

The dawning- place of the lights

Gender, religion, resistance and agency: the agency of Baha'i women in
post revolution through narratives

A Dissertation submitted for
(M.A.) in Gender, Culture and Development Studies

To
Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule women's studies center
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Declaration of the Candidate

I declare that the project entitled, **the dawning- place of the lights Gender, religion, resistance and agency; the agency of Baha'i women in post revolution: narratives of resistance** , submitted by me for the course Ws 18 of masters in Arts is a record of the work carried out by me, during the period from January 2013 to April 2014, under the guidance of **Dr. Swati**

Dyahadroy and has not formed the basis of any degree, Diploma, Associate, Fellowship title in these or any other University or other institutions of higher learning.

I further declare that the materials obtained from other sources are duly acknowledged in the project work.

Sign:

Date: 08/04/2014

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Certificate of the Guide

This is to certify that, the work incorporated into the project entitled “the **dawning- place of the lights** Gender, religion, resistance and agency; the agency of Baha’i women in post revolution: narratives of resistance “submitted by **Mrs.Raha Sabet Sarvestany** was carried out under my supervision and guidance.

Sign:

Date:

Name: **Dr. Swati Dyahadroy**

Acknowledgement

The topic I chose for this research was part of my life, experiences, studies and interest. My goal in this research is to give voice to the Baha'i women specially who lived in Iran after post revolution .I believe that their life stories in the fundamentalist, patriarchal society of Iran which imposed them exclusion, discrimination and violation of human rights, could bring new way of understanding and analysis of women's agency in the individual and social life which is based on teachings of their religion not political agenda. Thus this new view could open other aspects of studying life story which I tried to do it in my paper when I draw links between religion, resistance and women's agency.

My deep feeling of responsibility about the life stories of those women who I made my research on them, that I believe their life story is not only a part of the Baha'i history but is a part of history of mankind, gave me courage to write and analyze the way their resistance, agency in individual and social life, their faith and their role changed the attitude of Islamic government to Baha'i community in Iran after the Islamic revolution.

I am deeply thankful to my precious supervisor Dr. Swati Dyahadroy who with her advice, courage and trust helped me in doing my research so peacefully. I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Shamim Farokhzady who is one the Professors in BIHE University in Iran that edited my translations and guided. And Dear Uma Chakravaty who read chapter four and gave me her comments and lastly I would like to thank my roommate Viviana who encouraged me to write down my tough life experiences and for all friendly discussions which helped to both of us to understand more about methodology.

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INTRODUCTION

Experience is as important as a source of original intellectual work(C .Wright Mills 1959-1997).Mills reminds us that the crafting of interesting and meaningful intellectual work lies in our crafting of interesting and meaningful lives. (Gluck and Patai 1991).¹

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I was born in Iran 1974 few years before Islamic revolution 1979; my childhood and teenager years were full of time was depicted by tumults and disquiets of the first years of revolution which was the critical period for Baha'i community. As early as December 1978, shortly before Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Teheran, he had made it clear that, in Islamic Iran, Baha'i citizens would have no rights whatsoever While the Islamic Constitution, adopted in 1979, makes a general reference to the enjoyment of "equal rights" by all citizens, clauses assign the enjoyment of such civil rights to persons who belonged either to the state religion or to one of the tolerated minority faiths specifically named: Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. (Douglas Martin1992-93)²

The influential voices in post revolution had made clear that the bahai faith was a satanic and bahai community had no place in Iran and if they didn't recant their beliefs and convert to Isalm they were subject to the death penalty. So it was a threat to all bahais in Iran. (MoojanMomen2005)³

Through first decade along other political prisoners who were arrested and executed by the Islamic revolution MORE than 200 Baha'is have been killed or executed in the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁴Today, while Iran's Baha'i community is still excluded from the protection which the Constitution and the laws declare to other segments of the society, and while its members suffer

- But sometimes you are not part of the story, oral histories and ways of remembering and telling-
Antonette Errante, Feminist perspectives on social research, chapter 3, page431.

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- The Case of the Baha'i Minority in Iran -Douglas Martin reviews the history of the persecution of Baha'is in Iran and the success the community has had in using the U.N. system in their defense. This article first appeared in the 1992-93 edition of *The Baha'i World*, pp. 247-271-

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The Babi and Baha'i community of Iran: a case of "suspended Genocide"? MOOJAN MOMEN- *Journal of Genocide Research* (2005)7(2), June, 221-241-

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- The ongoing threat of execution, the Baha'i question cultural cleansing in Iran the web site

http://gr.bahai.org/gr.bahai.org/question/003_4.php seen 2014

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various forms of discrimination, the threat to its existence has been effectively lifted. Baha'is continues to suffer major deprivations in the areas of employment, retirement pensions, and access to university as well as a renewed threat to their personal property. According to the international reporter of human rights 136 Baha'is have been in prison since Jan 2014.

I was not only as a witness of all discriminations but have experienced different exploitations and injustices as a member of Baha'i community All these events inspired me to dedicate my thesis to give voice to this religion minority community mainly focusing on bahai women Therefore I chose Baha'i community in Iran, with focus on women who have been vigorous in first decade and third decade of post revolution to discover their agency and resistance to fundamentalist rulers and violation of human rights. As Stree Shakti Sangbatana⁵ explained, what is history like when it is seen through the eyes of women and judged by the values they define, what were their experiences, what was the movement for them? The task obviously requires new concepts and new categories, but it also demands that we locate new sources and fashion new methodological tools. We have to learn , as we read these life stories , to listen for what another oral historian has called the 'language of silence", straining to be heard .we need to understand the pauses , the wavering, the incoherence, the questions that are avoided just as much as we need to" hear" the real import of obsessive repetitions. So I chose life story as a method of this paper to discover, learn and elaborate the agency of Bahia women in fundamentalist, religious and male dominant society.

In this case I explain in one hand the history of Baha'i faith(chapter one) and how the principles and teachings of Baha'i faith have empowered western and eastern women who nurtured by Baha'i faith and how the historical process of this empowerment lifted in post revolution Iran when the Iranian Baha'i women/men deprived of high education, government employment, religious practices, social activities and so on and the other hand I retell an outstanding story of ten Baha'i women in post revolution(first decade) who were executed by the government (chapter two) because of their belief and my life story (third decade post revolution) when I was in prison (chapter three) to show how the women's agency and resistance had shifted.

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-We were making history, life stories of women in the Telangana people s struggle-Stree Shakti

Sangbatana- women s study library

Therefore my research questions are:

- What are the historical reasons for persecution of Baha'i community in Iran before and after revolution?

- How did Baha'i women who were under operation, narrate their experiences in books and articles.

- What and how were agency of Baha'i women in their individual/society life and how their relationship with the Islamic government changed during these years?

And my objectives in this paper are: To explain the history of persecution of Baha'i minority in Iran, by focusing on post revolution period in Iran through classified narratives / experiences of Baha'i women who have been detained. And To analyze /interpreted the role of Baha'i women in their individual/society life through narratives /experiences biased on resistance, agency and human rights violation by Islam government.

My aim in this paper is to make link between the examples that came in this paper by showing women's agency and resistance historically and the role of religion in individual and social life. Therefore women's agency and resistance theories as methodology and life story as method help me to accomplish to my aim while I know very well that whatever I can realize and insert in this paper is a small window to understand the agency of Baha'i women in post revolution never the less is a new ground for social studies, gender studies and feminist to discover the other sides of these information that I couldn't see while I am part of that and very close to all events. Although my research in this filed will continue for my PhD proposal by extension through other life stories and available documents but I have to avowal my weak point and at the same time strength point as an active participate in Baha'i community in post revolution to be as a neutral interpreter of events.

Chapter one

The history of Baha'i faith

The Baha'i Faith came into existence through the teachings of two successive Founders. The first, a young Persian merchant known to history as [the Báb](#) (seyed Ali Mohammad), announced in Shiraz, in May 1844, that He was the bearer of a Revelation from God, whom the Shi'ih branch of Islam had long expected under the title "the Twelfth Imam".

The world stood, He said, on the threshold of an era that would witness the restructuring of all aspects of life. The challenge to humanity was to embrace these changes by undertaking a transformation of its moral and spiritual character. Central to the Báb's teaching was the announcement of the imminent appearance of yet a second Divine Messenger, one who would address all the peoples of the world.

During the course of widespread attacks on His followers, incited by the Muslim clergy, the Báb was executed in the city of Tabriz, in 1850. There followed throughout Persia a horrific series of massacres of followers of the new religion. These pogroms aroused the revulsion of Western diplomats and scholars, and deeply scarred the Persian psyche, inspiring an effort to justify the killing of thousands of innocent people by excoriating the victims' beliefs and intentions.

In 1863, however, one of the Báb's leading disciples, who had survived the pogroms, a Persian nobleman, Bahá'u'lláh (Mirza Hussein Ali Nori), announced that He was the Messenger for whom the Báb had come to prepare the way. Partly because of the force of His own person and teaching, and partly because of unusual marks of distinction conferred upon Him by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh quickly attracted the allegiance of virtually all the Bábis. From exile in the neighboring Ottoman Empire, He began a thirty-year mission which brought into existence the worldwide religion and community that today bear His name and that are distinct from the Bábi religion out of which the Baha'i Faith emerged.

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are contained in a vast body of writings, in both Persian and Arabic, regarded by Baha'is as the source of authority in their Faith.

At the heart of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is the concept of the oneness of mankind: "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens". Strong emphasis is placed on the abolition of prejudices of all kinds, on full equality between men and women, and on the responsibility of each individual to investigate truth for himself. The great religious systems of humanity are seen as equally valid stages in the progressive revelation of the Divine Will, a process that will continue as long as the world endures.

Baha'is is encouraged to apply the scientific principle to the study of all reality, including spiritual issues. Although forbidden by their beliefs to involve themselves in any form of partisan political activity, members of the Faith are urged to give all possible support to developments that conduce to global unification. Some of Bahá'u'lláh's most important writings call upon the rulers of the world to create an "International Tribunal" to which nations will surrender whatever degree of sovereignty is necessary for the establishment of world peace and disarmament.

There is hardly a tenet of this ideas that is not in conflict with some dogma promulgated by the clerics of Shi'ih Islam, the dominant religion of Iran. Muslim opposition was sharpened by Bahá'u'lláh's insistence that humanity has entered the age of its maturity, in which neither clergy nor rituals are any longer required. The central principle of the age, He says, is the process of consultation and group decision-making, the key to well-being for both the individual and society.

To the clerics of Shi'ih Islam it seemed certain that the promotion of such ideas in Iran would bring to an end the system of tithes, endowments, social precedence, and political power which

they have always regarded as their religious right. To religious bigotry was early added, therefore, the force of personal investment in the prevailing scheme of things.

Outside the Muslim world, however, the new religion began to attract a growing body of adherents. Communities sprang up across North America and Western Europe, as well as in India, and lands in the East and Far East. While Bahá'u'lláh's teachings forbid proselytism as an infringement on the spiritual integrity of the individual, great encouragement is given to activities that promote public awareness of the Faith and that attract new members. Large scale enrollments began in the 1950s and 60s, particularly in Latin America and Africa. Today, the worldwide Bahá'í community numbers over five million members, representative of virtually all of the world's racial, religious, and cultural diversity. National administrative structures have been erected in 165 countries on a foundation of over 25,000 locally elected councils or "Spiritual Assemblies". Beginning in 1963, acting on provisions laid down in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, the membership of the National Assemblies have elected regularly at five-year intervals the Faith's international governing body, the Universal House of Justice.

As a consequence of this expansion, Iranian Baha'is now represents considerably less than ten percent of the world's total Baha'i population. It is this highly diverse global community that sees itself as the target of an entirely unjustified attack on its members in the land of the Faith's birth.

