

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SHĀHNĀMIH-YI HAQĪQAT FOR THE AHL-I HAQQ TRADITION

EHL-İ HAKK GELENEĞİ İÇİN SHĀHNĀMIH-YI HAQĪQAT'IN ÖNEMİ

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Abstract

Several centuries of secrecy and the continuation of oral tradition, accompanied by unfavorable social and religious circumstances, such as the deplorable state of Iran's communication and transportation infrastructure that limited the religious exchange among Ahl-i Haqq in remoted areas, political instability of the region and periodic changes in geographical borders and as a result change of the official religion, accompanied by or resulting in several tribal and religious wars, the appearance of new Ahl-i Haqq theophanies followed by the establishment of new leading families (khāndān), and a number of other social and cultural factors including differences in language and tribal traditions led to a heterogeneity in Ahl-i Haqq groups in the 19th century. The composition of the *Shāhnāmiḥ-yi Haqīqat* emerged within this complex social context characterized by both interreligious and intrareligious discourses. *Shāhnāmiḥ-yi Haqīqat* is well-suited for exploring the tradition of Ahl-i Haqq and the religious collective identity of this heterogeneous community as it seeks to compile the entire oral tradition of Ahl-i Haqq and present it publicly. The objective of this research is to review the Ahl-i Haqq tradition in the mirror of *Shāhnāmiḥ-yi Haqīqat* and explore the various elements, patterns, topics, or concepts that demonstrate the religious collective identity of Ahl-i Haqq.

Keywords: Ahl-i Haqq, Shāhnāmiḥ-yi Haqīqat, Hājj Ni'matullāh, Religious Identity, Collective Identity.

Öz

Birkaç asırlık gizlilik ve sözlü geleneğin devamı, buna İran'ın tecrit edilmiş bölgelerde Ehl-i hakk arasındaki din alışverişini sınırlayan iletişim ve ulaşım altyapısının içler acısı durumu, bölgenin siyasi istikrarsızlığı ve coğrafi sınırlardaki dönemsel değişiklikler ve bunun sonucunda resmi dinin değişmesi, çeşitli kabile ve din savaşlarının eşlik ettiği veya sonuçlandığı, yeni Ehl-i hak kehanetlerinin ortaya çıkışı ve ardından yeni lider ailelerin (khandan) kurulması ve bir dizi dil ve kabile geleneklerindeki farklılıklar da dahil olmak üzere diğer sosyal ve kültürel faktörlerin etkisi, 19. yüzyılda Ehl-i hak gruplarında bir heterojenliğe yol açtı. *Shāhnāmiḥ-yi Haqīqat*'ın kompozisyonu, hem dinler arası hem de dinler arası söylemlerle karakterize edilen bu karmaşık sosyal bağlam içinde ortaya çıktı. *Shāhnāmiḥ-yi Haqīqat*, Ehl-i hakk'ın tüm sözlü geleneğini derlemeye ve halka sunmaya çalıştığı için Ehl-i hak geleneğini ve bu heterojen topluluğun dini kolektif kimliğini keşfetmek için çok uygundur. Bu araştırmanın amacı, *Shāhnāmiḥ-yi Hakikat* aynasında Ehl-i hak geleneğini gözden geçirmek ve Ehl-i Hakk'ın dini kolektif kimliğini gösteren çeşitli unsurları, kalıpları, konuları veya kavramları araştırmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ehl-i hak, Shāhnāmiḥ-yi Haqīqat, Hājj Ni'matullāh, Dini Kimlik, Kolektif Kimlik.

Introduction

The Ahl-i Ḥaqq (followers/devotees of the Truth) is an ancient spiritual community with multiple consecrated families, existing since the 14th century. They are also known as Kākā'ī (Iraq) and Yārisān.¹ While most Ahl-i Ḥaqq reside in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, they have a significant diaspora in Europe and North America. Due to historical and contemporary doctrinal and practical diversity, it is challenging to provide a comprehensive representation of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq communities and their beliefs. Some consider themselves Shī'a Muslims, while others view their faith as distinct from Islam.² The common Ahl-i Ḥaqq adherents are referred to as *tāyifih* (clan) or *murīd* (follower), whereas members of the consecrated families are referred to as *siyyid* (lord), *pīr* (guide) and *masnadrishīn* (the chief of the family). These consecrated family members play a crucial role in performing specific rituals, such as *jam* ceremony and *sar-sipārī*, without whom (or whose appointed deputy in case of the *jam*) this rituals cannot be conducted (Elahi, 1994).³ *Kalām-khān* (literally: word-reciters) are those who can memorize and sometimes interpret parts of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq *kalām* mostly accompanied with playing some melodies on the tanbur. It's notable that Tanbūr itself and its sound are regarded as sacred in the Ahl-i Ḥaqq tradition, and most Ahl-i Ḥaqq, have a tanbur at home as blessing, even though nobody at that home could play it (During, 2001). One of the main beliefs of Ahl-i Ḥaqq is reincarnation. They name the reincarnation 'dūnādūn', 'jāmih bi jāmih' and tanāsukh, but Elahi has named it "The Soul's Return by Way of the Process of Perfection" (Elahi, 2007b).⁴

In the 19th century, the heterogeneity and some diversity among Ahl-i Ḥaqq groups came into the light, as missionaries, orientalist, philologists, travelers and ethnic researchers published their findings. This includes mostly case reports after an encounter with some Ahl-i Ḥaqq from the one or other group, who would gave the researcher some information and in rare cases some notes of their sacred tradition, named *kalām*.⁵ It is Minorsky, who has made the first intensive research about Ahl-i

1 Yār means friend, initiate, companion, aide, helper, dear, and cherished in Persian and Kurdish, with the understanding that "the Friend" can only be God and his revelations or manifestations. The suffix 'sān' in the word 'Yārisān' may be an abbreviation of the word 'sulṭān' (the king), used in the region of Haurāmān. Seen in that light, "Yārisān" would then designate "the friends of Sulṭān" and particularly Sulṭān Ishāq (Sahhāk), the founder of the order.

2 Some newer movements within the community have developed a hyper-Yārisānī identity, defining Ahl-i Ḥaqq in a tribal, national, and/or racist manner (Gūrān tribe, Kurdish nation, Aria race) as a separate religion with no ties to Islam. I have progressively encountered a new phenomenon in social media discussions on chat rooms and platforms where hyper- Yārisānī groups accuse Ahl-i Ḥaqq adherents of not being true Ahl-i Ḥaqq followers and instead being Sufis who have stolen Yārisānī traditions, founded new families, and named themselves Ahl-i Ḥaqq.

3 The 'Jam' is a recurring assembly among the Ahl-i Ḥaqq community, which is not constrained by any particular location or temporal boundaries. Based on this, the assembly is formed whenever and wherever Ahl-i Ḥaqq gather with a genuine intent to worship and with pure hearts (Elahi, 1994, 26-27). *Sar-sipārī*: Initiation rite to officially enter the order, also *sar sipurdan* or *sar dādan* (literally: to surrender the head) or *juz-i sar shikastan* (literally: to break the nutmeg of the head).

4 The terms dūnādūn', 'jāmih bi jāmih' and tanāsukh were mixed up with the common concept of reincarnation as known by Buddhists and Hindus. In *Ma'rifat ul-Rūh*, Elahi has clarified the difference between the concept of successive lives in Ahl-i Ḥaqq naming it "The Soul's Return by Way of the Process of Perfection" and the concept of reincarnation of other groups. For more see Elahi, 2007b, 83-114.

5 *Kalām*: literally, speech. The sacred Ahl-i Ḥaqq corpus, which consists of the sayings of the founder of the order (Sulṭān Ishāq) and of his companions and other holy Ahl-i Ḥaqq figures that were poetic, and frequently

Haqq. Whereas a considerable part of Ahl-i Haqq identified themselves as ‘Alī ul-lāhī (literally: deifiers or worshippers of ‘Alī) (Huart, 2012), or Shiytān-parast (worshippers of Satan) (van Bruinessen, 2014) and some other titles, some groups named themselves after their local leaders or acquiring traditions, such as Zarrīn and Dāvūdī (Membrado, 2013).

It is crucial to keep in mind that among the Ahl-i Haqq, the spiritual impact occurs following a spiritual awakening, which is typically a sudden illumination or understanding of one's spirituality. Since among the Ahl-i Haqq a high spiritual rank cannot be attained by heredity, the person who experiences this sudden illumination need not be necessarily a member of a sanctified family. Therefore, we observe the gradual establishment of at least four more consecrated families after the time of Sulṭān Ishāq until the 18th century (one as an additional khāndān of haftavānah and three as khāndān-i shāh mihmān).⁶

Minorsky considers the disagreement among the Ahl-i Haqq as the result of the secrecy⁷ in combination with the widely dispersed geographic expansion of the order accompanied by important ethnic and linguistic differences, and also the interchange with neighboring traditions and religions (such as Yezidis) (Minorsky, 1920). Accordingly, there were a huge difference in the worldview, beliefs and dogmas of different Ahl-i Haqq groups. From the today's point of view, there was no coherent religious collective identity among Ahl-i Haqq. Whereas some considered themselves Muslims and addressed pork and alcohol as forbidden, some non-Muslim groups saw the sacred in them and blessed them as offerings in their ceremonies. There are numerous variations in the performance of rituals within the Ahl-i Haqq community, ranging from differences in seating positions (kneeling versus cross-legged) to the precise terms and names that must be recited during the *jam* ceremony, which is the most common ritual among the Ahl-i Haqq.⁸ Moreover, significant disagreements exist among different factions of the Ahl-i Haqq regarding the correct time period, as well as the associated offerings and instructions, for the most important annual festival named ‘īd-i khāvandkārī.⁹

lyrical proverbs mainly transmitted orally in archaic lurī and haurāmī Kurdish and in a less extent Turkish, Persian and Surānī Kurdish languages. Daura and daftar are another terms used for (particular) kalām. When exactly they were written down is unknown. They were only intended for internal use, whether they were written or spoken, and because of the peculiar Ahl-i Haqq promise to secrecy, they were kept hidden from outsiders for many generations. Shortened editions and analyses of Ahl-i Haqq texts started to become available to outsiders in the late nineteenth century. For more about the textualization of Ahl-i Haqq kalām see: Membrado, 2015 and also Elahi, 1994, 254- 256.

6 There is a disagreement about the number of the consecrated families and the authentic successorship of them among the Ahl-i Haqq as well as among the external scholars. In some consecrated families, there are two or more members of the khāndān who claim to be the true successor and masnadhishīn of the khāndān. Some authors have reported of more than twenty claimed consecrated families. For more explanation of this diversity and its possible roots see: Membrado, 2013.

