny the Prophet’s extraordinary acts. However, many accused the Muhammad of being a sorcerer.¹⁰¹ In response, Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh maintained that anyone who was aware of the virtue, good manners and acts of the Prophet would not have these doubts.¹⁰² Martyn asserted that if the miracles of the Prophet of Islam were so well documented and clear and Islam was the religion of Truth, then why had the Jews, Christian, and some Arabs not converted to Islam? And why did they have to be converted by the sword? Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh rejected this assertion and stated that those Jews, Zoroastrians and Christians who did not convert to Islam and continued their beliefs did so because they were not able to distinguish between the miracles and sorcery, while some did not

convert because of their love of wealth and social status. Nevertheless, many did convert, otherwise who were the Muslims of the time? Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh maintained that the early Muslim wars were all fought in self-defence.¹⁰³

The Qurʾān as Miracle

Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh explained that anyone who rejects the stories of the Qurʾān implicitly rejects the Torah and the New Testament because most of their stories accord with those in the Qurʾān. Therefore, if Henry Martyn insults the Qurʾān he is rejecting his own scriptures.¹⁰⁴ He went on to warn that those who are opposed to the prophethood of Muḥammad need to realise that the Qurʾān is an inimitable inspired scripture beyond the capability of human beings to comprehend. The Qurʾān's inimitability is one of the major subjects of his treatise.

Henry Martyn asserted that one could not claim that there is absolutely no one who could write a book like the Qurʾān, because in the future someone who was well versed in the Arabic language might succeed in writing such a book. Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh asserted that '[i]t is enough that the contemporaries of the Prophet were helpless to write a book like the Qurʾān... it is obligatory for all human beings to answer the call of the prophets.'¹⁰⁵ He added that those who do not have enough knowledge of the Arabic language should put their trust in the opinion of those who do.¹⁰⁶ Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh then remarked that Martyn went to those Jews and Christians who were well versed in Arabic and asked them to write a book like the Qurʾān, and that their inability to do so was proof of the author's claim.¹⁰⁷

He maintained that the miracles of the former prophets were linked to the sensible world. He remarked, 'Since the Qurʾān is in written form, it is sensible for the eye, and since it is literal, it is sensible for the ear as well. Regarding other miracles, such as the utterance of the burning bush to Moses which were audible to the sense of hearing and Moses' staff which turned into a giant snake that was sensible to the eyes,'¹⁰⁸ Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh argued that 'the Qurʾān is a superior type of miracle because it is intellectual as well as sensible.'¹⁰⁹ The 'Word' or Logos was manifested in a book (Qurʾān) in Islam, whereas in Christianity it is manifested in flesh (Jesus Christ); this means that the bodily form has disappeared in the case of Christianity, whereas in Islam the living Logos, which is the inspired book, can still be perceived today.

Henry Martyn asserted that there were no more than five or six secrets in the whole of the Qurʾān.¹¹⁰ Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh's response was that Martyn

was not trustworthy enough to be privy to the Qur’ān’s secrets. He indicated that only the Imāms were privy to its secrets, saying that the Qur’ān is like a bride wearing a veil (*burqa*); those who are not trustworthy are not able to see its beauty.¹¹¹

He argued that those who have become saints (*awliyā’*) have a true understanding of the Qur’ān.¹¹² This is especially true for the 12 Imāms of Shi‘ism who are privy to the Qur’ān’s secret beauties. The tradition that ‘Saints have gnosis of the real meaning of the Qur’ān’ had long been part of Sufi culture. Mahmoud Ayoub quoted Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallah al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1391), ‘Outward expressions or explanations [*ibārāt*] are for the generality of men; they are for the ear. Subtle allusions [*isharat*] are for the elect; they are for the mind. Subtleties of meaning [*latā’if*] are for the friends [*awliyā’*] of God; they are glimpses [*mashāhid*] of divine presence.’¹¹³ Therefore, Sufis have the inner understanding of the reality of the Qur’ān, through their moments of ecstasy (*wajd*).¹¹⁴ On the other hand, Shi‘ites of a formalist persuasion believe that the Shi‘ite Imāms are the only ones who have the inner understanding and complete knowledge of the Qur’ān. ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī thus reasoned that the verse, ‘In a book safeguarded, none shall touch it save those who are purified’,¹¹⁵ refers to the ‘People of House’ (Fatima and the Shi‘ite Imāms). Ṭabāṭabā’ī asserted, ‘They are the People of the House who have the knowledge of the exegesis of the Qur’ān.’¹¹⁶ Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh cautiously created an amalgamation of both viewpoints, emphasising the superiority of the Imāms’ knowledge of the Qur’ān’s inner meaning. Saints (*awliyā’*) also possess certain knowledge, although limited in comparison to that of Shi‘ite Imāms.