The Pahlavi Period, 1925-1979 Iran

With the rise of the Pahlavi Shahs in 1925, a number of important developments occurred in Iran which was to have major repercussions on the welfare of the country's Baha'i community. Central to these developments was the policy which Reza Shah and later his son, Muhammad Reza Shah, adopted toward the Muslim clergy. Their objective was to transform their country, then known in the West by its historic name Persia, into a modern secular state.

In pursuing this goal Iran's new rulers sought to exclude the clergy from all major areas of social and cultural influence, while continuing to pay lip-service to Sheikh Islam as the country's state religion and to provide funding for religious institutions. The tensions which this policy engendered were managed by the regime's alternating suppression and appeasement of Islamic interests.

Since the Baha'i minority represented a major pool of educated people, they had, of necessity, been employed in the many branches of the civil service, while continuing to be denied formal

constitutional rights. The intensity of clerical opposition to the "Baha'i heresy", however, made of the issue an irresistible means of placating the mullahs.

Repeatedly, during the rule of both of the Pahlavi Shahs, eminent mullahs were allowed to incite mob attacks on Baha'i holy places and other properties. The ensuing loss of life, however, inevitably attracted foreign protest. In 1955, a particularly flagrant involvement of the government in one of the pogroms resulted in interventions at the United Nations. The Shah was embarrassed when international pressure forced him to curtail the worst of the excesses.

The Islamic Revolution

The collapse of the Pahlavi regime in February 1979 appeared to free the Sheikh clergy from the restraints which international considerations had forced the Shahs to place on their political and social influence. After ecclesiastical pressure had led also to the overthrow of two interim revolutionary administrations, the mullahs assumed the civil power they today exercise as cabinet ministers, justices of the Supreme Court, members of Parliament, heads of government departments, revolutionary judges, military commissars, and block wardens whose control extends to the details of daily life. Even the offices of President and Prime Minister were eventually filled by clergy.

The media became organs of religious propaganda. Ration cards and other crucial permits were distributed at mosques. New legislation imposed rigid rules from the Islamic Shari; the code of laws based on Islamic tradition, on day-to-day life, and used the courts and police to enforce these ordinances.

This theocratic regime confirmed the status of non-Muslims as second-class citizens. Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians were admitted to certain limited civil rights as "protected minorities" but were denied equality under the law with the Muslim majority. For the Baha'i community, however, there was not even this protection. As early as December 1978, shortly before his return to Teheran, the Ayatollah Khomeini had made it clear that, in Islamic Iran, Baha'i citizens would have no rights whatsoever.

While the Islamic Constitution, adopted in 1979, makes a general reference to the enjoyment of "equal rights" by all citizens, clauses assign the enjoyment of such civil rights to persons who

belonged either to the state religion or to one of the tolerated minority faiths specifically named: Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. (Douglas Martin 1992-93)⁶

There is a report which helps us to realize the situation of Baha'i community in Iran by The United Nations special representative on the human rights situation in Iran (2004). He made a detailed assessment of the situation as a result of several trips to Iran. Among the measures that he reported taken by the government against the Baha'i community at the institutional level were the following.

Official banning of all Baha'i institutions and activities, Arrest and execution of the entire body of the national leadership of the religion arrest and execution of many members of local leadership councils; Confiscation of Baha'i properties and assets, including a children's savings company confiscation, desecration and destruction of Baha'i holy places and cemeteries.

Among the persecutions and harassments that the United Nations special representative reported were suffered by individual Baha'is were the following:

- . Imprisonment and torture;
- . Expulsion of Baha'is from all government employment at the national and local level;
- . Encouragement of and pressure on other employers to dismiss their Baha'i employees;
- . Decrees that government pensions were not payable to any Baha'is;
- . Baha'is ordered to pay back past salaries and pensions paid to them over their Lifetime;
- . Forced closure of Baha'i-owned businesses;
- . Expulsion or refusal of admission of Baha'i children to schools and universities;
- . Lack of official marriage certificates for Baha'is leading to married Baha'i women being considered to be prostitutes and Baha'i babies being considered illegitimate;
- . Lack of places to bury Baha'i dead after confiscation of Baha'i cemeteries;
- . Exclusion from necessary social amenities such as obtaining ration cards or food supplies, farmers being excluded from farmer's cooperatives, etc.;
- . Confiscation of property and bank accounts;
- . Destruction of homes;
- . Exclusion from inheritance bequests;

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-The Case of the Baha'i Minority in Iran -Douglas Martin reviews the history of the persecution of Baha'is in Iran and the success the community has had in using the U.N. system in their defense. This article first appeared in the 1992-93 edition of The Baha'i World, pp. 247-271

- . Denial of passport applications;
- . Forced marriages and adoptions of children;
- . Extra-judicial abductions and murders; a declaration by the judiciary on several occasions that anyone who beat, robbed or killed a Baha'i could not be prosecuted for it, thus effectively giving a green light for anyone to do these things with impunity. (Mojan Moomen 2005)⁷

Women in Baha'i writings; Teachings and principles

The Baha'i faith is the youngest of the world's religions. Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet-founder of the Baha'i faith, claimed to be the latest messenger sent by God, an assertion that irremediably separated the Baha'is from their Islamic background. Baha'is believes that while all religions have been ordained by God, the social teachings of religions have varied according to the needs of the age in which a prophet appears. The central theme of the Baha'i message is the establishment of the unity of humankind in a single global society. This necessitates the establishment of a world government, the achievement of universal education, the elimination of all forms of prejudice, and the attainment of full equality of men and women. No other world religion has been quite as explicit as the Baha'i faith in its support of the principle of the equality of men and women. Baha'is themselves proudly assert it as one of the distinguishing features of the new revelation.

This equality does not refer solely to the spiritual plane, for Baha'i scriptures explicitly state that there should be "no difference in the education of male and female in order that womankind may develop equal capacity and importance with man in the social and economic equation." They further assert that "women will enter all the department of politics." Yet the understanding of this principle varies considerably among Baha'is.⁸

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-The Babi and Baha'i community of Iran: a case of "suspended Genocide"? MOOJAN MOMEN-
Journal of Genocide Research (2005)7(2), June, 221-241-

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- Susan ManeK, the bahai faith and religion freedom of consciousness, http://bahai-library.com/maneck_women_bahai_faith, seen in 2014

In the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah, women are advancing side by side with men. There is no area or instance where they will lag behind: they have equal rights with men, and will enter, in the future, into all branches of the administration of society. Such will be their elevation that, in every area of Endeavour, they will occupy the highest levels in the human world. Rest thou assured. Look not upon their present state. In future, the world of womankind will shine with lustrous brilliance, for such is the will and purpose of Baha'u'llah. At the time of elections the right to vote is the inalienable right of women, and the entrance of women into all human departments is an irrefutable and incontrovertible question. No soul can retard or prevent it.⁹

The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an ageless masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced.¹⁰

That is why in Baha'i writings it is incumbent upon the father and mother to train their children both in good conduct and the study of books; study, that is, to the degree required, so that no child, whether girl or boy, will remain illiterate....And also it is incumbent upon the girls of this glorious era to be fully versed in the various branches of knowledge, in sciences and the arts and all the wonders of this pre-eminent time, that they may then educate their children and train them from their earliest days in the ways of perfection.¹¹

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- Abdul Baha, *Paris Talks*, pp. 182-84. <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-7-6-1.html>, seen in 2014

10

-Quoted in J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, 5th rev. ed. <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-7-6-1.html>, seen in 2014

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-Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, *Women*, 1986, p. 17. <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-7-6-1.html>, seen in 2014

The purpose, in brief, is this: that if woman be fully educated and granted her rights, she will attain the capacity for wonderful accomplishments and prove herself the equal of man. She is the coadjutor of man, his complement and helpmeet. Both are human; both are endowed with potentialities of intelligence and embody the virtues of humanity. In all human powers and functions they are partners and coequals. At present in spheres of human activity woman does not manifest her natal prerogatives, owing to lack of education and opportunity. Without doubt education will establish her equality with men....

There are some teachings which Bahauallah advised his followers:

-Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children...¹²

- The world of humanity has two wings -- one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.¹³

-Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God. The Dawning-Place of the Light of God shredded its radiance upon all with the same effulgence. Verily God created women for men, and men for women. The most beloved of people before God are the most steadfast and those who have surpassed others in their love for God, exalted be His glory....

-The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equity, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God. He, verily, speaketh the truth and

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-Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre), p. 90.
<http://info.bahai.org/article-1-7-6-1.html>, seen in 2014

13

-Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, rev. ed. (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1982), p. 302.
<http://info.bahai.org/article-1-7-6-1.html>, seen in 2014

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commanded that which benefitted His servants and handmaidens. He is the Protector of all in this world and the next. ¹⁴

-Women have equal rights with men upon earth; in religion and society they are a very important element. As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs.

The status of woman in former times was exceedingly deplorable, for it was the belief of the Orient that it was best for woman to be ignorant. It was considered preferable that she should not know reading or writing in order that she might not be informed of events in the world. Woman was considered to be created for rearing children and attending to the duties of the household. If she pursued educational courses, it was deemed contrary to chastity; hence women were made prisoners of the household. The houses did not even have windows opening upon the outside world. Baha'u'llah destroyed these ideas and proclaimed the equality of man and woman. He made woman respected by commanding that all women be educated, that there be no difference in the education of the two sexes and that man and woman share the same rights. In the estimation of God there is no distinction of sex. One whose thought is pure, whose education is superior, whose scientific attainments are greater, whose deeds of philanthropy excel, be that one man or woman, white or colored, is entitled to full rights and recognition; there is no differentiation whatsoever...

The writings of Bahá'u'lláh unequivocally proclaim the equality of men and women, asserting that "in this Day the Hand of divine grace hath removed all distinction. The Servants of God and His handmaidens are regarded on the same plane." Elsewhere he suggests that differences between the sexes are the result of "vain imaginings" and "idle fancies," which by the power of his might had been destroyed. He further insists on the education of girls. Woman's lack of progress and proficiency has been due to her need of equal education and opportunity. Had she been allowed this equality, there is no doubt she would be the counterpart of man in ability and

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-From a Tablet translated from the Persian and Arabic. <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-7-6-1.html>, seen in 2014

capacity. The happiness of mankind will be realized when women and men coordinate and advance equally, for each is the complement and helpmeet of the other.¹⁵

The consequence of Baha'i teaching on women in West and East

The introduction of Baha'i faith to America had a profound effect on the position of Baha'i women in Iran. Western Baha'is began traveling to Iran, where they spoke to Baha'i gatherings. In the opening years of the twentieth century Iranian Baha'i women were still excluded from participation in Baha'i administrative institutions, had little access to education, and, in most cases, still wore the veil.

Charles Mason Remey, who published a pamphlet relating his experiences in Iran in (1908), observed that many Persian Baha'i women expressed dissatisfaction with this state of affairs and began to agitate for change. He described one incident where he was speaking to a Baha'i gathering where men and women were separated by a curtain. Remey was asked by his hostess to describe the activities of Baha'i women in America. As he did, the hostess became more and more excited and finally drew back the curtain and urged the other women present to remove their veils and join the men. The men made room for the newcomers by withdrawing, somewhat uneasily, to the far side of the room. Bit by bit the men regained their composure, but then the women became rather embarrassed. Suddenly "all arose and like a flock of affrighted birds fluttered from the room." Remey ended his account by suggesting that Western Baha'i women begin corresponding with their Eastern sisters. His hope was that eventually several would be able to settle in Iran as teachers and physicians.

The following year Dr. Susan Moody arrived from Chicago to join a small group of Iranian Baha'i doctors in establishing a hospital in Teheran. Over the next few years, Elizabeth Stewart, a nurse, Dr. Sarah Clock, and Lillian Kappes, a teacher, joined her. At this time a number of girls' schools were operated on an informal basis by Baha'i women. Since, with the assistance of American Baha'is, the community had maintained a highly reputed boys' school, Dr. Moody persuaded the executive committee of that school to adopt one of these girls' schools as a separate department. Eventually this school became one of the finest girls' college preparatory schools in Iran.

