

(before 1925) 'Ata'u'llah Natiqi took over as headmaster, followed by 'Ali Muhammad Nabili in 1928 and, after three years, 'Abbas Mahmudi (son of Mahmud Vadqani, see fig. 57 and p. 141). By this time the school was considered the foremost school in Kashan and the children of many of the notables of the town, such as the Ghaffari and Shaybani families, and even the children of religious leaders, such as the Thiqat ul-Islam and Shari'atmadari families, attended. In the latter part of 1932 there was another attempt by the local education ministry officials to close down the school; it was finally closed by the authorities in December 1934 as part of the general shutdown of the Baha'i schools.¹²⁹

The Dutch writer and traveller Maurits Wagenwoort, who was interested in the Baha'i community of Iran, records that when he visited Kashan in 1905 it was reported to him that the Baha'i community of Kashan was more than a thousand strong at this time (and therefore about three per cent of the population of the town), of whom a hundred were Jews who had become Baha'is (out of a Jewish pop. of 1,000).¹³⁰

Naraq

Naraq is a large village on the road between Kashan and Mahallat (70 km west of the former and 30 km east of the latter; pop. 3,000 in 1914; 2,504 in 1955). It became famous during the early 19th century owing to the residence there and in Kashan of Mulla Ahmad Naraqi, one of the most important clerics of the reign of Fath-'Ali Shah. It is situated in the hills near Kashan and thus many of the notables of Kashan repaired to the village in the summer months.

The Babi religion was introduced to Narraq in 1844 when one of the leading clerics of the village, Mulla Muhammad Ja'far Naraqi (usually called just Mulla Ja'far, d. 1869, see fig. 51) became a Babi. His father, Mulla Muhammad Qasim, was a son-in-law of the famous Mulla Ahmad Naraqi, mentioned above.¹³¹ Mulla Ja'far had studied at Najaf and Karbala,

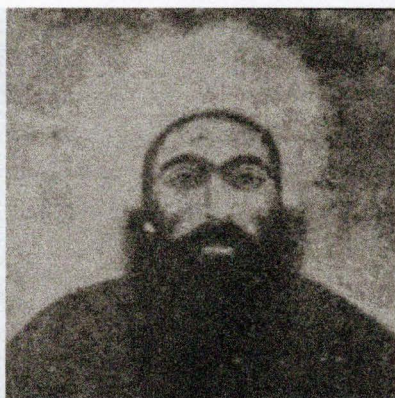
Ishraq-Khavari, *Sharh-i Tawqi' Naw-Ruz* 113 34-5; Ishraq-Khavari, *Muhadarat* 1:526-9; ZH 7:324.

129 For details of the shut-down of the school in Kashan, see MH 9:331-8.

130 Cited in De Vries, *The Babi Question* 71.

131 ZH4:171, 6:679 states Mulla Ja'far was married to the daughter of Mulla Ahmad; Bamdad, *Tarikh* 6:219 states it was a granddaughter. According to Mulla Ja'far's son, Sharif Kashani (*Tarikh-i Ja'fari* 2-3), he was first married to a daughter of Mulla Ahmad and when she died, he married a granddaughter.

obtaining the rank of *mujtahid*, and had also been a student of Sayyid Kazim Rashti. He then settled in Kashan where he established himself as a religious leader and teacher. He appears to have spent part of every year in Naraq and was Imam-Jum'ih in one of the mosques there. He was a Shaykhi and it was presumably on account of this that he met Mulla Husayn Bushru'i (who was on his way north from Shiraz) in Kashan in 1844 and thus became a Babi.