7 Ahl-i Haqq were supposed to hide their beliefs and tradition from others. Hājj Ni‘matullāh and his son Nur Ali Elahi were the first Ahl-i Haqq authorities, who considered this decree as not appropriate to the modern time and published several works, and were consequently accused of revealing the secrets. See for instance Elahi, 1994, 247-250.

8 Some of these disagreements are mentioned in *Burhān ul-Haqq*. For instance, 460 and 479.

9 The Ahl-i Haqq observe an annual festival known as the ‘īd-i khāvandkārī, which takes place during the autumn/winter season. This festival consists of a three-day period of fasting, followed by a day of celebration known as ‘īd-i khāvandkārī. It is believed that this tradition was celebrated by previous prophets

The oldest known manuscripts of Ahl-i Haqq date back to the late 18th century (Membrado, 2015). In the past, some kalām reciters and siyyids who had access to a portion of the kalāms began creating counterfeit kalāms and passing them off as the original poems of their major figures (Membrado, 2015). Other individuals were more committed to their responsibility as transmitters of oral tradition, however, most of those kalāms were incomplete and contained inadvertent errors. Such errors had accumulated over several centuries for various reasons, including differences in local dialects and unintentional mistakes.

The combination of World War I, the Persian famine of 1917-1919 (and earlier 1870-1871), colonialism, the continuous increase in the power of Shi'ite clerics from the last decades of Safavid dynasty, and other complex social and political circumstances made life excruciatingly difficult for the Iranian community as a whole, and in particular for the Ahl-i Haqq community, being inwardly confronted with quarreling and incoherency, and outwardly with accusation of heresy, blasphemy, disbelief and infidel accompanied by the animosity of the mainstream religious clergy.

In addition, in the 19th century, Ahl-i Haqq were in a 'millenarian' status. They awaited the manifestation of Zāt-i Haqq, who would come and release Ahl-i Haqq from the discrepancies among them and establish the Haqq on the earth (Minorsky, 1960).

The composition of the *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* (The book of the king(s) of the truth/ or The great book of the truth)¹⁰ emerged within a complex social context characterized by both interreligious and intrareligious discourses. Prior to the *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat*, Hāj Ni' matullāh had written several books, although none of them have been officially published thus far. However, one of his works, titled *Furqān ul-Akhbār*, has been referenced by researchers such as Minorsky (Minorsky, 1960).

In his explanation regarding the compilation of the *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat*, the author highlights that the kalām of Ahl-i Haqq, which is in Kurdish, is characterized

and saints. However, disagreements exist among different groups regarding the observance of fasting and ceremonies during this period. Nur Ali Elahi identifies at least seven groups that follow different time periods for fasting and ceremonies, influenced by their calculations on various calendars and inconsistent interpretations of their sacred texts. For further details, refer to Elahi, 1994, 153-161.

¹⁰ Due to the renowned opus magnum of Firdusī, the famous Persian poem that recounts the history of Persian kings, the term 'shāhnāmih' has become specifically associated with Firdusī's *Shāhnāmih*, commonly understood as 'Book of the Kings'. However, it should be acknowledged that there are several other Persian *Shāhnāmih*s written by different poets. In the past, 'shāhnāmih' was primarily used as a general term for one of the types of Persian literature, specifically one of the forms of Mathnavī (a kind of poem written in independent rhyming couplets). During the Sāsānīyan period, the books documenting the history of kings were referred to as *khudāynāmih* (Pahlavī: *Khutāy Nāmig*; which literally means 'God's book'). Additionally, in the Persian language, the term 'shāhnāmih' carries other connotations that need to be considered when interpreting the chosen name for the book by Hāj Ni' matullāh. For instance, we might note that in Persian 'shāh' is sometimes used as a prefix to emphasize greatness, mastery, or glory, as seen in examples like *shāhkilīd* (masterkey), *shāhkār* (opus magnum), and *shāhbiyt* (crux of the matter, punchline). While Hāj Ni' matullāh has narrated the oral history of Ahl-i Haqq and the narratives of Persian kings and the 'Spiritual Kings' (evidenced by the frequent use of the term 'shāh' in the text), he explicitly mentions that his spiritual Master instructed him to name the book *Shāhnāmih* (v478). Of note, that Hāj Ni' matullāh gave a second name to this book, namely *Haqq ul-Haqāqiyiq* (The Truth of the truths). Thus, *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* becomes an ambiguous term with multiple potential meanings, metaphors, and translations. If we adhere to the commonly established meaning in Persian, we can translate it as 'The book of King(s) of the truth'. Alternatively, if we consider 'Shāh' as an attribute of the book, we might render it as 'The great book of the truth'. Furthermore, if we take into account Hāj Ni' matullāh's own statement, in addition to the aforementioned translations, another possible rendition would be 'The book of the King of the truth'.

as ‘disturbed and incomplete’ (v11282-11284). This implies that a portion of the kalām has been lost over time, and what remains is mixed and unclear. It is important to note that this issue is not unique to Ahl-i Ḥaqq’s oral narrations but also applies to many other religious texts.

Ḥājj Ni‘matullāh asserts that the primary motive behind writing this book is a mission bestowed upon him by the Master of Time (ṣāhib az-zamān), without explicitly mentioning the identity of this spiritual figure. He further explains that he chose to convey the Truth in the Persian language, with the intention of presenting it to both Ahl-i Ḥaqq and non-Ahl-i Ḥaqq individuals (v11290-11294). Within the same context, he clarifies that the statements he presents originate from the kalām of Ahl-i Ḥaqq, alongside guidance received from the spiritual realm that served as inspiration (v11275-11276, 11297-11300).

Ḥājj Ni‘matullāh emphasizes to the reader that the *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīyat* should not be regarded solely as a literary poem. Its content is intended to be valuable in recognizing the existence of the Truth and gaining insight into His presence within the human body (v11271-11275).

Nur Ali Elahi¹¹, the scribe of *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīyat* mentions that his father has compiled a comprehensive collection of the significant and renowned oral history of Ahl-i Ḥaqq within this book (Elahi, 2007a, Saying 1526). Additionally, the book includes descriptions of various branches and ceremonies, teachings and beliefs, and notably, Ḥājj Ni‘matullāh’s personal autobiography.

The *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīyat* serves as a valuable source for researching religious collective identity within the context of Ahl-i Ḥaqq. There are several reasons why this book is particularly significant in the Ahl-i Ḥaqq tradition.

Firstly, the author, Ḥājj Ni‘matullāh, holds a prominent position in Ahl-i Ḥaqq. He represents one of the final leaders who represent an Ahl-i Ḥaqq *bāṭin-dār*. Notably, he openly acknowledges his connection to the spiritual realm and demonstrates his spirituality through performing miracles, thereby establishing the authenticity of his spiritual authority. Within a short period of time, Ahl-i Ḥaqq devotees from diverse consecrated families with various intrareligious ranks in the community, including lay families (ṭāyifih), siyyids (priest families), kalām-khān (receiters of the oral tradition) and Dalīls (guide assistance) followed him. Their decision to enter into a pact with Ḥājj Ni‘matullāh and adopt his teachings is a testament to the significance of his role in the Ahl-i Ḥaqq community and to his influence on the collective identity of Ahl-i Ḥaqq.

11 Nūr ‘Alī Ilāhī also known as Ostad (Master) Elahi (September 1895 – October 1974), was a philosopher, judge, and musician from Iran. His research focused on the tradition of Ahl-i Ḥaqq and the metaphysical aspect of human beings. Elahi was raised under the guidance of his father, Ḥājj Ni‘matullāh, with an emphasis on mysticism, music, and ethics. He led an ascetic life of rigorous discipline from an early age and received a classical education in addition to religious and moral instruction. After his father’s death in 1919, Elahi concluded that classical spirituality was no longer relevant and that spiritual development needed to take place in the context of an active and productive life within society. He left his contemplative life behind and tested his ethical principles in society. He settled in Tehran, cut his long hair and beard, replaced his traditional attire with a Western-style suit, and entered the civil service. Elahi’s philosophy addresses fundamental questions about the origin and nature of human beings, their responsibilities in the world, and their ultimate destination. For a more detailed depiction of his biography see: <https://ostadelahi.com/life/biography/the-early-years/> (last access: 12.05.2023).

Hājī Ni‘matullāh established the twelfth consecrated family within Ahl-i Ḥaqq, introducing a distinct structure that differed from other dynasties in several aspects.¹² This development occurred at the onset of his spiritual enlightenment, signifying a remarkable transformation within the community.

Furthermore, given that the *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat* was written in the final year of Hājī Ni‘matullāh’s life, it can be inferred that the book encompasses the culmination of his spiritual journey. It likely incorporates a comprehensive collection of insights, experiences, and teachings he acquired throughout his lifetime, making it a valuable resource for understanding the depth and breadth of his spiritual life.¹³

The context of the intra-religious and extra-religious discourse presented in the *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat* remains rooted in traditional frameworks and perspectives, since this book was compiled in a time period that modern era, as commonly understood, had not fully emerged in Iran. Understanding this traditional context is crucial for comprehending the dynamics and discussions that shape the narrative within the book. Lastly, both Hājī Ni‘matullāh and his son emphasize that the *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat* serves multiple purposes. It not only documents the oral tradition of Ahl-i Ḥaqq but also provides practical advice, shares personal spiritual experiences, and delves into the interpretation of significant beliefs and principles of Ahl-i Ḥaqq, such as the concept of successive lives. Additionally, the book includes retellings of famous historical narratives within Ahl-i Ḥaqq, even when they differ from Hājī Ni‘matullāh’s own perspective, without outright rejection. The objective of this research is to collect and explore various elements, patterns, topics, or concepts found within the *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat* that contribute to the formation of the religious collective identity of Ahl-i Ḥaqq. By examining these aspects, a deeper understanding of how the book described and shaped the religious collective identity of the community can be gained. This study employs interpretative content analysis and basic (conceptual) content analysis to examine the themes, messages, motifs, and patterns in the book *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat* that depict or describe the religious collective identity of Ahl-i Ḥaqq. These methods are well-suited for exploring the complex cultural and social contexts of the text (Drisko-Maschi, 2015). To conduct the interpretative content analysis, the entire text of *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat* was systematically examined and the identified themes, messages, motifs, and patterns related to the religious collective identity of Ahl-i Ḥaqq were explored and interpreted. For the basic content analysis, a word count analysis was performed to evaluate the frequency of technical and relevant terms used in the book. The purpose of the word count analysis was to identify any repetitive technical terms that may indicate a particular focus of the text on certain themes or subjects that relate to the religious collective identity of Ahl-i Ḥaqq. To focus on the relevant content and words carrying meaning, prepositions and auxiliary verbs were removed. Technical terms and relevant names and verbs were selected and related technical terms were unified to ensure accuracy and consistency. To generate a clear and readable word cloud, any words with a total count of less than 0.03% of

12 For more about the structure of Ahl-i Ḥaqq khāndāns and a more detailed description of Hājī Ni‘matullāh’s established khāndān see Membrado, 2013 and Membrado, 2014.