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-The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 133, 166,182. <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-7-6-1.html>, seen in 2014

In 1911 Godseah Ashraf became the first Iranian Bahá'í woman to travel to America for the purpose of pursuing graduate work in educational psychology. She then returned to Iran and taught in Baha'i schools. During Abdu'l-Bahá travels to the West in 1911-1912, he made more explicit Baha'i teachings with regard to women's rights, stressing especially the need for women's education, the lack of which he viewed as the sole reason for the perceived inferiority of women. He deemed the education of mothers so essential to the proper upbringing of children that he held that the education of daughters should take precedence over that of sons. But Abdu'l-Bahá did not restrict women's function in society to the home.

He urged women to excel in all the arts and sciences and, further, expected their participation on an equal footing in the political sphere as well. He stated that women's political participation would be a prerequisite for peace. The only field (aside from membership on the Universal House of Justice) where Abdu'l-Bahá did not extend full and equal participation was in military endeavors, since he regarded the taking of human life incompatible with women's role as mothers.

Copies of Abdu'l-Bahá talks were distributed throughout Iran, and these, along with the influence of American Baha'is residing in Iran, awakened Iranian Baha'i women to possibilities unthought-of in previous generations. Apparently they began to advocate the immediate abolishment of the veil, as well as women's full participation in administrative affairs. Abdu'l-Bahá was not entirely pleased with these developments, for, besides the stress and disunity these issues were creating within the Baha'i community itself, he felt that actions such as discarding the veil would bring on needless persecution in an already volatile situation.

Abdu'l-Bahá pleaded with the Iranian women not to do anything "contrary to wisdom." Women's assemblages at this time should be confined to educational matters so that "differences will, day by day, be entirely wiped out, not that, God forbid, it will end in argumentation between men and women." Their efforts should be in the spiritual, not the political realm. Abdu'l-Bahá would in time insure that they achieved full equality with men in all areas. In the meantime they ought not to agitate against the men for such changes. He chided the women for their impatience, saying "this newly born babe is traversing in one night the path that needed a hundred years to tread.

While women were allowed to vote within the Iranian Baha'i community, it was not until 1954 that they were permitted to serve on Baha'i institutions. As late as the 1970s one observer could only count two women delegates out of the more than one hundred attending the national Baha'i

convention in Teheran. Yet when the members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran were arrested and executed in 1981, the chairperson was a woman, Jinus Mahmudi.

In recent years Baha'i institutions throughout the world have made concerted efforts to insure equal participation of Baha'i women on them. Female membership in the higher institutions in the Americas and in Europe appears to be between 30 and 40 percent, while in Asia and Africa it remains at 10 to 20 percent. The numbers of women serving on national spiritual assemblies in the world has increased from 34 in 1953 to 354 in 1985.

Last word

Perhaps no other religion offers a stronger scriptural basis for women's rights or a richer history for women to draw on than does the Baha'i faith. Yet cultural barriers, rigidity of certain administrative structures, conceptions of authority, and literalistic interpretations of scripture have at times militated against the ability of women to obtain full equality within the Baha'i community. Whereas all Baha'is in theory believe in the equality of men and women, there is no unanimity as to what that equality means. In many instances Baha'i conceptions of equality have distanced them from more radical forms of Western feminism.

Whether or not Baha'i women will fully utilize the potentialities of Baha'i scriptures and history, or whether they will be relegated to "separate but equal spheres" that perpetuate structures of male dominance, remains to be seen. There exists no single theory of Baha'i feminism, but Baha'is, men and women alike are agreed on one principle: hierarchical systems that place men above women in a divinely ordained order have no sanction within the Baha'i scriptures. In this respect the Baha'i faith is unique among revealed religions. (14) The only remaining body within the Baha'i Faith whose membership continues to be limited to men is its supreme institution, the Universal House of Justice. First established in 1963, the Universal House of Justice is elected by the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies of the world. Naturally, the electors include many women. But the members of the House of Justice itself, from its inception, have all been male.

Shoghi Effendi – the last Guardian of Baha'i faith- anticipated that the Universal House of Justice would be established as an all-male body, even though he passed away before he could see this implemented. But in answer to questions from individual Baha'is, some letters were written on the Guardian's behalf by his secretaries which comment on the composition of the yet-

to-be-formed House of Justice. For example, his secretary writes:

As regards your question concerning the membership of the Universal House of Justice, there is a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Baha in which He definitely states that the membership of the Universal House of Justice is confined to men, and that the wisdom of it will be fully revealed and appreciated in the future. In the local, as well as national Houses of Justice, however, women have the full right of membership. It is, however, only to the International House that they cannot be elected.¹⁶The remarkable similarity of these letters to individual believers should be noted. In each case, the Guardian directed his secretary to refer to the Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to Corinne True which was written in reply to her petition that women be elected to the Chicago House of Justice. This Tablet explains that the reason for the exclusion of women will become manifest in the future.

'Abdu'l-Baha repeatedly assured Baha'i women in His writings that the women of the future would achieve full and complete equality with men. In one of these Tablets He refers to the composition of the House of Justice. The Tablet is dated August 28, 1913, and it appears to have been written to a Baha'i woman in the East. In it, 'Abdu'l-Baha repeats His promise:

In this Revelation of Baha'u'llah, the women go neck and neck with the men. In no movement will they be left behind. Their rights with men are equal in degree. They will enter all the administrative branches of politics. They will attain in all such a degree as will be considered the very highest station of the world of humanity and will take part in all affairs.

As regards the constitution of the House of Justice, Baha'u'llah addresses the men. He says: "O ye men of the House of Justice!" But when its members are to be elected, the right which belongs to women, so far as their voting and their voice is concerned, is indisputable. **When the women attain to the ultimate degree of progress, then, according to the exigency of the time and place and their great capacity, they shall obtain extraordinary privileges.** Be ye confident on these accounts. His Holiness Baha'u'llah has greatly strengthened the cause of women, and the

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-Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated July 28, 1936, *Baha'i News*, and No. 105 (February 1937) p 2. The Service of Women on the Institutions of the Baha'i Faith

rights and privileges of women is one of the greatest principles of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Rest ye assured! ¹⁷⁻¹⁸

Chapter two

The life story of ten Baha'i women in first decade of post revolution

There was a message by The Universal House of Justice on 20 June 1983 reported to the Baha'i world that on the evening of 18 June ten Baha'i women¹⁹, ranging in age from 17 to 57, were hanged in Shiraz, after months of imprisonment and torture during which they refused to renounce their faith. "THE EXECUTION OF THESE GUILTLESS WOMEN IN THE NAME OF RELIGION MUST SHOCK CONSCIENCE HUMANITY', the House of Justice telexed, 'THEY WERE ARRESTED FOR ACTIVITIES IN BAHAI COMMUNITY INCLUDING EDUCATION OF YOUTH.'"

Even the youngest among the women fearlessly admitted during the interrogations during which it was sought to have her recant that she had been conducting classes for the spiritual training of children. She had seen it as her duty, once the children were barred from attending regular schools.

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-Abdul Baha, Paris talk (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1912) pp 182-83. The Service of Women on the Institutions of the Baha'i Faith

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The telex of the House of Justice continued: “FOLLOWING LONG INTERROGATION IN PRISON THEY WERE WARNED THAT THEY WOULD BE SUBJECTED TO FOUR SESSIONS PRESSURING THEM RECANT THEIR FAITH ACCEPT ISLAM AND IF BY FOURTH TIME THEY HAD NOT SIGNED PREPARED STATEMENT RECANTING FAITH THEY WOULD BE KILLED. ALL PREFERRED DIE RATHER THAN DENY THEIR FAITH. FEW HOURS PRIOR EXECUTION WOMEN MET WITH FAMILIES NONE OF WHOM KNEW [OF] IMPENDING EXECUTION. NEWS THIS DASTARDLY CRIME NOT PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED OR FORMALLY GIVEN TO FAMILIES. AUTHORITIES REFUSED ALLOW FAMILIES RECEIVE BODIES FOR BURIAL OR EVEN TO SEE THEM.”

In the same communication the Baha’i community was reminded that between October and November 1982 over 80 Baha’is were arrested in Shiraz. The authorities later revealed that 22 persons among the 80 were condemned to death if they failed to recant. The names of these 22 were never revealed, however, intensifying the psychological stress endured by Baha’i prisoners. Not only the fellow prisoners of the ten women but their executioners too were affected by the heroism with which these women met their fate, remarking that they sang and chanted as though they were enjoying a pleasant outing. One of the men attending the gallows confided to a Baha’i, ‘We tried saving their lives up to the last moment, but one by one, first the older ladies, then the young girls, were hanged while the others were forced to watch, it being hoped that this might influence them to recant their belief. We even urged them to say they were not Baha’is, but not one of them agreed; they preferred the execution.’

A witness reported, ‘The bodies of the women were taken to the morgue at 10:00 p.m. The following day, when relatives went to take delivery of the bodies of the six Baha’i men who had been executed two days before [16 June 1983], they learned that the ten women were also martyred. The news spread rapidly throughout Shiraz. Soon it was impossible to buy flowers in the city as all had been purchased and sent to the relatives of the martyrs as an expression of sympathy. On 19 June the militia removed the bodies to the Baha’i cemetery of Shiraz without informing the families, and they were buried with their clothes on and without washing and shrouding.’

There was no further humiliation to which the enemies of these Baha'i women could subject them, now they were in the hands of God, and their names had been inscribed among the immortals.²⁰

Even before the details of the lives of these women were known a storm of public protest was registered by leaders of thought and by the media. The Guardian of 25 June 1983 carried a story, representative of those describing the hangings, under the headline 'Baha'i Women Sing and Pray on Way to Meet Hangman'. Other newspapers, echoing a paid advertisement inserted in major newspapers by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, tersely declared 'Now They Are Hanging Women', while many editorials spoke of 'genocide', 'bloodletting', and the 'reign of terror'.

Miss Shahín Dálvand, nicknamed 'Shirin', was born to a Baha'i family in Shiraz in December 1956. She was extremely diligent and was recognized as an outstanding student. Her senior thesis at the University of Shiraz where she earned her Bachelor of Science degree was accorded much praise by her professors. During her final year of school, Shirin's parents were in England, but despite the possible danger and her family's request that she move somewhere where she would be safer; she remained in Shiraz with her grandparents. She was, until her arrest and imprisonment on 29 November 1982, active on various Baha'i committees, and would often visit the families of Baha'i prisoners and martyrs. Asked during her trial if she would be willing to die for her beliefs, she replied in an unruffled manner that she was, and expressed the hope that God

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- The names of these women are: Miss Shahn (or 'Shirin ') Dálvand, aged 25, who held a degree in sociology; Mrs. 'Izzat Jánamí Ishráqí, aged 57, a homemaker, the wife of Ináyatu'lláh Ishráqí, who was executed but two days before; Miss Ru`yá Ishráqí, aged 23, a second-year student of a veterinary college and the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ináyatu'lláh Ishráqí; Miss Muná Mahúdnizhád, aged 17, the youngest Bahá'í and the youngest female to be martyred up to this point in the present onslaught, who was in her last year of high school at the time of her arrest and imprisonment and whose father, Mr. Yadu'lláh Mahúdnizhád, had been executed on 12 March of that year; Miss Zarrín Muqímí-Abyánih, aged 28, who held a B.A. in English and who wrote excellent poetry; Miss Mashid Nirúmand, aged 28, who had qualified for a degree in physics though it was denied her because of her being a Baha'i; Miss Símín Sábiri, aged 25, who held a high school diploma; Mrs. Táhirih Arjumándí Siyávushí, aged 30, who had qualified as a nurse and was the wife of Jamshíd Siyávushí, martyred two days earlier; Miss Akhtar Thábit, aged 25, a nurse; and Mrs. Nusrat Ghufrání Yalda'í, aged 47, a brilliant teacher of the Faith, who was a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly and the mother of several children, including Bahrám Yalda'í, who had been executed on 16 June. Although the provisions made for hangings varies from prison to prison it seems clear from reports that the desired end is generally not accomplished by the method in which the body drops from a considerable height, the neck is broken and death is swift, but by the less humane method of having the victim stand on a chair or low support which is then removed, or sometimes by slow elevation of the victim by a pulley, with, in either case, resultant strangulation and the maximum of suffering.

would help her to be steadfast in such circumstances. An eyewitness said that her responses to the interrogator seemed inspired. 'Shirin had a generous and sensitive spirit and was calm and content in prison', a Baha'i woman who was imprisoned with her has written. 'I remember one day in the prison when we were having a meal together, and Shirin told us that it was her birthday, and that the year before her mother had given her a beautiful new dress as a birthday gift, and that this year her gift was to be a prisoner for Baha'u'llah. Since we had nothing else, each of us took a little morsel of food and placed it in Shirin's mouth, and thus celebrated her birthday.'