51. Mulla (Muhammad) Ja'far Naraqī

Mulla Ja'far then returned to Naraq and was successful in converting a substantial number of the people of the village over the years. His most important convert was Haji Mirza Kamalu'd-Din (d. early 1882), whose father, Mulla Muhammad Taqi, was the third son of the famous Mulla Ahmad Naraqī.¹³² Kamalu'd-Din was married to Munirih (known as Sayyidi Khanum), a granddaughter of Mirza Abu'l-Qasim known as Mirza-yi Qummi. Both of these ancestors, Mulla Ahmad Naraqī and Mirza-yi Qummi, had been among the top-ranking clerics of the reign of Fath-'Ali Shah.¹³³ Kamalu'd-Din's conversion was in late 1269/1853 and because he then openly began to proclaim his new faith to the people of the village, Mulla Ja'far encouraged him to travel immediately to Baghdad to meet with Mirza Yahya Azal whom Mulla Ja'far strongly supported. But Mirza Yahya would not meet Kamalu'd-Din and only gave a very inadequate reply to his request for a commentary on a verse of the Qur'an (3:93). Baha'u'llah, however, gave a reply (Lawh-i Kull ut-Ta'am, Tablet of All Food) that satisfied Haji Mirza Kamalu'd-Din, who returned to Kashan a follower of Baha'u'llah.¹³⁴ His wife also became a Babi and later a Baha'i and was named Umm Nur (Mother of Light) by Baha'u'llah.¹³⁵ Kamalu'd-Din also converted his two sisters Agha Bigum and Jahan Khatun, as well as a number of the residents of Naraq. With these relatives and converts, he made a further trip to Baghdad to see Baha'u'llah.¹³⁶

¹³² Darrabi, *Tarikh Kashan* 284.

¹³³ For brief biographies of these two see Momen, *Shi'i Islam* 318, 319.

¹³⁴ Furughi, *Sharh Vaqayi'* 6-7; ZH 6:678-85.

¹³⁵ Amanat, *Kashan* 328.

¹³⁶ Furughi, *Sharh Vaqayi'* 7.



52. Mirza Muhammad Mahdi Sharif Kashani (son of Mulla Ja'far Naraq)

Another prominent citizen of Naraq who became a Babi and travelled to Baghdad was Mirza Mustafa Naraq. He remained there for some time, becoming a follower of Baha'u'llah. He then returned to Naraq for a while before setting out again to visit Baha'u'llah. He arrived in Istanbul just as Baha'u'llah was leaving for Edirne and so only had a brief interview with him before being instructed to return to Iran. He then lived for a time in Qazvin and Tabriz, copying the writings of Baha'u'llah. He was

arrested in Tabriz and executed there on 11 January 1867 (vol. 1:365-6).¹³⁷

A third notable of the village to convert was Haji Mirza 'Ali Akbar Naraq. After the execution of the Bab, Mulla Ja'far had started to tell the Babis of Naraq to do reprehensible deeds. When 'Ali Akbar had challenged him as to whether these were the instructions of the Bab, Mulla Ja'far had replied that they were the orders of Azal, the Bab's successor, and that Azal had said that everything that had previously been forbidden was now allowed. 'Ali Akbar then left for Baghdad to visit Azal and find out for himself. He managed to find Azal's residence but Azal refused to meet with him. Eventually 'Ali Akbar met with Baha'u'llah and returned to Naraq as his follower.¹³⁸

In the mid-1850s, after the execution of the Bab, both Nabil Zarandi and Haji Mirza Musa Qummi were in Naraq propagating their claims to be *Man Yuzhiruhu'llah* (He whom God shall make manifest) among the Babis of the village and distributing their poetry, thus leading to divisions

¹³⁷ 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Memorials* 148-50; Samandar, *Athar* 207-8; Ishraq-Khavari, *Muhadarat* 1:335-8.

¹³⁸ As recounted by Mirza 'Ali Akbar's son Mirza Muhammad Taqi Badi' ul-Mamalik to Qabil Abadihi ([*Tarikh Amr*] 78-9).

among the Babis. Meanwhile Haji Mirza Kamalu'd-Din, upon his return from Baghdad, had led an upsurge in Babi activities, with both he and Mulla Ja'far preaching the new religion from the pulpit. This led to uproar among the clerics of Naraq and Kashan, led by Mulla Rida Va'iz Yazdi. Mulla Ja'far tried to deflect this attack by denying his adherence to the Bab from the pulpit but it only temporarily quieted the situation. The governor of Kashan, 'Isa Khan Biglarbigi, reported the matter to Tehran. Eventually, on 8 January 1860, many of the Babis of Naraq were arrested and their homes looted. Mulla Ja'far and his son Mirza Muhammad Mahdi Sharif Kashani (d. 1922, see fig. 52) were arrested and exiled to Iraq, where they settled in Kazimayn and continued to support Mirza Yahya Azal against Baha'u'llah.¹³⁹