13 Elahi emphasizes the significance of the kalām of Hājī Ni‘matullāh in *Āthār ul- Ḥaqq*, Saying 1528: “The kalām of Hājī Ni‘matullāh consists of three topics: shūr (exaltation), pandīyāt (exhortations), tradition. His exhortations are extraordinary great and more profound than the kalām of Shīykh Amīr. His teachings are extremely valuable due to the fact that he personally has traversed all [spiritual] realms”.

the total words were excluded from the analysis. The data was then exported into WordSmith and Microsoft Excel for further analysis.

The book is structured into five parts, each named with a Persian or Arabic word for paradise or its respective doors (*firdus*, *riẓvān*, *khuld*, *janān*, and *na‘īm*). A distinctive feature of the book is its frequent use of lyrical hymns, *sāqī-nāmih* (book of the cupbearer)¹⁴, to open or close parts, sections, chapters, and episodes. Due to the book’s extensive contents, a comprehensive examination is not feasible in a single article. As such, the focus of the present study is on the elements that are relevant to its intended purpose.

1. Identity, Religious Identity, Collective Identity

In contemporary linguistics, psychology, cognitive studies, and cultural studies, the relationship between language, discourse, and identity has garnered significant attention. Collective, or group identities are often understood as an individual’s awareness of belonging to particular groups, along with the emotional and evaluative importance placed on such belonging. Social identity is defined in terms of culturally relevant concepts such as ethnicity, nationality, political affiliation, language, religion, class and profession or occupation. Importantly, social identity is not fixed but constantly negotiated through social interactions (Filonik-Kucharski, 2021). Collective identity, which refers to a shared sense of affiliation and identity among the members of a particular group or community is founded on the shared values, traditions and beliefs that define its worldview (Eisenstadt-Giesen, 1995). This includes religious or spiritual convictions, political beliefs, and cultural values and norms. Collective identity has been identified as a significant product of historical influences. By recounting the past and constructing a shared narrative of their origins, beliefs, and traditions, groups are able to establish a sense of continuity and cohesion that contributes to the formation of their collective identity (Jedlowski, 2001). Not only is history a record of past events, but it also serves as an essential instrument for constructing and reinforcing collective identity. By emphasizing particular historical figures and events, organizations can develop a sense of shared identity and purpose. This is evident in the case of the *Ahl-i Haqq*, where *Hājj Ni‘matullāh*’s accumulation of oral history of various *Ahl-i Haqq* groups with different languages or ethnicities, in one common language may contribute to the formation of a unified account of the group’s origins, beliefs, and traditions. Additionally, history can be used to justify and legitimize the beliefs and actions of a group. By emphasizing their connection to historical figures or events, groups can establish a sense of authenticity and authority that serves to legitimize their beliefs and practices (Smith, 1984). In the case of the *Ahl-i Haqq*, associating their history with a vast array of historical and religious figures serves to legitimize their beliefs and practices and establish a sense of authenticity and authority within the group. History and collective identity have a reciprocal relationship. Collective identity influences how history is remembered and recounted, on the one hand. Depending on their collective identity, various groups may emphasize different historical events or figures, and their interpretation of history may be influenced by their beliefs and values. On the other hand, history can also influence

14 In the *sāqī-nāmih*, the poet appeals to the spiritual cupbearer, seeking inspiration and guidance in the realm of spiritual love.

collective identity by providing a shared narrative of the origins and identity of the group (Klein, 2000). Religious identity, an important element of the collective identity, refers to how individuals develop their personal sense of religious and/or spiritual identity over the course of their lifetimes and a person's perception of belonging to a particular religion or belief system, which can be influenced by a number of factors (Etengoff-Rodriguez, 2023). In many cultures, religious practices are closely bound to the traditions and customs of the culture. Often handed down through families or communities, these traditions and customs can define an individual's sense of self. It is shaped by a combination of family background, personal, social, and cultural factors that can vary from individual to individual and can change over time (Arnett, 2000). Individuals' exposure to diverse cultures and belief systems, such as through travel, education, or migration, can cause them to query or reconsider their religious beliefs and practices. In addition, social and political events, such as war or political upheaval, can cause people to doubt their religious identity or even convert to a new religion (Tammes-Scholten, 2017).

2. The Author: Hāj̄j Ni'matullāh Mukrī Jiyhūn-ābādī

Ni'matullāh was born in 1871 in Jiyhūn-ābād, a Kurdish village in Iran. His father, mīrzā Bayān, was from the Mukrī tribe, and his mother, Bībī Khān, was from the Jalīlvand tribe. Ni'matullāh's great-grandfather, along with a few other members of the Mukrī tribe accompanied the great grandson of Shāh Ḥayās, named siyyid 'Abbās, by his migration from the present Iraq to the village of Jiyhūn-ābād in the Kirmānshāh region in the 19th century.¹⁵

His father was shot dead defending the village against bandits and nomads. Ni'matullāh became an orphan when his mother died a year later. This experience appears to have left a profound impression on him, which may partially explain the considerable attention he devotes to orphans and those with 'no defender' in the world and taught his children to continue this approach (Elahi, 2007a, Sayings 106, 361, 1584, 1637). From 1880 to 1894, he was under the tutelage of his uncle, together with his brother and sister (who died shortly after). He had bitter memories of this period but received his education. When he reached maturity, his uncle married him to his daughter, Sakīnih, and gave him back his paternal inheritance. After the birth of their first child, Nur Ali in 1895, Ni'matullāh was recruited by the Qājār government as an agent and later as a local representative of the governor. However, Ni'matullāh could not bear the bribery, corruption, abuse of power, and injustice that were part of the administrative apparatus at the time. He resigned and returned to the full-time administration of his family estate. At the age of twenty-eight, on the 31 May 1900, Ni'matullāh underwent a sudden spiritual awakening (tajallī) that caused him to reevaluate his priorities and abandon his materialistic pursuits. He withdrew from worldly matters and began to lead a life of asceticism, practicing self-discipline and living in isolation in a small retreat located in Jiyhūn-ābād. During the 'restricted

15 *Shāh*: (Literally: *The King*): According to Ahl-i Haqq *shāh-i haqīqat* is an exceptional spiritual personality who bear within himself a certain amount of the Essence of the Haqq. There are a few beings who reflect the whole power and attributes of the Devine such as 'Alī or Sultān Ishāq, and others who reflect the power and (some) attributes in varying intensity, such as Shāh Khushīm. Some spiritually advanced individuals might bear the Essence of the Haqq for a limited time and are called *shāh-mihmān* (*king as guest*) or *zāt-mihmān*, such in the case of Shāh Ḥayās.

advent' period (May 1900 to May 1902), only twelve men recognized him as a spiritual guide. These dervishes held secret prayer sessions in Ni'matullāh's home for a year. In the second year (1902), he traveled in a state of asceticism to the shrine of Sulṭān Ishāq (Sahhāk), earning him the title Ḥājj Ni'matullāh (Membrado, 2014).

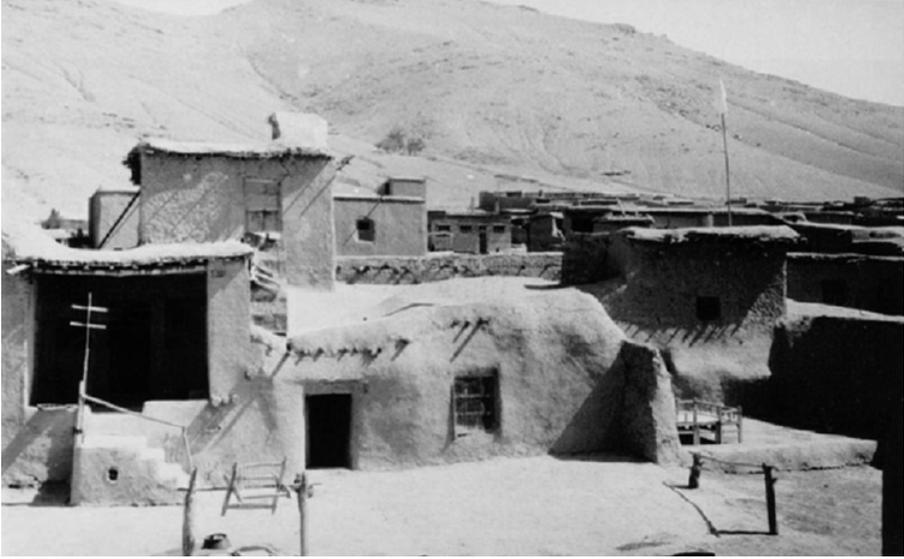


Figure 1: The home and tomb (white flag) of Ḥājj Ni'matullāh prior to the 1970s (photo courtesy of the official homepage).

From that point forward, Ḥājj Ni'matullāh began publicly declaring his beliefs and mission. In the Ahl-i Ḥaqq community, the arrival of an illuminated individual (zuhūr-i bāṭin-dār), has traditionally led to a widespread movement of followers. In case of Ḥājj Ni'matullāh, his notoriety spread beyond his village and Kurdistān into other parts of Iran. Within a few years, the number of his disciples reached 2,000, including over 500 women. He did not have a spiritual mentor and attributed his inspiration to the "Lord of the Age" (ṣāhib[-i] zamān). In addition to *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīyat*, he authored numerous works of prose and verse in Kurdish and Persian about the tradition and principles of Ahl-i Ḥaqq order.¹⁶ Ḥājj Ni'matullāh passed away on 29 February 1920, at the age of 49, and was buried in his home in Jiyhūn-ābād, on that a tomb was built and is now a pilgrim place for many Ahl-i Ḥaqq adherents.

3. *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīyat* –History of Its Formation And Publication

Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīyat is the only work of Ḥājj Ni'matullāh, which is available to the public in its ultimate edition in 1984. Before delving into the content analysis, it is important to establish the temporal and spatial context in which the compilation of *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīyat* took place. By understanding the spatiotemporal backgrounds, we can gain insights into the circumstances and environment that influenced the creation of this work.

¹⁶ For a complete list of Ḥājj Ni'matullāh's works see: https://www.hadjnemat.com/works_list_of_works_en.php (last visit: 02.05.2023).