Imprisonment was not a new experience for **Mrs. 'Izzat Jánamí Ishráqí**, nor for her daughter Ruyá, as they had been previously arrested and then released, but they refused to leave Shiraz, choosing instead to remain there to help the Bahá'í community. After the revolution, Mr. Ishráqí's pension was withheld because of his being a Baha'i, but in spite of their growing hardship the Ishráqí's home continued to be used as a haven for the disconsolate and those believers who had been rendered homeless. During one of Mrs. Ishráqí's interrogations in which, because she was blindfolded she experienced great difficulty in walking, the questioner taunted her, saying, 'Are you so blind that you cannot walk?' She replied, 'I am merely outwardly blind, but you are inwardly blind.' Ruyá, who was training as a veterinarian until she was dismissed in the second year of her course because of her adherence to the Baha'i Faith, was possessed of beauty and a radiant personality; she was one of the most popular Baha'i youth of Shiraz. She led an active life and loved sports such as mountain climbing. Her sister, Ruzitá, became engaged the same day her father was killed. When Ruzitá, two days later, told her mother and sister about the death of Mr. Ishráqí, her sister said 'Thank God!' and her mother calmly said, 'I knew, I knew, I knew.' Ruyá had a deep affection for her father and on one occasion persuaded the judge to let her speak to her father during their interrogation. Noticing the tender exchange between them, the judge sought to capitalize on it. 'What a pity,' he said. 'You put yourselves through this agony only for one word; just say you are not a Baha'i and I'll see that the three of you are released, and payment of the pension of your father resumed.' Ruyá was quick to respond. 'Your honor, the love of father and mother for their daughter is a natural sentiment, but my love for my Lord and my attachment to His Cause must take precedence over my love for my parents. I will not exchange my faith for the whole world.' Asked, then, if she would insist on saying she is a Baha'i even until the moment of her execution, Ruyá replied that she hoped to remain firm in her

belief and steadfast in her love of the Blessed Beauty to the end of her life. As a child of five or six, she had dreamed one night that she was lost in a Wheatfield among stalks so high that she could not find her way home, and was rescued and taken home by two men of brilliant countenance on horseback, one of whom was Baha'u'llah and the other `Abdu'l-Bahá.

The youngest of this group of martyrs, **Miss Muná Mahúdnizhád**, a schoolgirl, who as a result of her extreme youthfulness and conspicuous innocence became, in a sense, a symbol of the group, and whose martyrdom was greatly publicized, was born on 10 September 1965 in Yemen where her parents were pioneering, a child of the Ten Year Plan. The family returned to Iran in 1969 when the Government expelled all foreigners. Muná possessed a fine singing voice, was a good student, and had a warm, loving nature and a frank, inquisitive mind. An essay she wrote in 1981 on the topic `The fruit of Islam is freedom of consciousness and liberty; whoever tastes it benefits there from,' in which she expressed her frustration at being restricted, as a Baha'i, to offering guarded private responses to questions posed about the Faith to fellow students, caused a furor in the school that resulted in the principal, a fanatical man, prohibiting her mentioning the Baha'i religion on the school grounds, an injunction with which she faithfully complied. When Muná and her parents were arrested on 23 October 1982, her mother protested to the guards that Muná was only a child. One of the men, who in ransacking the house had come across a poem written by Muná, retorted, `Do not call her a child. You should call her a little Baha'i teacher. Look at this poem; it is not the work of a child. It could set the world on fire. Some day she will be a great Baha'i teacher.' In prison she was bastinadoed, lashed on the soles of the feet with a cable, and forced to walk on her bleeding feet. Sneering guards taunted her and the other victims by setting, just out of reach, a glass of water that would have been balm for their physical agony.²¹

Muná, in death, fulfilled the guard's prediction that she would be a great Baha'i teacher. It has been stated by one of the guards that Muná asked to be the last to be hanged, and that she prayed for the `murderers' of her martyred friends. Then she is reported to have said, `In the Baha'i Faith the kissing of hands is prohibited, and we are only allowed to kiss the hands of those who kill us

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-A book entitled *The Story of Muná 1965-1983*, produced by the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada in 1985, and a videotape of the Canadian musician Doug Cameron performing his composition `Muná with the Children', produced by Jack Lenz and Mr. Cameron in collaboration with other Canadian friends, were disseminated throughout the world and reached both Baha'i and general audiences.

for our beliefs.' Seizing the executioner's hand she kissed it lightly, then kissed the rope and placed it around her throat and, smiling, said goodbye to this world.²²

'Whether you accept it or not, I am a Baha'i. You cannot take it away from me. I am a Baha'i with my whole being and my whole heart.' These were words uttered by **Miss Zarrín Muqímí-Abyánih** at one point during her interrogation after her arrest when, having failed to convince her with arguments, the interrogator began to use foul language. Her singing, melodious voice, and her vigorous defense of the Baha'i Faith, caused one of her interrogators to declare that she should have obtained a degree in public speaking. She was an honor student in high school and at age 21 graduated from the University of Tehran where she obtained her degree in English literature. When her attempt to obtain employment as a school teacher in Abyánih where the villagers made clear she was welcome was rejected because the authorities did not want a Baha'i residing there, she accepted a job as administrative assistant, interpreter and accountant in a petrochemical plant near Marvdasht, not far from Shiraz,

Time after time during her trial, the judge who was Zarrín's interrogator pressed her to recant, and threatened her with execution if she did not. On one occasion she replied, 'How can I make you understand that my being exists solely for Baha'u'llah, the object of my hope and love is Baha'u'llah, and my heart is also of Baha'u'llah.' 'I will tear your heart out of your breast,' the judge replied. 'Even then that heart will cry out "Baha'u'llah!", "Baha'u'llah!", "Baha'u'llah!"' Zarrín retorted. Later, she wearily reminded him of his first interrogation of her. 'Do you think that I can deny the truth? I told you the first day I would not recant. If you try me for months and years, my response will be the same.' Zarrín's parents were also arrested but were subsequently released.

A graduate in physics from the University of Shiraz in 1979, **Miss Mahshíd Nirúmand** was ridiculed by her interrogator, who boasted that although he did not complete high school, he was in a position of power and was questioning a university graduate: 'What an education! A

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-Muná's mother, Mrs. Farkhundih Mahmúdnizhád, succeeded in gaining entry to the mortuary after the hangings, and wrote to Mrs. Táhirih Dálvand, mother of Shírín (Shahín), who was residing in the United Kingdom with her husband, 'I visited them all and kissed them, and then I returned to kiss Muná once again and bid farewell to my beautiful little daughter. My eye fell upon Shírín Dálvand. I arose from bending over the pure and sanctified body of Muná and went toward Shírín. I said, "Shírín, dear, I shall give you two kisses, one on behalf of your mother, and the other on behalf of your father; accept these kisses from me!" and I bent down and kissed her twice.'

graduate in physics!' he jeered. Mahshíd was born in Shiraz in 1955. Until her arrest December 1982 she had served as a youth advisor and as a member of a number of Baha'i service committees. She was also an assistant to an Auxiliary Board member. Throughout her long imprisonment she was strong, steadfast, and solicitous of others, often sharing her food with her fellow prisoners and encouraging them to be staunch. She was, by nature, sensitive and retiring, and although she was a lioness in the strength of her faith, she had a calm and soothing disposition, and a dignified bearing. She spoke little, but when she did it was to the point and revealed her profound grasp of the teachings of Baha'u'llah.

Noticing her demureness even when being cross-examined, the judge who was conducting her interrogation exclaimed, on one occasion, 'Your meekness and your non-interference in politics are banners that you Baha'is hold in your hands to conquer the world, and so far you have been successful. All the foreign radio broadcasts are talking about the Baha'is being wronged in Iran!' Confronted with the death sentence for failing to recant, Mahshíd replied, 'I have found the path to Divine Reality and I am not prepared to abandon it. Therefore, I am willing to abide by the court's verdict.'

Miss Símín Sábiri was born on 2 March 1958 in the village of Dabhíd in Fárs Province. Her father was from a Muslim background, and her mother from a Jewish one, but her father, and the parents of her mother, had independently investigated and accepted the Baha'i Faith. Símín's father was a widower when he married her mother and had two sons and four daughters by his first marriage. Símín was the youngest of the five children born of the new union. After completing high school Símín studied typewriting and acquired other secretarial skills and found employment in an agricultural company in Marvdasht.

In November 1978 when the homes of many Baha'is in Shiraz were burned and looted, the Sábiri residence was attacked by a raging mob that threw stones and broke windows and threatened the family. Although she was injured by broken glass, Símín remained cheerful throughout the incident. She and her family took refuge with relatives and about a month later their home in Shiraz was confiscated, as were the homes of other Baha'i families. Ultimately on 26 October 1982, Símín was imprisoned. Símín Sábiri has been described as one of the most fearless of the group of women who were martyred together. She had been a member of the Baha'i Education Committee in Shiraz, responsible for the continuing education of Baha'is about their Faith and its Writings, and she was the youngest assistant to a member of the Auxiliary

Board. During her interrogations, she would constantly try to refute the accusations and correct the misinformation of her interrogators. Throughout her imprisonment she remained strong and resilient, and did not yield to sorrow, but comforted and encouraged the other believers.

A Baha'i who was imprisoned with her has written, 'Símín was radiant, courageous and swift-thinking. Her whole being was suffused with love of Baha'u'llah, and she had a happy and smiling face. Even in prison she did not stop smiling. She was a symbol of absolute detachment, a true lover of the spiritual path and aflame with a desire to serve the Cause of God. "It is not important how they treat us here", she was often heard to remark in prison, "but what is important is that our interrogators realize the goal of the Baha'i Faith and its administrative order. We have unveiled the nature of the Baha'i administrative order and introduced and proclaimed the Faith. It is important that the truth is being made known to judges all across Iran in order that they might understand that the Baha'i Faith is a religion, not a political movement." She appeared willing to overlook the more cynical view that the stronger the sunlight grows, the blinder bats become.' When a female relative called at the prison to collect 'Símín's clothing after her martyrdom, she apologized to the guards and other workers that her relation had been their guest for so many months and said aloud, as she signed the receipt in the prison book, 'Dear Símín, may my life be a sacrifice to you! We are proud of you, and I am happy to sign a document that testifies so eloquently to your success.' Though some of the guards and workers bowed their heads with shame, others defended the right of the Islamic Republic to execute those who it regards as enemies. 'Símín was twenty-four years and four months old at the time of her martyrdom, her mother has stated. She tried very hard to prepare her parents for their loss. 'Don't expect that I shall be allowed to leave here,'

Mrs. Táhirih Arjumándí Siyávushí had served as a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Yásúj, near Shiraz, had been active as an assistant to the Auxiliary Board and as a member of the committee on deepening, and she had memorized, as had Miss Muqímí-Abyáníh, the entire text of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. Mrs. Siyávushí, a nurse, had been fired from her job for being a Baha'i but had later secured employment in a private hospital. After being imprisoned she was, for a time, held in solitary confinement where the cells have no bathrooms or toilets--facilities the prisoners may use only three times in twenty-four hours, at the discretion of the prison guards. Frequently, to make her recant, the guards told her that her husband would be tortured to death. When the prison authorities brought Mr. and Mrs. Siyávushí together in an effort to persuade them that the

other had recanted, she could barely recognize her husband because he had been so severely beaten, and indeed the prison personnel did not think he would live through the night. The guards felt so sorry for him that they asked his wife to send him some fruit, but he could not eat it. Although he recovered to some degree, he was hanged shortly afterward. When Mrs. Siyávushí realized that she, too, would be executed, she encouraged her family not to mourn. When she saw her father for the last time, she said, 'Look how beautiful I am!' And she was laughing. Sometime after Mrs. Siyávushí execution, a Baha'i who had been imprisoned with her but who was later freed said; Mrs. Siyávushí counseled her : 'Leave Iran and tell the world what we suffered, what the enemies did to us. And tell the Baha'is, too, so they will utterly detach themselves from material things, will not be content with the glitter and illusions of this contingent world, and will devote their lives to service to the Cause.'

