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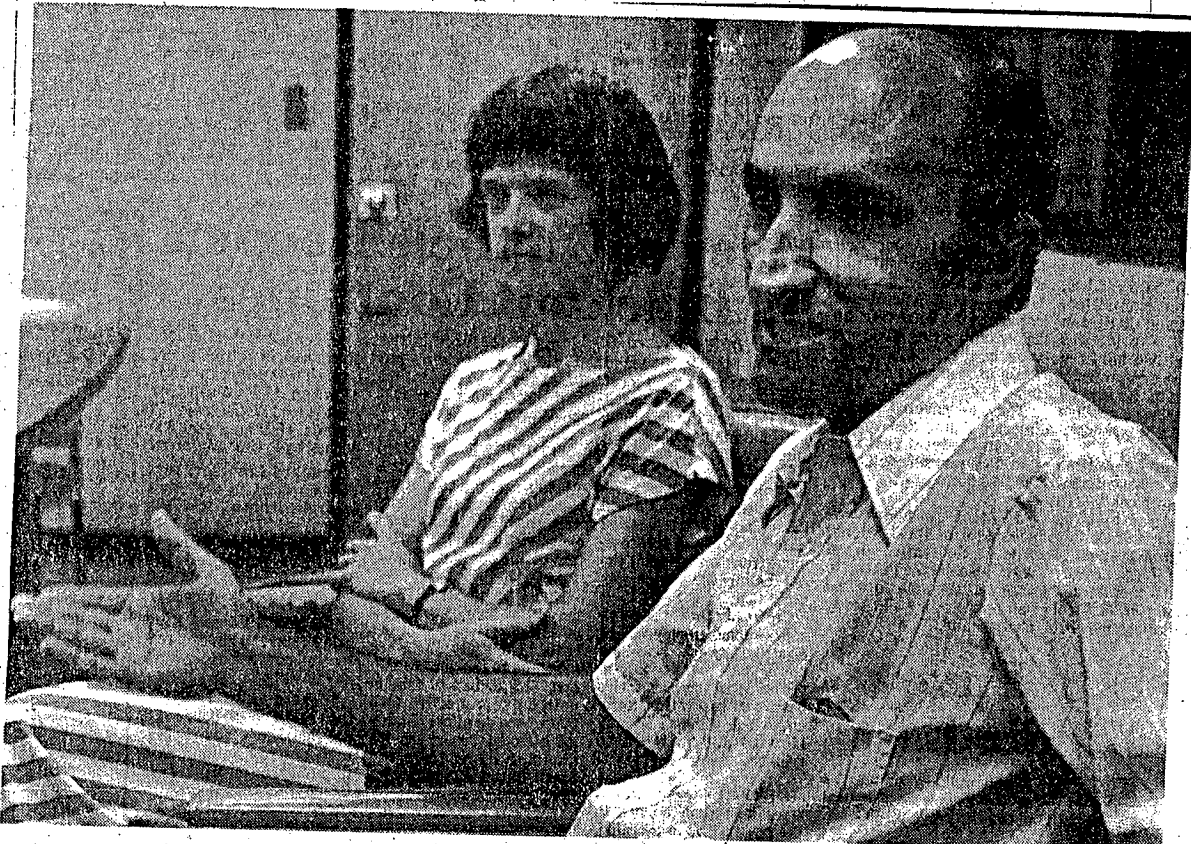


Photo by FREDDIE BENTLEY

Anne and Fereydoun Jalali of Fort Valley Discuss Iranian Persecution of Baha'is in Recent Interview

Persecution of Baha'is Becoming Worse In Land of Their Founding, Couple Says

By Edna Jackson
Telegraph Religion Writer

The persecution of members of the Baha'i faith in Iran, where the religion was founded in 1844, is intensifying, reports received by Fort Valley's small Baha'i community indicate.

Two Baha'is who live in Fort Valley, Fereydoun and Anne Jalali, described recent events in Iran in a recent interview with the *Telegraph and News*.

Followers of the faith have been persecuted since its beginning, Fereydoun Jalali said. He said more than 20,000 of the early followers of the religion were martyred.

There are 300,000 members of the Baha'i community in Iran. Recent attacks against them are only the latest episodes in about a four-year succession of executions and arrests, the couple said.

MEMBERS OF the Baha'i administrative bodies in Tehran are being hunted and arrested and their homes are being raided, said Anne Jalali.

"Fifteen Baha'is in Tehran and another 15 in the suburb of Karaj have been jailed during the last month. In addition, two Baha'is have been jailed in Mashhad, and a third in Shiraz, where some 65 Baha'is have been imprisoned since last fall.

"Shiraz was the site in June of 17 hangings of

Baha'is, including seven women and three teen-age girls."

"In Yazd, six Baha'is have been arrested and exiled to the remote province of Baluchistan along with three other Baha'is who had been previously imprisoned in Yazd," she said.

THE CENTRAL teaching of the Baha'is is the unity of mankind, Fereydoun Jalali said. They believe there is only one God and that all religious powers and spirits spring from one God. They believe God's purpose is for mankind to be united as a human race, he said.

"Some people feel man will never be united with these wars. Baha'is believe there will be this great uniting. These people who are giving their lives in Iran are saying we believe this is true," he said.

The plea of the Baha'is is for freedom and the legal right to practice their religion, he said.

IN JUNE, two prominent Baha'is were abducted in Tehran. In July, 130 Baha'is were attacked by mobs and forced to flee their village in northern Iran. There has been no news of their fate, Anne Jalali said.

Since 1972, 142 of them have been executed and assassinated. More than 200 are imprisoned without charges in cities throughout Iran, she said.

The Baha'is have been given a choice of denying their faith and going free or dying, Fereydoun Jalali said. "Very few have denied their faith."

The Iranian government has forbidden members of the Baha'i community to leave the country, Anne Jalali said.

"The government is trying to keep them there and appear to wipe them out," Jalali said. "They have attacked so many families. They have attacked their property. It is a general campaign trying to destroy a community—a religious community."

THE PEACEFUL, law-abiding people live by principles that will not allow them to defend themselves against the constant attacks from the Iranian government, the couple said.

"We are forbidden by the teachings of our faith to react," Anne Jalali said.

There are Baha'is all over the world, and most of them are not Iranians and are not from the Moslem background, Fereydoun Jalali said. Most have not even been to Iran. But "almost all of the Baha'is love and respect Iran because it is the cradle of the Baha'i faith," he said.

"It upholds the divinity and the truth of Muhammad. And it accepts all the religions of the world as individual in origin and having come from God in succession to bring the word of God to man."