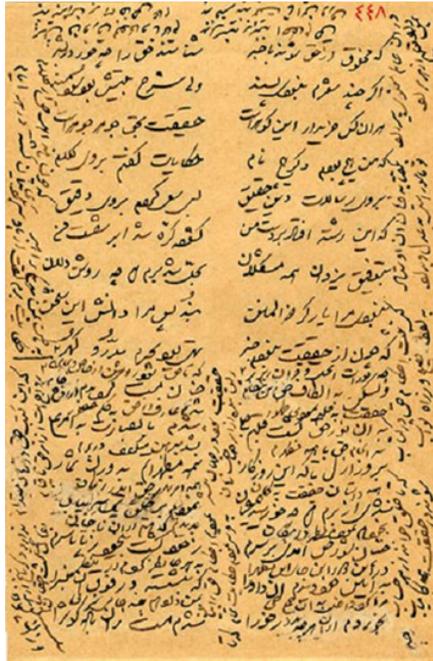


Figure 2: One sample page of the original handwritten Text of *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* (photo courtesy of the official homepage).

It is the Friday, 31 January 1919 that Hājji Ni'matullāh starts the compilation of *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* (and finishes it on Tuesday, 11 March 1919) at his home. However, outside of this 'spiritual garden', as Nur Ali Elahi has described it (Elahi, 2007a, Saying 1588), a devastating war, famine and the Great Influenza epidemic in 1918 have destroyed many lives. The first world war was finished a few months ago (11 November 1918), Iran is occupied by British soldiers and is still in the midst of a great famine that started gradually about three years ago and lasted until the summer of 1919. During this period, people were starving in droves, the population of Iran was reduced by half, and there are reports that people were forced to eat the corpse of the dead and animals such as dogs (Atābakī, 2016; Jamshīdī, 2015; Majd, 2017). Hājji Ni'matullāh and his son spent their time and property to take care of the hungry and the needy (Elahi, 2007a, Saying 1526). Given apocalyptic contemporary images, and the internal disagreements within Ahl-i Haqq groups, it is understandable why Hājji Ni'matullāh may have concluded that the tradition had to be entirely documented, in a more universal language for safety and accessibility purposes. Thus, given the aforementioned circumstances, it is possible that Hājji Ni'matullāh, was concerned about the potential loss of the entire tradition. Thus, he started the narrative, forty-and a few days after the feast of Marnuvī.¹⁷ He narrated the entire content of the book

17 Hājji Ni'matullāh followed an organized program of prayer and fasting and led an ascetic life in which he adhered to strict dietary prescriptions and fasted for 40-day cycles throughout the year, with a few days off in between. According to my calculation, 16-18 December of 1918 must have been the marnowī fastings and the feast day (rūz-i pādīshāhī) was on 19.12.1918. There are 42 days between the marnowī feast day (forty days fasting with one day break prior and after) and the start of a new forty day period in which Hājji Ni'matullāh has narrated *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat*.

within 40 days, pacing back and forth in the room, composing fluently and without taking any breaks, while his son, Nur Ali transcribed the poems (Elahi, 2007a, Saying 1527). Several repetitive patterns in the book create a contrast that separates the ‘words of Hājj Ni‘matullāh’s himself’ from the words that (as he states) the Master of Time ordered him to say. For example, in the very beginning of the book after praising the God, and a couple of verses as exhortation, Hājj Ni‘matullāh says:

"O Mojrem [literally: sinner; his pen name], stop talking,
And say those things that the Master has ordered (v83)."

Some of these repetitive patterns, taking into account the number of days of writing the book and the topics in the book, make it possible to guess where the next day started and in which part that day ended. For instance, in the above-mentioned ‘abstract’, in the last verse (v467) he says:

O sinner, stop this kalām
Retail the whole story of the truth.

According to the 1986 introduction by Bahrām Ilāhī (Bahram Elahi), the grandson of Hājj Ni‘matullāh, the *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* consists of three handwritten booklets. The first booklet, called ‘*Kāshif al-Asrār*’, is comprised of 124 pages in prose and contains certain topics that are presently deemed inappropriate for publication. The second book contains 11,124 verses, while the third booklet consists of 3,918 verses. In 1966, an incomplete version of the *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat*, comprising solely the second booklet, was published by the auspices of the Institut français d’Iranologie (the French Institute of Iranian Studies). Henry Corbin, upon the release of this partial version, drew a parallel between the *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* and the Holy Book, emphasizing its spiritual significance, profound nature and the same sacred origin of the two texts. After the first edition of the book was published, Elahi wrote a commentary on *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* titled ‘*Hāshīyah bar Haqq ul-Haqāyiq*’ [*Commentary on The Truth of Truths*], explaining certain terms, concepts and ambiguities of the book, which now appears as an appendix to the book.

4. The structure of *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat*

The content of *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* can be classified into two main sections with various topics:

a. The primary and most extensive section of *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* recounts the lives of the great saints according to the Ahl-i Haqq tradition, spanning from the Creation of the world up until the year 1919 presented in four chapters. The first chapter, ‘firdus’, narrates the story of the creation of beings of the two worlds (terrestrial and spiritual) up until the appearance of Prophet Muḥammad. The second chapter, ‘rižvān’, spans the period from the time of Prophet Muḥammad to the appearance of Sultān Ishāq. The third chapter, ‘khuld’, delves into the life and events of Sultān Ishāq, continuing until the time when Shāh Ibrāhīm succeeded him. Finally, the fourth chapter, ‘janān’, encompasses the period from the succession of Shāh Ibrāhīm to the contemporary time of the author in the late 19th and early 20th century. Hājj Ni‘matullāh seems to have ordered his collected narratives chronologically, striving to present them without imposing his personal opinions (Jiyhūn-ābādī, 1994).¹⁸ Based on this section, different Ahl-i Haqq groups

18 *Āthar al-Haqq*, Volume 1, Saying 1526: "... My father, for instance, did not want to mention the names

can become acquainted with their tradition. ¹⁹Through this section, a glimpse into the religious identity of Ahl-i Haqq deities, as well as the spiritual ideals sought by their followers and their collective identity, can be discerned. This comprehensive tradition encompasses the oral history of Ahl-i Haqq, moral and religious principles, and a worldview that addresses fundamental questions about creation, responsibilities, duties, rights, and the spiritual destiny of beings. Hājji Ni'matullāh's expertise in preserving and transmitting the oral heritage of Ahl-i Haqq is evident in this section. Additionally, in this first section we also can read Hājji 'Ni'matullāh's own words' through devotional passages presented in different forms, such as munājāt (worship), pandīyāt (advice or invocations), and sāqī-nāmih. These devotional sections add a contemplative and intimate dimension to the book, allowing the reader to connect with the spiritual themes and aspirations expressed within its verses.

b. The second section of *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* delves into the life and thoughts of Hājji Ni'matullāh himself, which are embedded within the autobiographical part of the book and we can read 'his own words' and sayings more than in the first section. It includes his prayers, glorification of God, and the virtues and principles he emphasized. This section provides insights into the religious identity of one of the more recent Ahl-i Haqq bātin-dārs²⁰, offering a glimpse into their spiritual life. The personal experiences and teachings of Hājji Ni'matullāh provide valuable insights into his spiritual path and practices of Ahl-i Haqq, adding depth and dimension to their collective identity. There are certain patterns in *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* that bear resemblance to the Mathnavī Ma'navī of Mevlana. Hājji Ni'matullah employs a similar approach of recounting a corresponding story within a running story or explanation of a concept, and then returning to the main subject once the new story is concluded. This technique includes the inclusion of spiritual or ethical messages and drawing conclusions from the retold narratives. In order to accomplish this objective, he refuses to let temporal or spatial constraints, as well as historical chronology, impede him. He skillfully establishes connections among various spiritual epochs, major figures of Ahl-i Haqq, and Deities who existed in different eras, if required. This is done to reach moral and spiritual conclusions and to achieve the harmonization of traditions and myths, which is one of his principal aims. Furthermore, the use of notably long titles for some narratives almost provides a preview of the entire story within the title itself.

5. Results of The Content Analysis

Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat consists of a total of 15,042 verses and 180,852 words.²¹ About 640 words are left blank to keep the privacy of some known individuals as well as

of certain monarchs in *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat*, such as Shāh 'Abbās, who blinded his son, or Nādir Shāh and others like him, because they cannot be called anything other than a predator...".

19 Of note, that the oral tradition of Ahl-i Haqq, which was partially scripted in the 18th to 19th century, was supposed to be available to some leaders and some members of the consecrated families, not to lay Ahl-i Haqq members and much less to others".

20 Bātin is a Quranic term and refers to the inner (spiritual) world (in opposition to zāhir, which is also a Quranic term and means the outer (terrestrial) world. According to Ahl-i Haqq tradition, a bātin-dār is a person, who has the ability to see the spiritual worlds or even intervene in it according to the stage of his spiritual ranking. For more see: (Membrado, 2013).

21 The word count provided refers specifically to the number of words in the poems, excluding the titles of the narratives and chapters. It is important to note that variations in word count may occur due to differences in old and new Persian writing rules, particularly in terms of spelling conventions, which can affect the overall count.

to avoid inter or intrareligious disputes, for instance by the naming of the avatars of the leaders of the darkness at the time of 'Alī's Manifestation on the page 121. Almost 80% of the content (141,909 words) is devoted to the narratives, myths, dogmas, and oral history of Ahl-i Ḥaqq. The word 'ḥikāyat (narrative) itself has been repeated 395 times in the first four chapters, which indicates the significance of the narratives in this book.

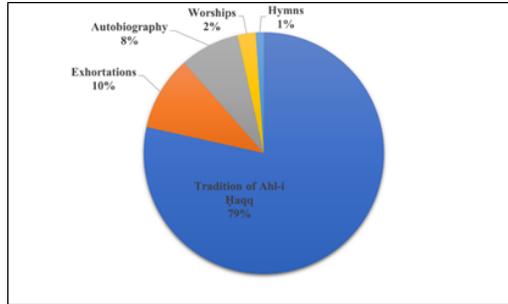


Figure 3: The diagram depicts the classification of words in *Shāhnāmīh-yi Ḥaqqīqat* based on the titles and subtitles of all chapter. It is important to note that some titles, which address the oral history of Ahl-i Ḥaqq, also contain spiritual conclusions, exhortations, hymns, and worships. However, due to the interconnected nature of these subjects, a word-for-word separation of topics is not feasible and would in either way not yield significant statistical differences.