Born in 1958 in Sarvistán, about fifty miles from Shiraz, to a family of modest means, **Miss Akhtar Sabet** was a model pupil, as her teachers have testified, cheerful and willing and always ready to assist her classmates in the study of their lessons. Humility, kindness of heart, respect for her elders and an eagerness to serve others were among her distinguishing characteristics. While attending school she had to accept employment in order to assist her family. She was always attractively attired in simple and becoming clothes that she made herself. Ever devout in nature, and faithful in her duties, she served as a teacher of children's classes and was an assistant to a member of the Auxiliary Board. Hostile elements among the population of Sarvistán often attacked and molested the Baha'is, murdered them, and plundered their properties. On 8 November 1978, when she was still a teenager, Akhtar and her family and a large number of Baha'is had to abandon their homes when the enemies launched an attack. Undismayed, and with firm resolve, she continued her studies in Shiraz, graduated as a pediatric nurse and found a job caring for children in a hospital in that city. After her arrest on 23 October 1982 the hospital manager telephoned and pleaded with the authorities to release her as she was extremely capable and her services were needed. But her release was conditional upon her recanting her faith, an impossible demand. Till the time of her death she served the other prisoners, washed their clothing (considered untouchable and 'defiled' by the authorities because it belonged to 'infidels') and hung the clothing to dry on a line she had improvised from plastic bags; put her nursing skills at the disposal of all including the non-Baha'i drug addicts and immoral women in other wards who relied upon her for help, claiming that the peacefulness of

her countenance alone was an aid to them; and, on one occasion, restoring to consciousness a Baha'i prisoner who had blacked out due to a heart attack, 'Even at the expense of your life do you intend to remain firm in your belief?' Akhtar was asked during one of her interrogations. 'I hope so, by the grace of God,' was her reply.

A member of the local Spiritual Assembly of Shiraz, **Mrs. Nusrat Ghufrání Yalda'í**, was known for her kindness and hospitality, and her home was considered one of the centers of Baha'i community life in Shiraz. Like her close friend, Mrs. Túbá Záirpúr, who held a degree in Persian literature and who had been martyred on 12 March 1983, Mrs. Yaldá'í had been a pupil of the noted Bahá'í teacher, Mr. Nasru'lláh Chihrihnígár. She was extremely knowledgeable about the Faith and allowed her home to be used for deepening classes and other Baha'i gatherings. Intransigent neighbors on various occasions made trouble over the years, harassing and seeking to annoy her, and complaining to the police on the pretext that she and her guests were disturbing the peace, although their real objection was that the purpose of the meetings was to discuss the Baha'i teachings. On at least one occasion when the police asked her to desist from holding Baha'i meetings in her home, she refused on the grounds that it was her religious obligation to be hospitable, and to open her doors to friends and strangers alike. But that was back in what, in retrospect, might be seen as a period of relative calm, before the nightmare began in Shiraz in October 1982 when she and so many others, including her husband and son, were swept into prison. Mrs. Yaldá'í was one of the several women who were tortured and she was twice given severe beatings of as many as 200 lashes. Those who saw her after those beatings testified that the strips of her blood-soaked clothing were embedded in the weal's that covered her body. Her wounds, an eyewitness recounted, were still visible after she was hanged. During her imprisonment she was cursed and reviled by her interrogators who pressed her to announce on radio and television that she had spurned the Baha'i Faith and was inviting the Baha'is to follow her example by recanting and becoming Muslims. 'I am but a drop compared to the ocean of the Cause of Baha'u'llah,' she replied. 'Do you think that you can stop the sun from shining? Do you think I was a member of the Baha'i Assembly when this religion was established? You should understand that the light of the Cause of God will not disappear even if I and others were to recant.' Her son, Bahrám, who was executed on 16 June 1983, it was learned, on hearing of his decree of death, danced from the courtroom to the prison--a truly worthy son of such an outstanding mother.

A report illustrating conditions in the prisons: “Being unwilling to touch the ‘unclean’ Baha’is, the guards blindfold the Baha’i prisoners, give them the end of a folded newspaper the other end of which they hold in their hand, and lead them to the interrogation room. In the interrogation room the blindfolded prisoners are made to sit down next to and facing the wall. Then the blindfold is removed and each prisoner is given a file containing questions which must be answered either in writing or verbally without turning around. The responses often produce insult and invective on the part of the judge or examiner, who seeks by every means to humiliate the prisoners. Non-Baha’i prisoners at first shun the Baha’is because they are told they are unclean, but soon they become friendly and realize that all the allegations against Baha’is are false. There are a few spies among the prisoners, but the Baha’i prisoners conduct themselves in a manner above reproach. Prisoners take turns in cleaning up and performing other duties in prison, but the young Baha’is often take the place of their elders. Baha’is is prevented from saying prayers in prison; they have to rise in the middle of the night when others are asleep and whisper their prayers. Trial of the prisoners is carried out in three stages. Stage one is the investigation in which the prisoner is asked to give information about himself and other Baha’is inside or outside the prison. Sometimes the prisoner is taken to a room next to the torture basement, where he or she can hear the cries of agony of those being tortured, and is threatened with the same punishment if he or she withholds information. Stage two is verbal or written interrogation in the courtroom by the district attorney. Stage three is the court procedure in which the religious magistrate acts as a judge and issues the final verdict. In many instances Baha’i prisoners are subjected to physical torture.”(Baha’i World Centre, 1994)²³

Chapter three

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²³- Persecution of the Baha’i Community of Iran: 1983-1986 compiled by Justice. Published in [Bahá’í World](#), Vol. 19 (1983-1986), pages 176-226 Haifa: Baha’i World Centre, 1994

Raha's experiences from her memorabilia notes

Part one: activities and events before imprisonment

It was the seventh day of the Year 2004; I arrived in Bam, a city of south Iran. Forty days ago, a devastating 7 Richter earthquake changed the city to a ruin and 3000 were killed, 7000 injured, 10000 homes got demolished....My friend Faran and I became volunteers to serve people in those days, when everybody in Iran celebrates New Year. From the first days of the tragedy, many came here to serve, but they mostly left for the New Year eve ceremonies.

We were three – a young man called Mehdi, Faran and me, members of UNISEF are staying in NGO s tent. Volunteers before left told us what we should do. Next to the tent there are some toys, so we decided to invite children. During dinner I told about my suggestion, to gather children here and spend our time with them, listen to their complaints and sorrows, play with them and help them to deal with their recent traumatic experiences. My friends accepted and we decided to go through the city to find and invite children to come the tent. The next early day after praying, I had a strange feeling a huge responsibility so I beseeched God to show the right path to us.

We saw children were roaming between ruins, also we saw people sitting, crying and talking to their family who had died while some were trying to find corpses or buried them. At noon we went to the tent and became ready to have children in our place. It was almost 3pm, when the invited children came with a big question mark on their faces. We welcomed them warmly and showed them the toys. They became excited and played for hours. I do not remember, but around 30 kids came and we had a very happy time together. They didn't want to go back home but we assured them that tomorrow they could come again.

When they left, I and my two colleagues were very happy we hugged because we could bring smile into the faces of children. After dinner we had a meeting to make a plan amusing the children. after all discussions we decided to have reading stories, painting, group games, and Making some handicrafts and sing some songs. We looked in all the boxes which had been sent to the tent by government and welfare organizations for finding the things which we would need for our plan. We found many things, books, papers, pencils...

Next step was dividing the responsibilities. Mehdi became a guard and protector of the place, Faran became a teacher to teach children how they can make a craft and I became a storyteller and responsible for the painting time. These activities were for at least one hour and the rest of the time, children would play together and enjoy whatever they wanted to do. We woke up with voices of kids in the early morning; it was a surprise, since we had not yet planned when they could come. Some of them came with their parents and some of them brought their friends. Very soon we understood that we can't control the children. They were more than 80 kids and all of them wanted to have time with us to chat and play.

That morning was exhausting; we couldn't do according to our plan properly because of the crowd. But I asked children to come back in the afternoon at 3pm, not earlier, so that we could have time to consult. For sure we needed help of some other volunteers, people who could join us in this project, we knew that the number of children will increase and junior youth also will join, we remembered the young ladies and lonely women who lost their family, who sometimes had visited us in our tent.

I believed that these young ladies were the best human resources. They worked with us and when we left, they continued the project till the government opened a school for children. Mehdi accepted to go through the city and call some of them and share our idea. Faran and I stayed in the tent, waiting for kids. In the afternoon the number of children was really surprising, some of young girls who had come were standing far away and looked at us. I called them and asked to help us to conduct the kids for the plan, they accepted. When Mehdi came with three young ladies, our team became big enough to work with kids.

Around 5:30pm, we asked the children to go back to their tent before darkness and come back tomorrow at 9am, and we told them that our plan for tomorrow would be special because we wanted to make a kite. They became very happy and left the tent with a dream of kites. We had a small meeting with the young girls and ladies and explained our plan and goal; however they were full of pain because they had lost their family recently in the earthquake. But they agreed to join us and help other kids and youth who had lost their family as well. We made a plan for tomorrow and then they left.

At night the weather was very cold, we couldn't bear the cold, so we wore whatever we had and tried to sleep. The desert nights are very cold, despite the very hot days. Next day all the city was full of kites, kids run everywhere with the kites and everybody could hear the sound of happiness

and joy. We were happy when we saw a group of young people coming to us and saying they came from another city to stay here for some days and perform music and theater for the people. This group brought with themselves lots of joy, laughter and spirit to Bam. They played music and sang some songs and performed a comedy play two times a day, and people and children gathered around them and listened to them and accompanied their songs.

All the experiences that happened during those days turned out to have a very important role in my life. I used whatever I had learned up to that time and gathered many new experiences. I remember the early days, when we started the project with all those new coworkers a few guys came to the tent and made some sort of trouble, so some of the young girls and kids came to us to complain about them. We didn't know what we should do, so we just kept quiet. But one afternoon, when we were busy in the project, those guys came again the police car came close to the tent. One of the policemen from distance pointed to me to go to him and asked very respectfully if we had any problem and if everything is ok. I was thankful and said everything was ok.

He pointed at those guys and asked if they had made trouble. I looked at them and saw the deep fear on their face so I said that we were thinking about how we could use their energy in our project. The police man was very happy and gave me the phone number and said that they were cruising all over all the time, so we could let them know if there was any problem. When he left I came back and saw those guys still were looking at me. I didn't say anything to them and busied myself with the kids. At night, when all children had left, we were in our tent and thought what we should have for dinner. We were hungry and didn't have anything, just some eggs. Every day the other volunteers distributed bread and drinking water and some cans between tents, and everybody could go and take a share. We were busy so we couldn't go and so we were out of bread and water and food cans.