Islamic Canon Law

Henry Martyn argued that many commandments in Islamic law had been promulgated merely to satisfy human lusts and the passions of the carnal soul (*nafs*).¹¹⁷ He questioned the role of polygamy in Islam and why Muslims were permitted to have no more than four wives, whereas the Prophet Muḥammad was permitted to have nine wives. He questioned the stories of the marriage of the Prophet Muḥammad to Zaynab, the wife of his adopted son, and suggested that the Prophet also took an oath that he would not have sexual intercourse with Maria, and that this oath was apparently later removed by divine revelation. Martyn also questioned why the wives of the Prophet Muḥammad were prohibited from re-marrying.¹¹⁸ By referring to these stories and traditions from the Prophet Muḥammad, Martyn tried to

prove that the Qurʾān is not a divine revelation and that it is a book written by a human being. Martyn thus concluded that many of the Islamic laws that are in the Qurʾān are based on the Prophet Muḥammad's carnal desires.

In response, Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh referred to a Prophetic tradition where the Prophet says, 'Three things have been made beloved to me in this world of yours: women, perfume, while the coolness of my eye was placed in ritual prayer.'¹¹⁹ He stressed that this saying indicates the perfection of the Prophet. The Prophet's love of women was in accordance with Islamic laws and for the satisfaction of lust within the legal limits permitted by the sharia and for the continuation of the human race.¹²⁰ Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh proposed the view that love of these three things results in the acquisition of gnosis (*maʿrifa*).¹²¹ He then provided an esoteric interpretation of this Prophetic tradition. He asserted that Muḥammad's main consideration was the ultimate fruition of these three. He understood that anyone who was wise would follow Muḥammad because the human race needed reproduction for the survival of humanity and the reproduction of the human race in conformity with Islamic Laws was a basic principle of human life. Ibn ʿArabi's interpretation of this tradition is that the word perfume is the only masculine term among the other two terms (women and prayer), which specifies the governance of the feminine. He proposed that the masculine term was placed between the two feminine ones, as the man was placed between the Divine Essence (a feminine noun) and the woman.¹²²

Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh then turned and asked why Martyn did not condemn Solomon for having had 1,000 wives and having followed the temptations of his carnal soul. He contended that '[t]hese criticisms by Martyn are out of his enmity toward the Prophet and because of this enmity, his research does not bring him to the truth of the situation.'¹²³ Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh provided a mystical interpretation of the prohibition on the Prophet's wives remarrying other Muslims. He asserted that the Prophet is the spiritual father of the community and the wives of the Prophet are, therefore, its spiritual mothers; in Islamic jurisprudence men cannot marry their mothers or their step-mothers; thus if any other Muslims were to remarry his wives that would be a shameful act.¹²⁴

Shiʿism

Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh asserted that anyone who does not believe in the five pillars of Islam, which are Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*), Justice (*ʿadl*), Proph-ecy (*nubuwwa*), the Imamate (*Imāmat*) and Resurrection (*maʿād*), is

not a follower of Islam.¹²⁵ He claimed that Shi‘ism is the only true path of Islam,¹²⁶ and also proposed that the only true heir of the Prophet Muḥammad was ‘Alī.¹²⁷ This exclusivist view was inherited from the Safavid era, in which Sunni Muslims were suppressed at certain times.¹²⁸

Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh stated that none of the three first caliphs was worthy of the caliphate and they were not appointed by the Prophet Muḥammad. Only ‘Alī was worthy as he was appointed by Muḥammad.¹²⁹ He maintained that ‘[a]lso, many observed the miracles of ‘Alī ibn Abī al-Ṭālib as proof of his Imamate based on definite reports and correlated narrations. Also, it is obligatory for all prophets and Imāms to declare their prophethood and Imamate to their followers.’¹³⁰ Therefore, he maintained that while ‘Alī claimed to be the rightful successor of the Prophet, he never took up arms against any of the other caliphs, thus making an indirect criticism of Sunnis for believing in other caliphs of the Muslim community.