At the beginning of the *Shāhnāmīh-yi Ḥaqqīqat*, there are 467 verses that appear to be 'abandoned' in some way. Neither the title 'preface/introduction' nor any other title is assigned to them. Specifically, upon reading the entire book, an attentive reader may discern that much of its content is repeated in the subsequent chapters. Thus, it may seem that removing these 467 verses would have no impact on the book's content, as is often the case with introductions and prefaces in many manuscripts. However, it seems that these 467 verses serve as a summary, providing an abstract of the first three books (firdus, rizvān, khuld). Ḥājj Ni'matullāh has included some of the most significant topics that represent the entirety of the content. This enables readers to gauge their interest in delving into a much lengthier 'path' after reading these verses. It could be seen as employing an attraction and repulsion strategy, which is inherent in Persian mystical traditions.²² The aim is to attract truth seekers, those who are receptive to spiritual truths, while repelling those who are obstinate. For instance, Ḥājj Ni'matullāh initiates the text with bismillah (In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful) and Quranic terms glorifying the Divine (huwa Allāh-u ta'ālā shānah ul-'aziz ul-ḥakīm: He is the God, Exalted by His Dignity, the Mighty, the Wise). Thus, pretty fast, the reader has to acknowledge that he is facing a tradition that has not separated itself from Islam. Naturally, some Ahl-i Ḥaqq adherents, who do not consider their tradition inseparable from Islam, may regard the presented Ahl-i Ḥaqq tradition in this book as flawed from the outset. However, this symbolic invocation can attract those who previously regarded Ahl-i Ḥaqq as non-Muslims and, as a result, held negative views towards them. Additionally, it can appeal to those who view Islam as the final Shari'a (divine law). The same pattern

22 For instance, in the case of Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh, the well-known mystic of the 18th century, who would start to play music to banish those Islamic extremists, who came to blame him for his way of spirituality; see *Āthār ul- Ḥaqq* vol 1, Saying 1375.

can be found in other topics that he mentions in this ‘abstract’: ancient Iranian kings, Iranian and Greek sages, all the prophets who appeared from Adam to Muḥammad and are mentioned in the Bible, Qurān and Ahl-i Ḥaqq kalām, the twelve Shī‘a ĩmāms are introduced as major figures or followers of Ahl-i Ḥaqq. Moreover, the introduction of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq doctrines, such as the belief in the reincarnation of major spiritual beings as guides for Ḥaqq seekers, as well as the relevant virtues that assist seekers in finding the Ḥaqq, and the obstacles that impede their quest. This convergence of thoughts and concepts, regardless of its historical validity, can be seen as an attempt to unify diverse narratives and align with the previously mentioned concept of attraction and repulsion. We also have verses expressing gratitude to God, some worships, enumerating and emphasizing the importance of relevant attitudes for those seeking the Ḥaqq. For instance:

“O heart, if you desire to become ḥaqq-shinās [someone who knows the Truth], always seek the essence of the Divine in whatever form it may manifest” (v26).
 “There is no place devoid of Him
 So seek the Ḥaqq in every place (v29).”

Continuing with subsequent verses, he itemizes several virtues and vices that bring one closer to or distance one from the Ḥaqq (v30-70). In essence, he emphasizes that in order to establish a connection with God, one must regard all things, beings, and creatures as inherently good, approaching them with love (muḥabbat) and sincerity (sidāqat). Since the dwelling of truth lies in honesty, it reveals itself to those who are honest (v40). A remarkable characteristic of the book is that it repetitively mentions these attributes, reviews them from different perspectives in the frame of various narratives (for instance in: v2425-2475, v4373-4445, v4571-4845, v8370-8631, v8632-8714, v8715-8783) alongside the content of the book and completes them with more comprehensive explanations (for instance: v3347-3450), and at the very end of the book five (na‘īm), he again returns to those virtues and evils (for instance: v11327-11420, v12937-13227, v13642-13702, v14023-14110, v14171-14208, v14576-14653, v14871-15042).²³ He further blames arrogance, taunting others, self-glorification, self-satisfaction, pride, and breaking the heart of others. The text then delves into seven topics, such as the four stages of religion according to Islamic philosophy (sharī‘at, ṭarīqat, ma‘rifat, ḥaqqīqat), the creation of Adam, and the names of significant figures in Ahl-i Ḥaqq (divine entities and their companions) who were prophets from Adam to Muḥammad, the kings until the time of Muḥammad, as well as thinkers, philosophers, and the twelve Shī‘a ĩmāms. These subjects and concepts are further explored in greater detail in the subsequent chapters of the book.

5.1. Firdus (The pre-Islamic Epoch)

Firdus, the first chapter of *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat*, contains 58 sections, including an introduction (with ‘bismillah as title), two sāqī-nāmih, one worship (monājāt), and 54 narrations, most of them with ‘an appropriate sāqī-nāmih’. In firdus, the oral history of Ahl-i Ḥaqq, from the narrative of creation until the emergence of Islam has been recounted. The introduction of firdus starts with bismillah and goes on with a hymn,

²³ This pattern is reminiscent of Persian maqāmī music. It is worth noting that Ḥājj Ni‘matullāh was a master of the Tanbūr, and Persian maqāmī music. He composed several Tanbūr pieces himself. For more information, refer to: https://hadjnemat.com/about_en.php; and also: During, 2001.

Adam and Eve, the narrative of their exclusion from the paradise, the disobedience of Satan and the fall of Adam and Eve, which leads to the start of the life of human beings on the earth, the story of Noah, Abraham and Jesus. On the other hand, some narratives delve deeper into the realm of ‘pure’ Ahl-i Haqq mythology and tradition, such as the narrative surrounding the creation of Pīr Binyāmīn (v588-696) and other archangels and higher spiritual beings (v697-752), the indoctrination of the higher spiritual beings through the Divine about their several incarnations for guiding the human beings and their sufferings during these cyclic earthy lives (v846-895), and the spiritual pact (khāvandgārī covenant) between the Divine and the higher spiritual beings (v931-972). It is after this pact, according to Ahl-i Haqq tradition, that the God creates both worlds, the spiritual and the terrestrial and their ‘residents’ (v994-1354). In *firdus*, Hājī Ni‘matullāh also explains several doctrines that constitute the religious identity of Ahl-i Haqq such as the successive lives, i. e. the reincarnation of the souls and their return to Him (v770-804) in the middle of ‘‘the story of the God’s men, who sought the Truth in the spiritual world’’ (v753-845), the dual nature and power of humans (imperious self vs. divine love) as soon as the terrestrial soul and the celestial soul are united in the earthy life (v1499-1507). It is noteworthy that, apart from the well-known biblical and Quranic narratives of prophets and saints, *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqqīqat* also mentions ancient Persian figures and their relationship to Ahl-i Haqq such as Zoroaster, various Persian kings (both tyrants and evildoers like Bahman, who fought against the believers, as well as righteous kings like Farāmarz), and certain Persian mythical figures like Rustam. The text serves as a reminder to the Ahl-i Haqq community that all these figures are part of their religious tradition and contribute to their religious identity.²⁴ Prior to the narrative of the creation of the first archangel, Jabrā’īl (Pīr Binyāmīn), it seems that Hājī Ni‘matullāh looks for the correct moment or correct way to enter to this narrative (awaits an illumination), he says a hymn, then a prayer, then another hymn, and another one and only then he starts with the story of the creation of Jibrā’īl (v600-696). Although, through the whole content of *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqqīqat*, we read several hymns, prayers and exhortations, as connecting pieces to the narratives, and sometimes at the start, in the middle and at the end of the narratives, but this is the only place in the book, in which Hājī Ni‘matullāh uses various introductory pieces to enter the main story. The narrative of the Alexander the Great and his teacher and companion Aristoteles is another remarkable story of Ahl-i Haqq tradition that connects one of the most important philosophical movements in the human history with the oral tradition of Ahl-i Haqq.²⁵ A common pattern observed in the narratives of saints and prophets across all epochs is the presence of a theophany or a higher spiritual being, as the spiritual king (who usually barriers various degrees of the power, light and attributes of Zāt-i Haqq) accompanied by close companions, the other archangels. Most of the times, they

24 Several authors have explored some similarities of myths between Ahl-i Haqq and ancient Persian myths; see for instance Hamzeh’ee, M. Reza, *The Yārisān*, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1990, pp 70 – 154; and also: Zaehner, R. C. (1992). *Zoroastrian Survivals in Iranian Folklore II*. Iran, 30, 65–75. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4299870>.

25 The justification of the own defeat by tyrants such as Alexander and enclosing them to the own tradition has been described by other authors. See for instance: Minoo S. Southgate. (1977). *Portrait of Alexander in Persian Alexander-Romances of the Islamic Era*. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 97(3), pp 278–284. <https://doi.org/10.2307/600734>

are separated from each other and have to be gathered, collected and illuminated. Sometimes, these spiritual beings and/or (some of) their companions are initially unaware of their elevated spiritual status. Nevertheless, they actively seek the Haqq, or the 'one', who barriers the order and grace of the Haqq, find each other, guide those humans who seek the Truth, and after their passing, this cycle repeats itself. However, it is actually Him who guides his seekers to Himself. And there are also the commanders of evil who betray or fight them and their followers. In the narrative of Jesus for instance, Jesus is Pîr Binyāmîn (Jibrā'îl), who is also the host of Zât-i Haqq, Judas is the commander of Evil, Maria is Pîr Razbâr, and Petros was the manifestation of Davûd. Knowingly, it is Jesus, who travels around to collect his companions, some of whom are lost in the material world. In some narratives, Hâjji Ni'matullâh presents a very brief overview of the biography of the prophet, his companions and their spiritual avatar, yet, in some narratives he makes ethical and spiritual conclusions, suggestions and exhortations or doctrinal explanations, such in the narratives of Adam and Eve (v1891-2021) and, Satan (v1792-1874), Abel and Cain (v2022-2097), Noah (2329-2495), and Abraham (v2607-2836). Firdus recounts the pre-Islamic history of Ahl-i Haqq, which is part of the religious collective identity of this community. According to Hâjji Ni'mat, the prophets and their companions were not bounded to a particular region, religion, language or tribe. The 'people of God' had have one main common characteristic in *Shâhnâmih-yi Haqîqat*, they all have sought the living guide of the time or sâhib-zamân (Lord of Time), in whatever avatar, wherever place, whenever epoch, to sincerely follow his orders. This is evident in firdus (but also in the next sections of *Shâhnâmih-yi Haqîqat*) and serves as an important aspect of Ahl-i Haqq's religious identity.