A voice from outside tent called my name; we went out and saw the guys who had brought some fresh bread and some eggs. The weather was very cold but they didn't accept to come to the tent so we made a tea and sit with them outside of the tent and chatted. At first they told us some jokes and we laughed then one of them asked me about the policeman. I explained my talk to the policeman and then one of them said they had been arrested for a short period of time recently because people made complains that they perturbed them. Then they said that they didn't know

what should they do, because they lost their family and jobs and there were no school and activity for them so they just wander about all over.

I told them why they don't join the volunteers for helping; they said they didn't know how to help. Mehdi told them the next morning introduced them to some friends who manage all the volunteers and would ask them to give them some small job. They left but this time our feeling was different about them, in fact we had found new close friends. Then we had a nice dinner, egg with fresh bread. Our activity was going on well and then some government organizations came to us and asked about our activity .Faran and I wanted to leave because the holidays were finished and we had to go back to our jobs in our cities so we put the activity in their hands.

In the way back my feelings were very strange, I didn't know if I would have wanted to stay for long time and serve or leave. I remembered all the memories that we had during those 15 days and my tears came down. When I came back home some young people who they knew about my activity , asked many questions and wanted to know if they could go there as a volunteer. I explained if they become the member of the NGOs they would get the permit to go, but I also reminded them that why they want to go there, when here in our city there are many opportunity to serve. They asked me to explain more and I told that we had some poor sectors in Shiraz whose children need help for their study and life. I said we could find one of them and start working with them.

They were happy and tried to find a sector, many as came up and finally one of them who were my cousin said" I have a friend in school that lives in a poor area; I'll ask him if we can go there or not and how he can help us." All of us were full of hope for next meeting to know how we could start. The entire time of next study circle²⁴ was about the new decision. Nima, my cousin,

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- The term study circle has become common terminology in the [Bahá'í Faith](#) to describe a specific type of gathering for the study of the [Bahá'í teachings](#), with an emphasis on "promoting the well-being of humanity."[\[1\]](#)

Study circles are a form of [distance learning](#) designed to systematically bring education about spiritual concepts to the grassroots level. Because they are intended to be sustainable and reproducible on a large scale, study circles shy away from formally taught classes, opting instead for participatory methods. They are usually led by a tutor whose role is not to act as an expert but rather to facilitate the rhythm and pace of the study circle. In this way, attendees of study circles are expected to become active participants in their own learning process.

Another foundational principle of study circles is a heavy emphasis on the [Bahá'í writings](#) as a means of finding unity of vision and action by focusing on the essentials of Bahá'í belief.

At the present time, the most common curriculum used in study circles is one that was originally developed at the [Ruhi Institute](#) in [Colombia](#) but is now used in Bahá'í communities all over the world. Because of its

mentioned that his friend welcomed us to the activity and said children needed help in their studies and said if we could go on the next weekend .I had enough experience about how should Motivate the children so I shared my Bam with the group and we decided to drive the place, Mehdi Abad on coming Friday at 9 am.

Mehdi Abad was very far from the center of my home so we had to drive for 45 minutes. We decided to divide to two groups, one group stay next to our cars and the other group went with the guy, Reza to house visit. I was with some of our group members next to our cars while some kids came toward us; I asked about school and activities that children had there. The kids explained about the teachers and how much they needed help for mathematics and said that since their parents had asked them to get a part time job after school so they couldn't study well. They also reported about some crimes that had happen in their sector by youth.

In fact Mehdi Abad was one of the crime locations in Shiraz and we heard about it. I knew that using drugs, alcohol, rubbery, girl trafficking and raping were common in that area. But little by little when we used to go there for activities I understood that how much children especially young boys and girls were involved in these crimes, for example I realized many families sell their daughters and wives for sex to earn money as a job for their livelihood. And little boys were the tools for transporting the drugs and also begging in the city.

After one hour the other members of our group joined us with more children. It seemed they had made friends because they hold the children by hands and talking friendly. All the children wanted to know what we had planned so we explained. They asked for many things, so we told them that we could help them for their studies and very soon many requests came up from them for different subjects in school. All the members of our group looked at me and wanted to know what they should do, so I said write all the demands and the name of children and tell them next week at 9am we will come and will help them for their studies and ask them to call other friends if they also need help. The children were happy and asked us to play with them. We played a game for an hour.

origin, most [Bahá'ís](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1'%C3%AD_study_circle) refer to this curriculum as the Ruhi sequence or Ruhi materials. Additional courses used by study circles vary from country to country and include the "Fundamental Verities" and "Core Curriculum" materials developed in the United States, among others.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1'%C3%AD_study_circle

Then some parents showed up and asked from which organization us were and how much they had to pay us for tuition. I explained that we want to serve and help our little brothers and sisters and it's free and we are not from any organization. They couldn't believe, so I said I am a member of one NGO and was in Bam as a volunteer. They find me trustable but still couldn't believe that our job is free and asked why we wanted to help and what our purpose was. I tried to explain more but I could realize their rising suspicions. It was obvious that this area was ignored. Our group decided to have a meeting to plan for what we wanted to do next and who should become the responsible person for which duty .In fact the first important issue was who could teach mathematics to children at different levels and to find the school books to become ready for teaching.

Some of our members couldn't teach, so very soon we divided ourselves in pairs, one for teaching and another for assistance. We knew that the number of children would increase. Next step was to find some facilities like boards, paper, pencil, carpet and....all these things needed money. Our team members decided to dedicate some money every week to the project to buy whatever was need. After collecting the money we found that we had enough to buy even some candies. Next Friday was full of experiences and everybody tried to do the best many children came but our attempt to organize the classes was not so successful. Some young boys came around the classes, especially the classes with young girl teachers and teased them. It was expectable. Also many parents came and asked questions about our activity and asked if we had any permission from the government. We spread the plastic carpets in the open field for different classes with two teachers for practicing mathematics and science.

After almost two hours we distributed the candies between children and people who had come and sat close to our classes and had looked at our activities. Then children asked to play games so boys played football and girls came and started talking. It was a good time to get close to girls and know then better .On that time I understood that some girls are used or sold for sex by their parent and the victims felt ashamed and were in great suffering. My thoughts went to how we could help them to get free of this issue, therefore without further consulting I suggested to girls if they wanted to learn some skills like tailoring or hair dressing or weaving, the answer came yes from the victimized girls, some of them liked to learn tailoring and some of them hairdressing but some were quiet. I promised to find some teachers for the next week to teach them those skills .They were very happy.

Around 12 pm we decided to leave the area but children did not allow us they asked for more time but we couldn't stay so again we promised them that we will come back next week A bit earlier and would stay longer. After going out of the area, we went to a close park and sat on the ground and shared our experiences, feelings. I told them what happened in the girls group when the boys were playing football and asked if they would agree and they did.

At the next meeting some of us had found two teachers who wished to join us, one for tailoring and one for hairdressing and both of them were women. Also we arranged a new class for kids, under. Our activities for teaching those skills, and children classes continued for almost one and half month when children had final exams, and after exams many of them were happy because they could pass the exams with more success than expected. When three months summer vacation got started they asked us to continue our activities but differently. It was our pleasure that they accepted us and asked for more activity. For the next week we had different activities for children and junior youth as well as kids. All the activities were infused with social and moral skills through acting, reading, storytelling, playing games and singing.

Through hot summer days and cold rainy winter days we continued. One day we had so much rain, that our cars got stuck in the mud but nothing could stop us Neither the distracting kids nor the skeptical parents. We were Tenacious and ready to serve. Though all difficulties now is a sweet memory. I remember the times that some of the youth showed up with a knife in their pocket. The day that a woman was beheaded and thrown in a ditch close to our classes by murder thieves, or the time a few kids tried to target our cars with rocks And when older boys, were riding their bikes right through our classes, through all those events We became stronger and our faith grew firmer and felt God's tests and supports in each step of the way. By the end of summer I was selected with a few other Bahia's to go to India and a few other countries in Asia for six months of volunteer service to the Baha'i Faith in those countries. After my departure to India the group decided to continue with the project. They had 17 members and they adopted a system of teaching called "Youth Empowerment Project". This is a social, economical and moral package of education for pre-youth and youth and implemented in many countries by Baha'i social worker volunteers for years since the group needed to and teach themselves about this.

While I was in India I attended numerous classes, meetings, seminars with community building project concept. I was also introduced to youth activities and the books they were studying.

Upon my return I provided my 10 months of experience in India to the group. We consulted about adopting a method which was suitable for our situation and implement it in our local plans.

On 13 the of September 2003 for the first time after the first years of Islamic revolution that were full of pressures, torture, arresting and revolutionary execution on Baha'i friends in Iran I witnessed an organized simultaneous raid by the revolutionary secret intelligence service to 13 Baha'i friends' houses in Tehran and Shiraz and collected all the books, CDs, photos, documents, computers, mobiles... and arrested eleven and put them in jail for one month.

I was one them but they didn't arrested me and my friend, Rozita Instead they called and ordered us to yield ourselves to the Revolutionary Intelligence Service Office to get interrogated. We were summoned there three times and we had long inquiry about the new activity in Baha'i community in Iran that was conducted to their opinion, by those 13 persons. In fact in February 2001 for the first time Baha'i community of Iran Had been called upon by the UHJ(Universal House of Justice, the highest Baha'i administrative body residing in Israel) to begin learning the Rouhi educational package. Rouhi project was then to be taught to interest Iranians who wanted to improve their moral and social skills.²⁵

Those arrested, few Baha'i friends²⁶ had a trip to Emirate in February 2001 and visited some Baha'i continental counselors who were expert in Ruhi institute and methodology of teaching the ruhi educational package. So upon returning home, those 13 taught Baha'i persons began

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-The materials prepared by the Rouhi Institute focus on the [Baha'i writings](#) by assisting participants to understand the texts on three different levels. The first level is that of basic comprehension--understanding the meanings of the words and sentences. Towards this end, participants formulate questions whose answers are direct quotes from the texts, in order to gain a literal understanding of the meanings and context of various quotes. The second level relates to the application of the texts to various real-world situations. For example, this would entail examining simple daily acts (lying about one's taxes, cheating on an exam) in light of the Baha'i emphasis on truthfulness. Finally, the third level deals with the implications of the various quotations on other aspects of Baha'i belief.

There are currently eight books in the Institute's main sequence of courses, with more courses in development. Each book is broken up into three units each with many sections. Tutors are encouraged to apply the arts, using music, games, crafts, and such during the training. Each book has one or more practices that can be done outside of the training. For example, the third book helps people to become teachers of children's classes, and the practice is to give an actual class. Also encouraged throughout the books is the practice of memorizing passages and prayers." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruhi_Institute

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- MR Saeed Rezai, Jamal Sabet ,Foad Etehadolhagh, Shahram Mansoor, Farhad Sarafraz, Mrs Mahvash Sabet, Raha Sabet, Rozita Eslami, Fariba Kamalabadi, Zhinos Farnoosh.

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travelling to different cities, meeting local spiritual assemblies to arrange for having Rouhi classes for interested Baha'is. When enough Ruhi tutors learned the Ruhi teaching methodology, Ruhi classes got extended to non- Baha'is as well. This new move was welcomed by many Muslim and non Muslim minorities and it was the cause of many worries news for the Islamic government in Iran, getting afraid of losing some Muslims to Baha'is as religious convertors.

The first group of Baha'i friends who were arrested, they had to explain about their Ruhi project activity. No matter how much the arrested friends tried to Explain to the authorities that this activity didn't want to convert anybody to Baha'i faith and was just a learning process for Teaching some social and moral skills, but Skeptical authorities did not accept and they ordered that the activity should be stopped So Iranian Baha'i leaders Called Yaran e Iran, obeyed the government order and stopped systematic Rouhi teaching projected directed by Baha'i administration, but instructed individual Baha'is to continue the teaching project on their own accord and management, if they wished.