Haji Mirza Kamalu'd-Din was asked by the people to replace Mulla Ja'far as Imam-Jum'ih in Mulla Ja'far's mosque in the village. After about a year, Haji Mirza Kamalu'd-Din suddenly, in the middle of leading prayers, decided he could no longer conceal his true beliefs in this way and walked out of the mosque. Haji Mirza Kamalu'd-Din then tried to convert his uncle Mulla Muhammad Naraq, who was one of the leading clerics of Kashan (see p. 85). He did not convert but was usually protective of the Babis and later the Baha'is in Kashan and Naraq.¹⁴⁰ Then Mulla Ja'far returned and tried to live unobtrusively in Naraq but once again his enemies stirred up the population and again the governor sent reports to Tehran. The shah wanted to send troops to Naraq to tear the place apart but the village was the fief (*tuyul*) of the shah's sister 'Izzat ud-Dawlih (see fig. 53). In addition, Khan Baba Khan, the maternal uncle of the shah, was married to the sister-in-law of Mirza Mahmud Naraq, Kamalu'd-Din's brother. These two women intervened strongly and managed to persuade the shah that reports from Naraq had been exaggerated. Although Mulla Ja'far had been sufficiently frightened to go to Kashan and publicly repudiate the Babi religion in front of Mulla Muhammad Naraq, the shah nevertheless decided to exile him to Iraq, where he again settled in Kazimayn in

139 ZH 4:181-2. Baha'u'llah states that Mulla Ja'far had, at about this time, ordered every Babi to pay over one-fifth (*khums*) of their wealth to him (*Athar Qalam A'la* 7:234-5) and Sayyid Mahdi Dihaji asserts that he had put forward a claim to be 'Him whom God will make manifest' (Dihaji, *Risali* 69). For 'Abdu'l-Baha's assessment of Mulla Ja'far, see Ishraq-Khavari, *Ma'idih Asmani* 5:265-6.
140 ZH 6:678, 679-80n, 681; however, according to one account (Furughi, *Sharh Vaqayi'* 10-11) he did on one occasion order the severe beating of Haji Mirza Kamalu'd-Din.



53. 'Izzat ud-Dawlih

early 1862. When Baha'u'llah left Baghdad in 1863, Azal entrusted his wife Maryam (Qaniti) and son Mirza Nuru'llah to Mulla Ja'far before himself leaving Baghdad. In 1286/1869 the Persian consul in Baghdad, Mirza Buzurg Qazvini, arrested Mulla Ja'far and brought him and his son Mirza Husayn (Sharif Kashani) and Azal's son Mirza Nuru'llah back to Iran with him. Mulla Ja'far fell ill in Kirmanshah and was eventually transferred to prison in Tehran, where he died on 18 July 1869. He is generally thought to have been poisoned or strangled.¹⁴¹

Shortly after Mulla Ja'far's exile from Naraq, during the month of Ramadan (March 1862), one of the Babis of Naraq was discussing religious matters and said that the laws of fasting had been changed. To prove the point he ate some fruit that he had just purchased. The crowd seized him and took him to the governor's residence. His brother, who tried to rescue him, was taken as well. Haji Mirza Kamalu'd-Din sent a messenger to ask for the release of the two Babis and the messenger was arrested, as were Kamalu'd-Din himself and his brother Mirza Mahmud when they went to take the matter up. A mob descended on the Babi houses but found their way blocked by six Babis with guns in their hands, led by Haji Mirza 'Ali Akbar, the above-mentioned notable of the area. A commotion ensued and the mob was dispersed. The next day the *kadkhuda*, who was friendly towards the Babis, intervened. He went to the governor and spoke to him in such a way that he took fright and fled the area in women's clothing. The Babi captives were released. The governor, however, sent reports to Tehran of what had happened and warned that if the Babis of Naraq were not suppressed they would take over the area. The government there sent a force to take control of Naraq. Haji Mirza 'Ali Akbar, as soon as he heard of this development, sent his family off to Hamadan, where his father lived, and later joined them there. But his father was opposed to the new religion and threw them out, so they went on to Baghdad.¹⁴²

141 ZH4:142-3; Bamdad, *Tarikh* 6:219-22.

142 The account of this episode from 1860 to 1862 is drawn mainly from ZH 4:178-84, Bamdad *Tarikh* 6:219-22, Furughi, *Sharh Vaqayi'* 4-5. However, the latter part of the account in ZH 4:185 appears to conflate with the later episode in 1873-4.