5.2. Rizvân (The Emergence of Islam)

Rizvân focuses on the Arabic, Islamic and post-Islamic era of Ahl-i Haqq's oral history leading up to the appearance of Sulţân Ishâq on Earth. The text serves as a reminder to the Ahl-i Haqq community that the major Shi'a figures and Shi'a Islam are part of their religious tradition and contribute to their religious identity. In the introductory verses of this section, Hâjji Ni'matullâh asserts that the Yârân (companions) from ancient times will reappear in their new and diverse homelands (v3330). This indicates that he does not confine the manifestation of the Truth and His companions to a specific geographical area. Hâjji Ni'matullâh covers various narratives and concepts under 36 titles, often discussing two or more narratives or concepts within a single title. For instance, under the title "about the treachery of the terrestrial world", he cautions humans about the pitfalls present in this world and the limited time they have to perform good deeds on Earth. He then proceeds to delve into the doctrine of successive lives, the time limit of fifty thousand years associated with it, the Divine justice, and the eschatology of Ahl-i Haqq, including how human actions will be evaluated after death (v3446-3452).²⁶ A few verses later, he revisits this topic and provides further explanation. He states that the primary reason why many deviated after Muḥammad and failed to recognize the Truth in 'Alî roots in the fact that they were pursuing transient material possessions (zar va zîvar fânî) rather

²⁶ His son, Nur Ali Elahi has explained both concepts comprehensively in the 'commentary of *Shâhnâmih-yi Haqîqat*' and Ma'rifat ul-Ruḥ. For more see: Elahi, 2007b.

than seeking the eternal Truth and the Great Essence (zāt-i kabīr) (v3950-3979). One remarkable contentual difference between firdus and rizvān is that the ‘non-purely Ahl-i Ḥaqq narratives’ in firdus are mainly rooted in bible or Qurān (except of Persian Kings and Prophets and Greek thinkers), whereas in rizvān ‘non-purely Ahl-i Ḥaqq narratives’ are mainly rooted in the Shī‘a ḥadīth and Sufi hagiographies. For instance, the narrative of the birth of ‘Alī in Ka‘bih in Shī‘a ḥadīth (Majlisī, 1983) or the narrative of *Sultān Ibrāhīm-i Adham* also called Ibrāhīm-i Balkhī, who was one of the most prominent of the Sufis of the 8th century (Jones, 2012). Interestingly, Hājj Ni‘matullāh also talks to the materialists and nihilists, who negate the hereafter and the justice of God (v3390-3450). Then, he depicts the Islamic period of Ahl-i Ḥaqq thoroughly, naming all spiritual as well as evil figures and their avatars during this period, which surely is one of the most important epochs of Ahl-i Ḥaqq tradition, since the companions and Ḥaqq-seekers see the first complete appearance and embodiment of Zāt-i Ḥaqq on the earth, namely ‘Alī, who comes, as promised in the khāvandgārī covenant, to conclude the stage of exoterism of religion (Sharī‘at), and trigger the epoch of spirituality on the earth (vilāyat and ‘irfān). Hājj Ni‘matullāh retails various narratives (14 narratives such as birth and prophecy of Muḥammad, birth and Imamate of ‘Alī, expansion of Islam, assassination on ‘Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥusain and 12 Shī‘a imāms, etc) in almost 800 verses uninterrupted with no long hymns or worships (except of one probable break between the end of list of the evil leaders and Mu‘āvīyah, considering the ending verse of the first and the starting verse of the latter, who is also one of the evil leaders). In all narratives, the avatar of the major Ahl-i Ḥaqq spiritual beings, such as haftan, haftavāna and others are named. For instance, Zāt-i Ḥaqq was ‘Alī, Razbār appeared in Fātimih bint-i Assad (mother of ‘Alī) and later in his daughter (Ziynab), siyyid Muḥammad (haftavāna) appeared in Prophet Muḥammad and Pīr Binyāmīn was Salmān-i Fārsī. According to *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat*, the presence of higher spiritual beings illuminates jahān or ‘ālam (world/cosmos), encompassing not only the tribes or groups they were born into but also both worlds at large, for instance in the accounts of the appearances of Jesus (v3238), Muḥammad (v4073), ‘Alī (v3577), and Sulṭān Ishāq (v6162). Rizvān proceeds to retail the narratives of minor manifestations of Zāt-i Ḥaqq and various saints until the eventual re-appearance of the complete Manifestation of Zāt-i Ḥaqq, specifically Sulṭān Ishāq (Table 1).

This section includes accounts of several renowned Islamic Sufis, including Sulṭān Ibrāhīm-i Adham, and Maṅsūr-i Hallāj. It is worth noting that the incorporation of these prominent Sufi figures into the Ahl-i Ḥaqq tradition, some of whom are considered leaders and significant figures within various branches of Islamic Sufism, establishes a connection between Ahl-i Ḥaqq and numerous mystical orders that emerged after the advent of Islam.

Several other famous mystics and poets of this era are mentioned as avatars of higher spiritual beings or their companions such as Rūdakī, Bābā Ṭāhir, Firdusī, Abū ‘Alī Sīnā, Abū Sa‘īd abi al-Khiyr, Umar Khayyām, Sanā‘ī, and Niẓāmī Ganjavī. There are several (at least 9) ‘purely Ahl-i Ḥaqq narratives’ in rizvān such as “the narrative of the Sāj-i Nār, in which the King renewed the covenant with pīrān-i ḥaqqīqat (guides of the truth)”, “the story of Shāh Khushīn” and “the story of Bābā Navūs”. A significant subject in this section is the covenant of Sāj- Nārī, in which according to

Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat, Zāt-i Haqq, renews the old covenant with his companions and agree to reveal the spiritual level of the religion for Haqq-seekers. In this section, the instructions of the Jam and sacrifice ceremony are also described.

Table 1: Some of the post-Islamic Ahl-i Haqq theophany manifestations until the time of Sulṭān Ishāq. ICMZ: incomplete manifestation of Zāt-i Haqq, CMZ: Complete manifestation of Zāt-i Haqq.

Name /	Ranking	Era (CE)	Known whereabouts
‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib	CMZ	601 – 661	Makkih, Madīnih, Kūfih, Baqdād
Buhlūl	ICMZ	7 th to 8 th century	Baqdād, Kufeh, Kurdistān, Luristān
Shāh Fazl-i Valī	ICMZ	9 th – 10 th century	Īndiā (including modern Pakistān)
Bābā Sarhang	ICMZ	10 th century	Kurdistān and/or Luristān
Shāh Khushīn	ICMZ	10 th – 11 th century	Luristān and Kurdistān
Bābā Nāvūs	ICMZ	11 th – 12 th century	Kurdistān – Luristān
Sulṭān Ishāq	CMZ	13 th – 15 th century	Kurdistān

There are some notable ‘Ahl-i Haqq virtues’ that Hājī Ni‘matullāh corroborates in this section between the lines of the narratives. For instance, in the narrative of Sulṭān Ibrāhīm-i Adham, we recognize the virtue of being ready to abstain from all material belonging in the sake of Him, as Sulṭān Ibrāhīm relinquishes the kingship to seek and reach the Haqq (v4571-4845). Another virtue is the certitude of faith and being aware of doubt in the narrative of Buhlūl, Hārūn und his wife, in which Hārūn’s wife, knowing Buhlūl as Zāt-i Haqq, has an unconditioned trust to him, and Hārūn not (v4473-4445). In the narrative of Bābā Navūs, Hājī Ni‘matullāh corroborates the forbiddance of eating pork for Ahl-i Haqq (v5949), which is considered as sacred by some Gūrān Ahl-i Haqq (van Bruinessen, 2014). Hājī Ni‘matullāh ends Rizvān, with his introductory words.²⁷ He emphasizes the importance of practicing the spirituality (deeds instead of words), helping others and particularly those in need (that would be superior to any other worship), avoiding to dispute others, being righteous and humble, and avoiding hypocrisy, selfishness and being a mammonist.

5.3. Khuld (The Emergence of Sulṭān Ishāq)

Khuld begins with a worship and humble words from Hājī Ni‘matullāh. From this point onward, until the contemporary time of Hājī Ni‘mat (halfway through the next

²⁷ As mentioned in footnote No. 23 similar pattern to a piece of Persian maqāmī music.

chapter, Janān), the narrative of Ahl-i Ḥaqq tradition is continuously recounted by Ḥājj Ni'matullāh, with minimal interruption apart from a couple of spiritual conclusions, recommendations, and exhortations based on instructive narratives like Shiykh Rash (v8370-8631) Yūsif Birahnih (the poor Yūsif, v9104-9237). There are no hymns or prayers included between the narratives. Additionally, Ḥājj Ni'matullāh provides explanations of certain rituals, such as instructions for the initiation ceremony (v8027 – 8099). Khuld portrays the efforts of Sulṭān Ishāq's companions in preparing the conditions for his appearance on Earth. The account reveals that Pīr Binyāmīn from Pāvih, a city in western Iran, initially remains unaware of his own spiritual status. It is only after encountering Mullā Rukn ad-Dīn from Damascus that he becomes aware of his proximity to the "King of the religion". The narrative highlights a repetitive pattern that signifies an essential aspect of the collective identity of Ahl-i Ḥaqq. This pattern involves the planning carried out by the companions of Zāt-i Ḥaqq for His Emergence, as well as the efforts of Ḥaqq-seekers from around the world who come to witness the spiritual king and seek his blessings.

The narrative of the marriage between the father of Sulṭān Ishāq, who is a more than 100 years old Sunni Muslim and the leader of the Qādirī and Naqshbandī Sufī order - and possibly the leader of the Nūrbakhshī sect according to Jean During (During, 1998) - and his young mother Khātūn Dāyrāk, who is the daughter of one of the chiefs of the Kurdish Jāf tribe (mostly Sunni Muslims), depicts the struggles faced by the companions in their pursuit of their goal. The migration of Sulṭān to Pirdīvar, prompted by the hostility of his half-brothers, the three days of fasting, the pirdīvarī covenant, the numerous miracles attributed to Sulṭān Ishāq and his companions, and all other Ahl-i Ḥaqq narratives, which constitute the Ahl-i Ḥaqq religious identity and are scattered across different Ahl-i Ḥaqq kalām, are interconnected as intended by Ḥājj Ni'matullāh.