In my inquiry by the Revolutionary Intelligence Service Office, they asked me about the social project that I was running but it was not important for them compare with my responsibility for teaching Rouhi project to bahai community in Iran so I decided to continue my social project on my own risk and responsibility, knowing of the governments sensitivity and concern and at the same time I tried to get permission letter for volunteer social activity from the Islamic council in Shiraz who were the organization for social and economical activities. I wrote a letter to them and introduced and explained the project and its aims .after one week they gave me an official permission letter which showed they knew and accepted this sort of social activity and they mentioned that their cohort will control the project and will give them report. They seemed to be happy and thankful because of this activity was supposed to go on in needed, hard to access, poor Shiraz country side.

On May 2004, after one year working in Mehdi Abad, the number of children grew to over 200. We adopted a new way of proceeding by dividing the work into two parts of sector and asked more volunteers to join the group. Then we were 30 volunteers in our group and in two sections with 100 children in each. In the September2004, I was approached by a Baha'i youth who was interested in our project, and we discussed the possibility of teaming up with his Muslim friend for the same type of project in another part of the city, Shall Abad. The Muslim youth was

genuinely interested in working for children and was truly ready to do something to help. I discussed our year long project in Mehdi Abad and informed the two new volunteers of all the challenges they will be facing. I assured them of my support and assistance as much as I could.

On the following Friday (just 2 days after my first interrogation by Secret service) we visited another poor Country side called Sahl Abad. In our first meeting with children and their parents in Sahl Abad, we discussed about our project and consulted with them the ways and means to do it just like the project in Mehdi Abad.

The reaction from both parents and children was very positive and they asked us to start as soon as possible. There was no time to waste. We started this project the following Friday. In our first day of activity, we formed three groups Young children aged 3-6, Children ages 7-10, Pre Youth aged 11-15. We assigned 2 or 3 members of our group to be responsible for each group and prepared the material and logistics for the next Friday as we did for Mehdi Abad (teaching social and moral skills). As the number of children grew, we added more volunteers to serve. Eventually we had over 110 children and 18-20 volunteers. Most of the volunteers in this new group were Muslim and they were old friends that invited each other for this activity.

In this group Baha'i and Muslim youth worked together. I believe, one the most fascinating aspect of this project was to notice how these volunteers were working together, discussing and consulting without letting their religious beliefs interfere with their social duties. Although I noticed how those volunteers used to adopt some of the Baha'i administrative methods for consultation and holding a meeting, at no times a religious discussion about the Bahai faith was in order.

On early April 2005 I was approached by a Baha'i couple who were interested to form a group and start a project in another poor area called Deh Pialeh encouraged them to join one kind of NGO first and follow our past experience in dealing with this project. Since it was close to the end of school year and children were studying for their final exam, this new group decided to start by helping Deh piayleh children with their preparation for exams school work. This new group expanded to have 14 volunteers and the number of children reached above 90. With our experience in the last 3 years, other NGOs heard about our successful project and were interested to know about our methods and procedures. I was invited to numerous meetings, seminars,

discussions and shared my experience about working with children and youth with them. .I was interested in improving our method and activities.

In 2005-2006 I was a teacher in 12th level Baha'i moral Friday classes. And Students in that class were very keen for social activity as they had heard about my NGO and Rouhi activity, One day with these students we decided to visit a children hospital with cancer patients. We designed and implemented games, plays, art and crafts and reading books for them. Parents and staff were very pleased and supportive of our efforts. The hospital manager donated a play station for children. We were involved in this project for about one year.

Children Rights and Protection organization, was another group which have heard about our activities and approached me with interest to obtain my experience and knowledge of three years of volunteer social work. I suggested again to them to become a member of an NGO and to get an official permit from City council just like the one that I had. This project attracted 12 volunteers, of mixed genders and religious backgrounds. Their project served over 80 children in a park.

During 2003-2006, all the four groups of Mehdi Abad, Sahl Abad, Deh Piyaleh and the group which were working with the hospital also were involved with visiting facilities which were housing handicapped children, children without family and abused children. We used to take cooked food and fruits, toys and gifts to make their life a little brighter. We used to visit them once a month and always had a special entertaining program for them. I remember once we remember we decided to have a musical theater for them. During our performance, because of the rhythmic music that was very Moving to everyone all the children came to the scene and started to dance with the performing actors and made the actors to forget about the rest of the story they were about to present! We felt from the bottom of our hearts that we wanted nothing more when we saw that we were making people happy as a result of our sincere, selfless service to people. In the last three years of involvement with different targets and volunteer groups, we never asked anyone outside the group for financial aid. The entire fund was donated by the volunteers involved in the projects. We had a fund box in our weekly meeting and a treasurer to collect and keep track of income and expenses.

We were approached by numerous people willing to donate funds; however we denied their contributions for the reason of not being indebted to anyone or raise expectations in return.

Another important activity that all of us followed very carefully were weekly meetings. Each group had at least a weekly meeting of their own to discuss and consult the affairs of their group activities. We used to start the weekly meetings with prayers and seek the assistance of God and Concourse on High. Then we used to review the past week field work problems, successes and then we used to plan for the following week. Each group project in different area was unique and needed its own attention. We also needed to train ourselves to be a better morally, better prepared, and most of all focus on our love for giving service to humankind. We studied some books from other countries with similar projects, as well as virtue books and moral education which most of them prepared by UNICEF or other organization in Iran which were working for children and youth. Some books were showing us how to play games; conduct meetings with children.

I was delighted and encouraged to see the level of cooperation between Muslim and Baha'i youth in these groups, Sahl Abad, Deh Piyaleh and Alavi Park. At no time we discussed Baha'i teachings. We did enjoy each other's presence and respected each other's religion and believes and used to react with each other courteously and learn from each other. As mentioned before, I wrote a letter to the president of the Shiraz city Council. . I explained about our services and activities and asked for an official permission letter. He requested the proper application and paperwork to be submitted to his office for review. We applied and gave them a written report and then our application was approved by the educational committee Of Shiraz city Council and we were issued a permit to be carried with us and show the authorities, wherever we Would be serving .During this process to my surprise, no one asked about our faith and we did not volunteered say anything. This was a very valuable permit and assisted us in many occasions, when someone would call police we would only show them this permit and they would leave. In many occasions the police actually assured the parents of our legitimacy and after a few times the police named us "The Field Group".

We were in a very good term with parents, children and police. Especially parents were very helpful and did all they could to make our presence as easy as possible. They actually used to accept our advices and guidance for their children. Our activities were carried out with utmost wisdom and with great precaution for not making a big propaganda. Some of participant would not even explain fully our services to their parents. We did not want to jeopardize our activities by advertising it. Even the members of one group did not know about the other group and I was

the only one who knew about the whole groups and thus I was a sole coordinator among the groups. Only one person in the Shiraz Baha'i Administration hierarchy knew about us and he only used to guide us on how to make the next moves in order no harm would fall on the fragile relationship between the government and the Baha'i Faith administrative structure in Shiraz.

Here I must re emphasize that, our activities were not organized, guided or supervised by any religious organization, Baha'i or Muslim. Our only goal was to serve our little brothers and sisters. We discussed our services, activities and challenges with target parents as well as UNICEF representatives, Educational Committee of City Council, Committee for Children Books and Interested Groups. It was our wish and ardent desire to have other groups follow our path and assist children anywhere in the country.

In the morning of Friday 19th May 2006, some information ministry police force raided all the five locations of our group gatherings simultaneously, as if they wanted not let anyone escape a crime scene .They Attacked five places at 10 am, carrying machine guns, masks, and in no police uniform without a searching warrant to show it to us (Sahl Abad, Mehdi Abad, Deh Pialeh, Alavi park, Hospital Group). They arrested 54 Baha'is and 10 Muslims, but a few were absent on that day which did not get arrested, then. They did not arrest anyone from the hospital group.

At the first week of our detention, the main interrogations were to find out if we were doing our activities under the direction of Iran Baha'i' administration and whether we were teaching the Baha'i' Faith. After a week they were convinced that we were not teaching the Bahai Faith. Even some of our Muslim friends did not know about the religion of my Baha'i volunteers and that strongly proved to the authorities that we were truthful when we told them that did not intend to teach the Bahai Faith or to convert people. From the first hours of our detain ment, I was separated from the rest and was kept in solitary confinement. The authorities were trying to connect my activities with the Baha'i' Faith. It took more than a week to convince them that I was not working under any Baha'i' organization and were not teaching the Faith.

I explained that we were under a NGO and all of our activities were transparent. I did also explain that the Baha'i' Faith is not recognized by the Iranian government as a religion, therefore could not form a NGO under the name of Baha'i Faith.

After 3 days of interrogations, they issued the charges as follows:

- Organizing illegal groups to rebel against the government of Iran

- Cooperation with other groups to undermine the central government

In response to such bizarre charges, I defended myself by showing the court our permits and NGO membership which showed our only involved with education of children as our permits stated and there was not a shred of evidence to show otherwise. I was very calm and patient during two hours of court hearing. I was confident and I believed in my heart that Baha'u'llah was with me at the all time. I told the judge:” do you really think a fragile girl like me, being arrested could possibly be stupid enough to pick a fight with a powerful government like you? My honesty, firmness and stating the facts of the case made it clear to the judge that I am not , what they thought of me and pictured me as a hidden religious missionary or a saboteur.

I could see the attentive impression on his face and the enthusiastic ways he was listening to my response. Then he asked about the books we are using and the method we used to teach children which I responded with precise and honest answers. The hearing lasted over two hours. The judge then asked me step out of the court room and wait for his verdict. A few minutes later the court clerk asked me to come in. I felt a different atmosphere and the faces were much happier. Then the judge addressed me with these kind words:”I have dropped all the charges except the charges regarding teaching the Baha'i' Faith”.

He continued asking About Ruhi Books and the reason for them, the goals and function of these courses. He was curious to know...Why I went to Emirate to learn about these books and what did I do with my knowledge when I returned to Iran. He was clearly searching a way to connect me with Ruhi Courses and teaching the Faith. My answer was direct, honest and simple:” The goals of our Ruhi Courses are to assist participant to be a better human beings and elevate their spiritual, social, and moral lives, regardless of their religious, social or educational background. It shows them how to serve all humanity and leave all prejudices behind. With this vision we are working with our children and let them see the world as one country and all of us as its citizen. How would this harm anyone? Wasn't this the goal of Prophet Muhammad to bring peace to all tribes in Arabia? So many people got through Ruhi Courses and do not become Baha'i', however they will be a better human being.”

Then he asked refer to my explanation about Ruhi books:” why do you need Ruhi Books to promote morality and virtues? Could you not use other books? There are many Baha'i' quotations in these Ruhi Books. These quotations attract who study them.” I respectfully answered;” the contents in these books are medicine for today's social and spiritual ills. We are

all sick and we need an immediate attention from a physician. These lessons are for today's society."Then he asked:"How about Ruhi book four which is all about the history of Baha'i Faith and Ruhi book six which is a teaching tool?

Respectfully I responded in today's ill societies with, crime, drugs, terrorism, neglected children, abused women, and many other shortcomings, we have an answer and a solution which I believe can heal these ills. Do you think I should share this medicine? Or do you think I should be selfish and keep it to myself? This is what Ruhi six is all about. And Ruhi book four is for one, who wants to know about the bahai history not for everybody and I emphasized again that I never used Ruhi books in my social activity though I was one of the 13 bahai friends who went to Emirate.

Judge then asked:"who is in charge of the Baha'i Faith in Iran? And who runs your Institute for higher Baha'i 'studies'²⁷? Explain the Baha'i's organization chart.