Ḥusayn ‘Alī also declared that he believed in 124,000 prophets, as well as their heirs, who were the Imāms of Shi‘ism, mentioning each of the names of the 12 Imāms.¹³¹ Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh maintained that the appointment of the Imāms was by God and only bearers of divine knowledge, which he called ‘the knowledge of the first and the last’, can be Imāms.¹³² Their line of spiritual knowledge was continued down to the twelfth Imām, who was in occultation.¹³³ He even referred to the theological disagreements between Shi‘ite and Sunni Muslims. As he proposed, Henry Martyn referred to the Sunni interpreters, who do not believe in the immaculacy of the Prophet, unlike the Shi‘ites. He called Shi‘ite Muslims the rightful people of Islam and disapproved of Sunni beliefs.¹³⁴

Intercession (shifā‘at) in Christianity and Shi‘ism

The concept of ‘spiritual intercession’ was another important theological doctrine followed by many Sufis as well as Shi‘ites. Shi‘ites believe that the Imāms and higher rank followers of the Imāms can intercede for the salvation of their followers.¹³⁵ The early Shi‘ite theologian Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) explained that only the sin of infidelity cannot be forgiven by intercession, and it is in the power of God alone to forgive that sin. He continued by indicating that the Imāms and those who have faith in them and who have not polluted their lives with sin have the power of spiritual intercession.¹³⁶

Sufis also believe in the spiritual intercession by the Prophet Muḥammad and saints, who can intercede on behalf of their followers. Rūmī held this belief as well, saying:

He [Prophet Muḥammad] is the intercessor in this world and in yonder world – in this world (for guidance) to the (true) religion, and yonder (for entrance) to Paradise.¹³⁷

Rūmī narrated from the Prophet Muḥammad that the righteous ones, the Sufi saints, do not need intercession and can intercede on behalf of others, as he remarked:

The Prophet has said, 'On the day of Resurrection how should I leave the sinner to shed tears?

I will intercede with (all) my soul for the disobedient, that I may deliver them from the heavy torment.

I will deliver by my efforts the disobedient and those who have committed capital sins from (suffering) punishment for breaking their covenant.

The righteous of my community are, in sooth, free from (have no need of) my intercession on the Day of Woe;

Nay, they have the (right to make) intercession, and their words go (forth) like an effective decree.

No burden one shall bear another's burden, (but) I am not burdened: God hath exalted me.¹³⁸

In the last verse of this poem Rūmī referred to a verse of the Qurʾān that says, 'Is it other than Allah I should desire as a lord while He is the Lord of all things? And every soul earns not [blame] except against itself, and no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another. Then to your Lord is your return, and He will inform you concerning that over which you used to differ.'¹³⁹ This verse evidently rejects the Christian belief in Jesus Christ's sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Rūmī referred to this verse to distinguish his belief from the Christian doctrine of Christ's intercession.

When Martyn explained the Christian idea of spiritual intercession (*shifāʾat*), Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh responded that spiritual intercession was possible only if it was in accordance with wisdom (*hikmat*).¹⁴⁰ He defended the theological beliefs of Shi'ites and Sufis about intercession and rejected the idea of general intercession based on Christian principles. Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh

used the term ‘physician’ for intercessor, as it had been used by other Sufis before. In this context Rūmī remarked:

Hail, O love that bringest us good gain – thou that art the physician of
all our ills,
The remedy of our pride and vainglory, our Plato and our Galen!¹⁴¹

The title of one of Rūmī’s stories in the *Mathnawī* is ‘The meeting of the king with the divine physician whose coming had been announced to him in a dream.’¹⁴² The phrase indicates that the saints are viewed as divine physicians. Ibn ‘Arabī also compared apostleship (*risāla*) with the physicians’ duty and said:

Know that, just as the physician is said to be a ‘servant of Nature’
(*khādim al-ṭabī’a*), so the apostles and their successors are commonly
said to be the ‘servant of the Divine command.’¹⁴³

Ibn ‘Arabī elucidated the superiority of the apostle as the physician of the soul. The apostle in his definition is a spiritual doctor.¹⁴⁴ Physicians have limited control and knowledge of physical bodies, and their power is inferior to the power of spiritual doctors. Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh maintained that sins are like rotten food: if a person eats it, he will need medicine for the prevention of sickness. If he becomes sick he needs to go to a physician. The physician will tell him that he cannot eat any food other than the distasteful medicine.¹⁴⁵ Of course, if he continued to eat the rotten food, he would die.

Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh used these examples and, continuing with his mystical explanation, commented that the medicine is repentance (*tawba*), the physician the intercessor or saint who prescribes self-mortification for the sinner to purify his soul, without which he is worthy of hell-fire, which is death.¹⁴⁶ Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh’s explanation here contains an indirect reference to the Sufi path. According to most Sufi masters, the spiritual physician is the Sufi saint and repentance is his medication. He also indicated that one recovers to a healthy spiritual state from affliction with the sickness of deviations and disobedience through the guidance of the spiritual physician. In this regard, Abū al-Qāsim Qushayrī (d. 465/1074) proposed that repentance is a return to the Islamic Law and spiritual codes,¹⁴⁷ and likewise Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988)¹⁴⁸ and ‘Alī ibn Uthmān Hujwīrī (d. 463/1071)¹⁴⁹ also considered repentance (*tawba*) to be the first station (*maqām*) on the spiritual path.

Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh asserted that Martyn was wrong to claim that Jesus Christ was the spiritual intercessor for all humanity. He also maintained that this idea of general intercession was contrary to Divine Justice and the religious Law.¹⁵⁰ However, in praising Jesus one should include all the prophets and the faithful, to receive spiritual blessings.¹⁵¹ Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh believed that if the sacrifice and blood of Jesus Christ were for the purification of humanity, then there would be no need for any laws and prohibition for humanity after him. Therefore, all religions, including Christianity, would be abrogated due to the abrogation of those laws. Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh's understanding of religion had two aspects: interior and exterior, the latter consisting of the laws, prohibitions and commandments brought to humanity by the prophets.¹⁵² These two aspects are inseparable. If one part is destroyed, it brings about the destruction of the whole.

The 'People of the Book'

Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh stated that Jews and Christians who lived around Mecca in the Prophet's day socialised with Muslims and there was no antagonism between them.¹⁵³ His views about the wars between the people of the book and the Muslims during the time of the Prophet are crucial. He believed that these wars were fought by Muslims in defence of their territories and their faith, and not for conquest.¹⁵⁴ He admired Sunni Muslims for their relationship with the people of the book, and remarked, 'Sunni people, who are the dignified people of Islam on account of their numerousness and wealth, maintained their friendship, brotherhood and social interactions with Jews and Christians.' However, he imposed certain limitations on this relationship.¹⁵⁵

Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh had the same belief about the Bible as other Muslim theologians, stating that the companions of Jesus altered the Word of God and that there are different narrations of the Gospels (*ʿInjīl*) among various Christian sects. If there is no consensus about the Bible among Christians, how then can Muslims validate it?¹⁵⁶ He specified that he did not reject the former prophets because he believed in Muḥammad,¹⁵⁷ stating that if one rejects one prophet, one has rejected the rest.

Martyn contended that there were three or four people involved in writing the New Testament. Ḥusayn ʿAlī Shāh stated that the New Testament was the Divine Word, but since the text had been altered, it is now nearly impossible to distinguish the truth from falsehood in it.¹⁵⁸ Martyn declared

that there is no mention of the Prophet Muḥammad in the books of former prophets. Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh replied that:

. . . the Prophet Muḥammad in both the Torah and the Gospels was described in appearance and name. Some people do not come across it or they do not recognize it, whilst others have said that these signs that are in the Torah and the Gospels are for a savior that will come in the future. The consensus [among Muslims] is that this was Qā’im Āl-i Muḥammad [Mahdī] who is the promised Messiah.¹⁵⁹

Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh believed that the leaders of the Christian community omitted the name and titles of the Prophet Muḥammad from the Gospels and attributed these titles to themselves because of their love of power and wealth.¹⁶⁰

Martyn defended the idea of the trinity in Christianity, which Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh rejected, contending that Christians believe that God has created someone in his own likeness, a God-figure who is Jesus Christ, and this idea is evidently untrue.¹⁶¹ Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh explained that believing in the trinity is due to a lack of understanding and the Christians’ alteration of the sayings of the prophets. He also rejected the idea of the incarnation of the divine in human beings (*hulūl*),¹⁶² calling the trinity ‘foolish imitation’ and apostasy.¹⁶³ He also noted that those who believe in the trinity are placed in the lowest level of hell (*asfal al-sāfilīn*).¹⁶⁴ He affirmed that he has no doubt that Jesus Christ was the true prophet of God, but he adds that with the emergence of Islam the religion of Jesus was abrogated.¹⁶⁵ His views were closer to those of theologians of Shi‘ism than to the Sufis in this regard.¹⁶⁶