The establishment of the seven consecrated families (v7929-8026) is another remarkable contents of khuld. According to this narrative, the followers of Ahl-i Ḥaqq sought proper guidance after Sulṭān's demise, and as a result, he established the seven khandāns. Khuld includes several poignant narratives. For instance, there is the narrative of the poor old woman who arrived late to the gathering (jam) and felt ashamed because she did not have a proper food offering. All she had was a simple qāvit.²⁸ Sulṭān ordered the entire gathering to wait for her, and when she arrived, all the other offerings were accepted by God due to her pure intention and the fact that she had offered all her belongings. The virtues of Ahl-i Ḥaqq mentioned in previous chapters are reiterated here, with a few additions. These include avoiding doubt in the mercy and power of God, avoiding pride, refraining from hurting others, resisting the allure of worldly possessions, and seeking guidance from the living guide on Earth. Pride is a recurring 'spiritual pitfall' that is the main theme of some narratives in *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat*. Even some of Sulṭān Ishāq's companions, including the most highly ranked among them like haftan, have fallen into this pitfall, as depicted in the narratives of Pīr Binyāmīn (v8986-9060), Shāh Ibrāhīm (v10008 – 10110), and Abulvafā (v7755-7765).

28 Qāvit is a powdered mixture of various cereals and legumes that is prepared in different ways across different regions of Iran. In the Ahl-i Ḥaqq tradition, it typically consists of a combination of seven cereals and legumes. It served as a dessert or, not rarely, as a main meal for poor people or farmers.

Two notable narratives connect Ahl-i Ḥaqq with the Safavid dynasty and the Ḥājjī Baktāshī order. Ḥājjī Baktāsh Valī and Ṣafī ad-Dīn Ishāq Ardabīlī are mentioned in these accounts. While Shiykh Ṣafī served Sulṭān for many years and was bestowed with spiritual enlightenment and a dynasty on Earth after 12 years, it was Sulṭān himself who, along with his companions, appeared in Anatolia under the name Ḥājjī Baktāsh.

5.4. Janān (Ahl-i Ḥaqq after Sulṭān Ishāq)

In Janān, which includes 57 titles, we read almost exclusively 53 remarkable ‘pure Ahl-i Ḥaqq’ narratives. For instance, the birth of the Turkish branch of Ahl-i Ḥaqq through Qush Chī Uqlī, who is born in Turkistān and considered as the avatar of Pīr Binyāmīn. He moves to Baghdād to visit Shāh Ibrāhīm and serves as the translator of Ahl-i Ḥaqq kalām into Turkish (v9804-9846). This narrative portrays and emphasizes the connection between the Kurdish and Turkish Ahl-i Ḥaqq traditions, thereby strengthening the collective identity of the community with diverse ethnic backgrounds. In another narrative, we witness how Shāh Ibrāhīm falls into pride once again, this time in relation to Bābā Yadigār. After losing his divine influence, he regrets his mistake and decides to go to Pirdīvar to seek forgiveness from Sulṭān. However, unlike his previous experience, he is unsuccessful in reaching his goal and dies on the way. Nonetheless, he returns in the form of shāh-mihmān as Bābā Jalīl in Luristān and siyyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh in Fars and Luristān, (v10373–10411).

In the narrative of Zunnūr, we observe the establishment of a new consecrated family due to disputes over successorships among the successors of the Abulvafā family in Luristān after the time of Sulṭān Ishāq (v10305-10372). Then, we have the narrative of the confrontation between siyyid Farzi (a successor of the Abulvafā family) and Atash Bag, who has established a new priestly family known as Atash Begī. Both individuals are shāh-mihmān; however, Atash Bag, being the avatar of haftavāna, ‘loses the competition’ that he initiated out of pride to siyyid Farzī, who is the avatar of haftan (v10511-10530).²⁹

Shāh Viysqulī, the avatar of Bābā Yadigār, is another shāh-mihmān mentioned in *Shāhnāmīh-yi Ḥaqīqat*, and we once again observe the pattern that all companions and true believers were seeking the spiritual King prior to his emergence, following him as soon as they found him, and prior to his death, asking for his promises to come back again (v10531-10767). We also have other shāh-mihmāns (Shāh Ayāz from India, Shāh Hayās from Kurdistān, and Bābā Ḥiydar), which lead to the establishment of two other consecrated families (Shāh Ḥayāsī and Bābā Ḥiydarī). Here again, we observe the pitfall of pride and the disputes among different Ahl-i Ḥaqq families. Bābā Heydar takes pride in his illumination and rejects Shāh Hayās, claiming that he alone is the present shāh-mihmān. Shāh Ḥayās, being the avatar of Dāvūd (haftan), sends one of his companions to disarm the divine illumination of Bābā Ḥiydar, which is successfully accomplished. Bābā Ḥiydar, recognizing his own mistake, asks for forgiveness, and Shāh Ḥayās forgives him and allows him to establish a new consecrated family (v10872-10935). It is Shāh Ḥayās who foresees that the spiritual King, Zāt-i Ḥaqq, will appear on the earth contemporary to the 7th successor of his consecrated family (v10975-10982). It might be the main reason that Ḥājjī Ni ‘matullāh

²⁹ This might be a symbolic depiction of the disputes that might have exist between the consecrated families as new ones were established.

continues with a detailed explanation of the successorship in Shāh Ḥayās' family and his kalam (v11026-11124, 11135-11197, 11421-11534 and 12396-12577).

In Janān, we also encounter the narrative of claimants anticipating the prophesied appearance, such as Tiymūr I and Tiymūr II. However, their claimed 'mission' was abruptly halted as they were either killed or imprisoned by local or central rulers before its fulfillment. Shāh Faḥḥullah from the Gūrān tribe (v12584-12615) and 'Alī Ashraf Khān from Iraq (v12617-12660) were among several claimants who purported to be the savior contemporaneous with Ḥājj Ni'matullāh.³⁰ According to *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqīqat*, in each case, many Ahl-i Ḥaqq followers accompanied them, leaving their homes and giving all their belongings to these claimants. However, they were ultimately disappointed, lost their faith, and many of them departed from the Ahl-i Ḥaqq order (v12664-12684).

The narratives of Shāh Faḥḥullah and 'Alī Ashraf Khān include lessons addressing the pitfalls faced by individuals who attain certain degrees of spiritual illumination granted by the Divine but subsequently lose it due to being overwhelmed by misinterpretation of spiritual messages and the power of their imperious self. These pitfalls may manifest as pride, impatience, vainglory, and a lack of restraint and patience.

The last section in janān, aḥvālāt-i Nāzīm (narratives about the author), serves as a transitional narrative connecting the ancient history of Ahl-i Ḥaqq covered in the first four chapters to the final chapter, na'im that encompasses contemporary events up to the time of the writing of *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqīqat* and also includes the author's biography.

Aḥvālāt-i Nāzīm consists of several parts, with the first part being one of the most emotionally captivating sections of *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqīqat*, in my opinion. It delves into the inner experiences of Ḥājj Ni'matullāh, particularly from the year 1901 onwards (v12685-12735). In this portion, he reflects on how he learned valuable lessons from the mistakes of previous bātin-dārs (v12685-12690). He emphasizes his commitment to humility, avoiding vanity and impatience, and adopting the role of a devoted disciple (sālik) under the guidance of a spiritual master (ostād). His aim at each moment of his life was to align his thoughts, words, and actions with the will and satisfaction of his Master. His only wish and aim was to see Him and to be connected to Him. He continues to depict how much he had to suffer from the cruelty of his opponents, some relatives and acquaintances and in spite of it all being grateful to experience these discomforts on His path. It is amazing that he ends this touching part with the known Ahl-i Ḥaqq verse: avval-u ākhar Yār (v12735):

*My first and also my Last be the Yār
May my soul rejoice with the help of Ḥaqq*

He continues with itemizing the spiritual figures who were contemporary to him, some of them relatives and acquaintances, retails the narrative of some of his disciples who first closed a pact with him and broke it later and those who came to him and stayed faithfully.

At the last part of aḥvālāt-i Nāzīm, Ḥājj Ni'matullāh gives an account to his writings, mentioning that some of them are merely for internal use baḥr-i asrār

³⁰ The name of 'Alī Ashraf Khān is left blank in *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqīqat*. I found it out during my interviews and field studies for my PhD thesis.

After presenting a riddle concerning his spiritual identity and its corresponding response (v13025-13074), Hājī Ni‘matullāh appeals to God, requesting guidance for all those who sincerely seek the Truth (Ḥaqq) to find their way to his path (v13088-13092). He then resumes the enumeration of the prerequisites of being a Ḥaqq-parast, discussing their characteristics and duties. In addition to the golden rule (Treat others as you would like others to treat you, do not treat others in ways that you would not like to be treated) in v13184-13185, the virtues purity, righteousness, commitment to the spiritual covenant till the last breath, seeking the truth, avoiding the socialization with indecent people, and avoiding, pride, doubt, hypocrisy, the lures of the imperious self and the terrestrial world are mentioned in three touching pieces.

Hājī Ni‘matullāh quotes Sa‘dī, the famous Persian poet (v13162-13164) and mystic, to emphasize that fear of God is more important than rituals. He also emphasizes the importance of kindness towards all humans, not just the faithful or good people, which alludes to the Bible (Luke 6:33). Hājī Ni‘matullāh further itemizes several virtues that a true Ahl-i Ḥaqq must possess and identifies bad habits that Ahl-i Ḥaqq followers should avoid. These virtues and vices are repeatedly mentioned in na‘īm under different titles, including generosity (versus stinginess/ v14625-14630), seeking the satisfaction of God (v14530), and avoiding pride, doubt, and the allure of worldly possessions (v14026), among others. This makes na‘īm a comprehensive guide to Ahl-i Ḥaqq virtues.

Ahl-i Ḥaqq concepts such as the successive lives and the reincarnation of contemporary major Ahl-i Ḥaqq figures are also repeated in this section. He emphasizes that the main principles of Islam and Ahl-i Ḥaqq are the same, except that in (the mainstream) Islam there is no return to the earthy life (v14489-14545).

One of the most remarkable statements by Hājī Ni‘matullāh is about the distinction of a true Ahl-i Ḥaqq (for instance in v13271-13207 and 14023-1453). He emphasizes that the Lord of Time instructed him to spread this truth among the people, stating that what characterizes a true AH is certainly not his affiliation to a center of power (such as a consecrated family, particular religion, or sect), nor by their theoretical knowledge of the kalām. Instead, it is their purity of intention and good deeds, actions that align with Divine satisfaction.

An important content of na‘īm, however, is the biography of Hājī Ni‘matullāh. We read the narrative of an Ahl-i Ḥaqq child, who became orphan at the age of ten with its related sufferings. One of the most captivating aspects of na‘īm is when Hājī Ni‘matullāh humbly acknowledges and lists the mistakes and sins he committed prior to his spiritual enlightenment. To him, not being in a state of permanent attention to God is a dereliction of human duty. It is worth noting that this book was written just one year before Hājī Ni‘matullāh’s death. By that time, he had dedicated himself to spiritual pursuits for approximately twenty years and must have humbled himself. Through these statements of humility, he might have been demonstrating to his adherents, disciples and readers the importance of leading a battle against pride.

earthly world, as well as speeches 159 and 162 that glorify God and emphasize his oneness. Intertextuality can be observed in several parts of *Shāhnāmīh-yi Ḥaqqīyat* in form of quotations, allusions, adaptations, and reinterpretations of the Qurān, Islamic traditions, Persian mysticism, bible and of course, Ahl-i Ḥaqq oral tradition (which was partially textualized in that time). Exploring these intertextual references would require a comprehensive examination.

Furthermore, Hājī Ni‘matullāh provides insights into his spiritual illumination and the persistent efforts he made to create the necessary conditions for the manifestation of the Truth on Earth (Membrado, 2014).

5.6. Recurring Patterns and Elements of Religious Collective Identity

There are several recurring patterns and elements of the religious collective identity of Ahl-i Ḥaqq in *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat*. A recurring pattern in the history of Ahl-i Ḥaqq is the persistent pursuit of its devotees to find the individual who embodies the divine essence, guidance, and ‘light’, regardless of their geographical birthplace, language, tribal affiliation, or other classifying social norms. This search for ‘the essence of the Truth’ is narrated from the time of the first prophet to the period of writing the *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat*. Notably, even the author of the book himself was engaged in this pursuit, reflecting the ongoing longing within Ahl-i Ḥaqq to encounter and connect with the earthly manifestation of divine Truth. This enduring theme highlights the central role of seeking and recognizing the essence of the Truth within the beliefs and practices of Ahl-i Ḥaqq. Another persistent pattern that emerges alongside the search for the ‘Essence of the Truth’ is the presence of antagonistic leaders of darkness who are hostile towards the Truth and its companions. These malevolent beings consistently exist on the planet and manage to gather followers and supporters of their own. However, according to this paradigm, despite their efforts, they have never been able to completely eradicate or prevent the continued existence of the Truth on Earth. It is noteworthy that throughout history, these negative forces may inflict harm or even cause the demise of highly spiritual beings or even the Zāt-i Ḥaqq (as exemplified in the case of ‘Alī), but they have consistently failed to extinguish the enduring presence of Ḥaqq (Truth) in the world. This pattern underscores the resilience and enduring nature of the Truth in the face of opposition and adversity.

Reincarnation constitute a fundamental element of the religious identity of Ahl-i Ḥaqq. This concept allows for the spiritual growth, purification, and progress of individuals over multiple lifetimes, emphasizing the continuous journey of the soul and its evolving relationship with the divine.

In *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqqīqat*, the reader not only can follow the several reincarnations of the major figures of Ahl-i Ḥaqq but also gains an explanation of the particular concept of reincarnation, in Ahl-i Ḥaqq.³³ According to this concept, each soul has a limit of 50,000 years of earthly lives, within a maximum of 1,000 human bodies, to reach the appropriate spiritual level. Upon reaching the highest spiritual level, the soul would join the Divine. However, if a soul fails to reach the necessary level after the mentioned limit of 50,000 years, it will face its own judgment day, after which it will be determined whether it goes to paradise or hell (see for instance in v765-822).

Music, particularly the tanbur, holds significant importance as an element of the religious identities of Ahl-i Ḥaqq. Ahl-i Ḥaqq utilize music, as a form of worship and a means of communication with God and making requests to Him. This practice establishes a unique dialogue between the practitioners and the Divine Essence.³⁴

33 This concept is comprehensively presented and extensively discussed from a theological and philosophical perspective in the works of Nur Ali Elahi or his son Bahram Elahi. For more detailed information, you may refer to their writings, such as: Elahi, 2007b or Elahi, Bahram, *Fundamentals of the Process of Spiritual Perfection: A Practical Guide*, 2022, New York: Monkfish Book Publishing Company.

34 In certain instances, the Divine Essence also communicates with Ahl-i Ḥaqq through the medium of the tanbur, as illustrated in the narrative of the tanbur suddenly tuning itself prior to the appearance of Bābā

The Ahl-i Haqq have maintained a belief in the living Prophet of their time. Following the last prophet, Muḥammad, their focus shifted to the Shi‘a ĩmāms and subsequently to the guardians of the time. In this sense, they can be considered as Ja‘farī Twelver Shia Muslims. Within their belief system, ‘Alī is regarded as the complete Essence of the Divine, while his sons Ḥasan and Ḥusain hold esteemed positions among the seven archangels.

The emergence of the Zāt-i Haqq (the Divine Essence) is often accompanied by significant spiritual transformations or advancements. For example, the appearance of ‘Alī marked the conclusion of prophethood and the initiation of vilāyat (spiritual leadership). Sultān Ishāq played a crucial role in establishing the seven consecrated families and organizing the Ahl-i Haqq community, bestowing them with a functional structure and organization.

These beliefs and historical figures contribute to the religious identity and practices of the Ahl-i Haqq, shaping their understanding of spiritual leadership, divine essence, and the evolution of their community throughout history.

Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat corroborates several notable virtues of Ahl-i Haqq. These include sincerity, certitude of faith, commitment to the spiritual covenant, awareness of and fight against doubt and particularly pride (which can even affect higher spiritual beings), seeking the satisfaction of God, and the allure of worldly possessions, among others.

Research about religious collective identity of Ahl-i Haqq is scarce. In *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat*, Ḥājj Ni‘matullāh provides a detailed account of his twenty-year experience in the research about Ahl-i Haqq oral tradition. Additionally, the *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* serves as a significant resource by depicting aspects of Ahl-i Haqq history that Ḥājj Ni‘matullāh did not necessarily hold a favorable opinion about. This adds a critical perspective to the research, allowing for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Ahl-i Haqq community and its development over time. By utilizing *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat* and exploring the viewpoints of Ḥājj Ni‘matullāh, this research contributes to a deeper exploration of the religious collective identity of Ahl-i Haqq, shedding light on their beliefs, practices, and historical narratives that have shaped their community. Indeed, when studying religious collective identity, it is essential to acknowledge the multitude of historical, social, and cultural factors that contribute to their formation. Given the diverse nature of Ahl-i Haqq and the wide range of influences that shape their religious collective identities, it may not be possible to capture every relevant aspect in a single research endeavor. Consequently, one potential weakness of the current research is the challenge of fully exploring and analyzing the entirety of these factors within the limited scope of the study. Nonetheless, by focusing on specific elements, patterns, topics, or concepts within the *Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat*, the research can still provide valuable insights into the religious collective identity of Ahl-i Haqq.

Shāhnāmih-yi Haqīqat is able to transcend sectarian differences and foster a sense of belonging among members of the Ahl-i Haqq community by emphasizing the group’s connections to larger historical and religious narratives.

Nāvūs (see *Āthār ul-Haqq*, vol 1, Saying 1430). This narrative highlights the profound connection and interaction between Ahl-i Haqq and the Divine through the musical expression of the tanbur.

Hājj Ni'matullāh's written and systematic presentation of the mythical history of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq sheds light on the interconnections between the sacred history of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq and a broader range of national, tribal, and religious beliefs, traditions, and revered figures. Thus, *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqīqat*, may have contributed to the strengthening of the collective and religious identity of Ahl-i Ḥaqq communities.

Conclusion

The words related to divine unity, such as 'Ḥaqq', 'King', 'God', and 'He', are at the center of the *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqīqat*, both conceptually and statistically. The narratives conveyed in *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqīqat* emphasize that Ahl-i Ḥaqq transcends national, and cultural boundaries. Ḥaqq can manifest anywhere and within every human being, regardless of their tribe or culture. According to the *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqīqat*, Ahl-i Ḥaqq order is not limited to a specific time period or geographical region. *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqīqat* represents the formation of Ahl-i Ḥaqq with the first spiritual assembly after the creation of the main archangels in the spiritual world, and its continuation in the material dimension commenced with the fall of Adam on the planet. The order will continue like a chain until eternity, with all prophets from Adam to Muḥammad, as well as all genuine imāms and mystics after Islam, being the connections of the 'Ahl-i Ḥaqq chain'. Pious men and their companions have existed in various locations across the globe in all epochs, and this will continue. In this sense, Hājj Ni'matullāh's definition of an Ahl-i Ḥaqq adherent goes beyond tradition and mythology. He identifies Ahl-i Ḥaqq followers as those who verify the practice and living out of divine virtues with certainty, such as purity, righteousness and fidelity, humility, helpful service, being committed to the spiritual covenant while experiencing the inclemency of life, and avoiding the lures and temptations of the material world, but especially the effort to find the living spiritual guide of the time. Thus, the spatial and temporal boundaries of Ahl-i Ḥaqq encompass the entire universe and eternity. However, the experiential reality of Ahl-i Ḥaqq is rooted in the present moment, wherever and whenever one encounters the presence of the manifestations of the Divine. This concept constitutes one of the most fundamental elements of the religious identity of Ahl-i Ḥaqq according to *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqīqat*. It involves the search for the Zāt-i Ḥaqq (the essence of the Divine) in every place or region, within every individual, and at any given time. Therefore, the collective identity of the community cannot be restricted to a particular tribe, ethnicity, language, or religion, and the Ahl-i Ḥaqq order cannot be degraded to a separate religion, as they seek the living Man of the Truth to follow His teachings, which are considered as the 'real truth'.

The comprehensive oral tradition of Ahl-i Ḥaqq, narrated in *Shāhnāmih-yi Ḥaqīqat* in a more widespread language compared to the fragmented, unclassified tradition in local ancient languages, might enable a more constructive religious communication between the various Ahl-i Ḥaqq groups and a convergence of them. Hājj Ni'matullāh has presented a wide variety of events and figures that Ahl-i Ḥaqq groups consider to be its own. According to this oral history, Iranian kings, Persian or even Greek sages and philosophers, as well as prophets and saints mentioned in the Old and New Testaments, the Qurān, and Islamic ḥadīths, as well as Shia imāms and mystics after them, are all members of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq tradition. This approach, per se, can be viewed as a factor which brings together the tribal, national, and religious mythology and traditions in

order to converge and unite the Ahl-i Haqq communities, which in the 19th century faced numerous divergences and differences in their traditions and beliefs.

Hājj Ni'matullāh's approach to narrating the history of the Ahl-i Haqq in its primary mythological version, with a chronological structure and in a more widespread language permitted a wide range of Ahl-i Haqq of various groups to see themselves as part of a larger historical narrative. This shared history becomes a source of collective identity, a factor that can strengthen the group's religious collective identities by allowing various communities to feel connected through their shared heritage, oral history, mythical experience of their ancestors, and shared beliefs. All members of the group can see how their tradition and religious beliefs have changed and developed over time naturally by historical events and figures.

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