Martyn claimed that the vast diffusion of Christianity and conversion of people to its faith was a miracle. Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh counterclaimed that these conversions were to a false religion which is no miracle at all.¹⁶⁷ He believed that the Christians of his time were not the true heirs of Jesus. He asserted, ‘The religion that Paderi and his cohorts hold, is not the religion of Christ.’¹⁶⁸ He believed that the religion of Christ was the religion of Truth, whereas the religion of Christians had strayed from the straight path of truth. However, he remarked, ‘Truly, Christians (*naṣāra*) are superior in knowledge, intelligence, truthfulness, serenity, chivalrousness and loyalty in comparison to the followers of other religions.’¹⁶⁹ He asserted that the Jews and the Magians who were converted to Islam during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad were not true Muslims, whereas the Christians who converted to Islam converted out of ‘truthfulness, serenity and right-

eousness'.¹⁷⁰ He invited Christians to contemplate the truthfulness of the Qur'ān and Islam, and reminded them that Islam had abrogated all former religions.¹⁷¹

To conclude, Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh's treatise is more theological than mystical. He wrote it as a theologian and jurist, responding to Henry Martyn's refutation of Islam; however, there are some veiled mystical points in that treatise. According to the social and religious context of his time, he was more moderate in his defence of Islam than the majority of his contemporaries. This moderation was the effect of his Sufi beliefs, however; since he lived during an era of persecution of Sufis, he was careful not to provoke the wrath of his fundamentalist Uṣūlī enemies by any mystical interpretations of Christianity.

Conclusion

Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh's comportment, as the first Iranian Ni'matullāhī master after Ridā 'Alī Shāh, was appropriate to the context of the religious seminary milieu and the wider socio-political situation of that period. His mission was to dissimulate his beliefs and to conform to mainstream Shi'ism. He presented himself as a preacher and scholar, and wrote his only treatise as a Shi'ite theologian defending Islam against Christian missionaries, specifically, a refutation of Henry Martyn. This treatise was an important contribution to the literary and religious genre of *Radd-i Padrī*. As one of the first treatises written by a Shi'ite seminary scholar, it influenced other scholars to write treatises in refutation of Martyn.

Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh lived as an active scholar, in the sense that he held communal prayers and preached in the mosque and seminary colleges. Before him, Ni'matullāhī masters had appeared only as wandering dervishes aiming to revive Ni'matullāhī Sufism in Persia, putting their emphasis on love and the emotional aspects of Sufism. Thus, they developed their own ecstatic poetry and music, which inspired seekers.

As explained earlier, the fundamentalist Shi'ite scholars persecuted Ni'matullāhī Sufis, which is why Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh did not follow the same path as his predecessors. He was a conservative master whose appearance was far from that of the dervishes of the time. Unlike his predecessors (Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, Nūr 'Alī Shāh and Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh), he did not wear a dervish's cloak (*khirqā*) or hat (*tāj*). This was indicative of an inner and philosophical change within the Ni'matullāhī order: the transformation

from a charismatic Sufi movement to a theologically orthodox mystical order.

Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh’s treatise in refutation of Henry Martyn, which was his main contribution to the literary and intellectual milieu of his time, was not as important as the writings of the next two masters (Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh and Mast ‘Alī Shāh) who were more thinkers trying to create a mystical philosophy out of Ni‘matullāhī Sufism. Since Ḥusayn ‘Alī did not distinguish himself from seminary scholars, his treatise was more of a dry Shi‘ite jurisprudential refutation of Martyn with some hints of his mystical thinking, and is hardly recognisable today as being the work of a Sufi who was also the supreme master of the Ni‘matullāhī Order.

Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh’s approach to converting people to Sufism was, in a way, elitist. He examined his students and followers to see if they were ready for Sufism and would dissimulate his Sufi beliefs so as not to invite persecution. He encouraged his followers to keep their outward appearances in conformity with mainstream Shi‘ism and to avoid any acts that might distinguish them as Sufis. The revival of the Ni‘matullāhī order was Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh’s mission, yet he was not as active as the Ni‘matullāhī masters before or after him; he was more of an intermediary for the order’s transformation from an enthusiastic mystical movement directed towards the masses to a ‘theologically correct’ Shi‘ite Sufi order directed by and towards an intellectual elite.