I explained:" there is no official bahai administrative body in Iran since 1979. As you are well aware, all bahai elections and organization were dissolved by the government after 1979 Iran Revolution. We have obeyed the laws of the country which we reside in and therefore we were deprived of having institutions like LSA or NSA²⁸ and so forth. There are five members who were appointed by UHI to take care of the affairs of the Faith And regarding to your question about Baha'i University, Baha'i are not allowed to enter colleges and universities according to the laws of Islamic Republic of Iran. Baha'is of Iran decided to start an institution for higher education and not let the minds of our bright and brilliant youngsters go to waste. I am one of the graduates from it with Masters in Sociology. These are the type of adjustment we had to

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-The Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), popularly known as the *Bahá'í Open University*, is a university in [Iran](#) designed and managed by the [Bahá'í community](#) for [Iranian Bahá'ís](#) as a Baha'i for those who are excluded from access to [higher education in their country](#). Founded in 1987 and offering 17-degree programs, the BIHE offers academic programs of learning and research in the sciences, the social sciences and the arts. In 2011 there were 475 volunteer faculties that include accredited professors from universities outside Iran who assist as researchers, teachers and consultants. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1'%C3%AD_Institute_for_Higher_Education.picture4 page 104

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-LSA – NSA: Spiritual Assembly is a term given by [`Abdu'l-Bahá](#) to refer to elected councils that govern the [Bahá'í Faith](#). Because the Bahá'í Faith has no clergy, they carry out the affairs of the community. In addition to existing at the local level, there are national Spiritual Assemblies (although “national” in some cases refers to a portion of a country or to a group of countries). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual_Assembly

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make under direction of the UHJ²⁹ and with guidance of “Yarane Iran”. As I mentioned, we do not have elected officials and hence bahai community follow the guidance of Yaran Iran since they are doing all their work under direction of UHJ.”This court session came to an end and I went to my cell. After a week of solitary confinement, 51 were released and I was placed in a cell with another arrested Baha'i' girl. Besides us two girls, they only kept another young man.

During the next three weeks the line of questioning and the attitude of interrogators were changed. They were much warmer and polite while conducting these sessions. All the questions were about Baha'i' Community. Relationship between Baha'i' Community and the government, our university and higher education, Baha'i' rights and what should the government do with it, Music ,art and moral classes in our community and expression of free speech; how do the Baha'i' youth think about the government? I answered:”these are the questions and subjects you need to discuss with Yarane Iran not me. I do not have any responsibility to answer to your questions and will not participate in a subject who I don't know why you are asking from me?”

They were insisting that Yaran did not give us the right answers and did not cooperate, and I felt they were trying to drive a wedge between me and our beloved Yaran by saying things like” they are old and don't know as much as young people” or “younger generation had a better feeling

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- The Universal House of Justice is the supreme governing institution of the [Bahá'í Faith](#). It is a [legislative](#) institution with the authority to supplement and apply the [laws](#) of [Bahá'u'lláh](#), the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, and exercises a judicial function as the highest appellate institution in the [Bahá'í administration](#). The institution was defined in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and [`Abdu'l-Bahá](#), Bahá'u'lláh's successor, and was officially established in 1963 as the culmination of the [Ten Year Crusade](#), an international Bahá'í teaching plan.[\[1\]](#)

Its nine members are elected every five years from the male membership in good standing of the world community by an electoral college consisting of all the members of each Bahá'í [National Spiritual Assembly](#) throughout the world. The [Seat of the Universal House of Justice](#) and its members reside in [Haifa, Israel](#), on the slope of [Mount Carmel](#).

While being empowered to legislate on matters that are not explicitly stated in the Baha'i holy writings, the Universal House of Justice has, since its inception, limited its exercise of this function. Instead it has generally provided guidance to Bahá'ís around the world through letters and messages. The books and documents published by the Universal House of Justice are considered authoritative and its legislative decisions are considered infallible to most Bahá'ís the institution has also collected and published extracts from the writings of the [Báb](#), Bahá'u'lláh and [`Abdu'l-Bahá](#).

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_House_of_Justice

about this country than old”, “they do not show flexibility about our problems”, “All they want is obtaining the religious recognitions and restore human rights for Baha'is in Iran”. They also admitted that treatment of Baha'is in the early years of Islamic Revolution was a mistake. I responded:”These old men as you called them, have lost all their material positions and sacrificed their life, family and everything else to only serve our Baha'i' Community. We all appreciate their dedication and love for the community and most of all, their commitment to do their work just for love of Baha'u'llah.”

I really felt, they were looking finding a way out to take the international blaming pressure off their back. I really felt that these poor souls needed help so I tried to rely on the words of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha to ease their heart. I told them:” there are more common grounds between us than it appears. We just need to find them, work on them and keep our vision focused. We are trying hard to educate these children, the We want youth to get educated, We want peace and security, We believe in eradicating of drug abuse and addictions, We believe Iran will be a paradise someday, We believe in eradication of extreme wealth and poverty and in all these, U share our aspirations and goals; don't U?” I continued by saying:”with all these common ground, why are we not working together to make them realized. Let us cross these lines and work together for a better Iran. Let us put our differences aside, walk together hand in hand and are part of an advanced society.”

“For how long more we should waste our resources? We are all Iranian and we are all part of the wealth of this great country, so let us put aside our differences and start a new beginning after 27 years of Islamic revolution. Let us work together and move this great land forward. I have done as much as my limited resources could do I worked hard to improve the life my little brothers and sisters. I need your help to join this group and be part of our service as well. I have explained all I could and I really do not have anything else to add.”I felt relieved and happy about my last few minutes and could see silence in the room and wonders on the audience faces.

The silence broke after 3 days by the judge announcement which asked my father to provide 50,000,000 Tooman (\$50,000) as bail for my release. My dad had been busy for a month to prove that his daughter was not guilty and she should release. He pleaded with the Judge for reduction of the bail by saying to him:” Is it crime to teach children? How should our youth have spent their times, if they do not serve their countrymen?” The judge reduced the bail and asked my

father to bring his job permit as collateral, security instead so three of us released after one month.

One day after my release, I was asked by the judge to see him in court. I was worried but confident. I waited by his office and he asked for me to enter. After greeting he asked me be seated. He thanked me and continued by saying:” I must admit that I found you very honest, frank, and helpful during my court appearance and I have reviewed your file many times and read your notes and writings over and over again and your honesty have made me believe that you do what you preach. I have many questions which I like to ask you later. “

He then read the court ruling and explained my accusations: “Organizing and leading illegal groups, Commitment for uprising against the government, Teaching and promoting an illegal religion “.

I defended my innocence and he did not reply. After a few moments of silence, he suddenly said: “The session is over and we are not in the court of law, and I would like to speak to you as a citizen and would like you to do the same”. I was shocked to hear that, however I shook my head as a positive sign. He asked me about the Muslim’s belief that if Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet that is destined for human by God, so who is Baha’u’llah. I answered him as much as I could with my limited knowledge; however he kept asking more questions and wanted to know more about the bahai Faith. This conversation lasted almost 3 hours. I thanked him for making the court atmosphere more tolerable, which he became very pleased to hear those kind words from me. Then he turned to me and said: “I swear by God if I had my sister on this stand I would deal with her as I did with you and I would issue the same verdict”. He wanted to show me that he was righteous. After me the other 54 bahai youth were asked by the court for final defenses.

During these court hearings we could see how all the court clerks, personnel and even door men were impressed by Baha’i’ youth and their conduct and manners. They observed the youth who were denied education, jobs, and even of believes but they had a shining, smiling and happy face during the court time. What puzzled many of the audience was to wonder why these people were arrested and why is it a crime to help and educate children.

One day one of my Muslim friends who worked in our volunteer project and were arrested with us approached me and quietly said: “I lied about our activities and signed a paper confessing to a not true statement which said you were teaching bahai faith. The investigators compelled all

Muslim youth, to lie and signed the paper which they showed us and said if we wanted to be release we had to sign. We all did so they released us on the first night of our arresting.”Then he looked at me and said: “you do what you preach we couldn’t. We always thought the children honesty and now I failed the test with all shame.”This was a project that we wanted to keep it low and did not want to promote it openly however Baha’u’llah had other plans. After our arrests, the whole world knew about our project and the children, whom we used to serve, were left wit out their mentors, as before.

I remember my family explained to me some events when we were in prison for example they said:” Every day more than 100 family and friends come to prison to hear about the status of their loved ones. They used to stay in front of prison doors and hope for a piece of good news.”

My mother said: “When the first groups of 51 were released, there were over 300 people waiting with flowers and sweets to greet their heroes. This was also a teaching occasion and people were asking and the Baha’is answering. Whether the authorities liked it or not, it was a huge teaching event. A bank manager who was next to the prison and has looked all these days came out of his bank and said that he was witnessing the freedom of 51 one people which he was proud of them.”

I will never forget the role of my parents specially my father during those years. Since I was arrested till I released he struggled to prove our innocence by meeting and writing letters toward the different government held responsible .all his efforts opened new doors for bahai community to talk to the government and many people who had never heard about bahai faith became familiar to bahai faith, teachings and principles. He became expert to visit and talk to the government so many bahai families who are in the same situation as my family was when I was in prison ,ask my father to help them to ask for demands and rights.

Part two: isolated cell

Finally the Islamic court charged three of us³⁰ to four years imprisonment and the rest 54 Baha’i youths had to attend an ideological Islamic class for two year. I passed 3 years and 4 months in isolation cell (individually prison) and the rest means 8 months I had to be with another prison

with 11 women who charged for crimes like drug trafficking and selling, gun trafficking, sex workers...The isolation cell is just a small chamber where it's ironic door is closed all the time and there is not any window to outside and had a lavatory set.

Every prisoner could have a free walk in the yard outside for fresh air around 15-20 minutes every day. There was no tree, no grass; what you can see is only concrete floor (as wide as a volleyball field) and high walls which beyond them the beautiful blue sky can be seen. When the weather is so hot or cold or it is rainy you cannot go for open air. Once every week the prisoner can meet and talk to her/his family by phone behind a thick glass just for 5 minutes. Every day some dedicated jailers are responsible for bringing breakfast, lunch and dinner and also to lead prisoner to open air. All of them are men and I cannot hide this fact that their behavior toward me was quite respectful and polite and they never hurt me.

In my cell there were a heater, a cooler, and also there were 3 blankets that one of them was used as a carpet and 2 of them for sleeping. Another facilities that I had on my cell were: soap, shampoo, a tooth brush , a tooth paste , a box of handkerchief, a nail trimmer, a box of detergent, a towel , a comb and one shirt. I should mention that once every 2 or 3 weeks, the jailers asked a list of shopping from each prisoner for buying him/her the necessary hygienic facilities or some fruits. So as there was no refrigerator in our cells, the prisoners could buy only 1 or 2 kinds of fruit like apple or orange.

Many might think that living with little facilities is very difficult, but one can learn how to live with minimal facilities without a mirror, bed or refrigerator...It is important that how you train your spirit and mind for thinking about the values of humanity and spirituality and divine goals. It took one week for me to learn how I should manage myself and my time for praying, reading the books, exercising, walking in the cell and watching TV without falling in the routine life.

In fact for the first 8 month they didn't give me any book or magazine or even paper and pen. my father from outside and I from inside tried to Convince the wardens that reading book and having pen and paper is the first right of a prisoner but always they responded that the judge had said you couldn't read book, magazine ,newspaper and you couldn't have paper and pen! Even for almost one year they didn't give me my glasses without which I had a blurred vision. I remember after 3 weeks I wrote a letter to the head of prison and asked to talk to him but he refused and said that whatever you wanted to say write in a letter, I would read. Therefore I wrote a letter to him asking for prisoner's rights.

I remember in my letter I mentioned that I haven't had any book, I haven't permitted to phone my family, why I haven't been in public prison, why I have to pass my charge in solidarity cell, why I didn't have television or radio, I need to buy some personal needs, I need to have fruits and vegetable and different food, I need open air more than 15 minutes. Please let me know why you keep me here and please if you will not follow the prison rights at least follow the human rights to me. After 30 minutes he called me and asked; "what do you want?" I said that I had written everything in the letter he said that none of them was acceptable. We have given you 3 times food every day and if you need soap or shampoo or whatever, you have to write in a piece of paper and give to guard, he will buy, but once a month, if we accept.

I said that it was not possible to pass 4 years just with only food I need to read book or at least let me have newspaper. He replied; "no, you are not permitted to have any book or newspaper or... I asked if it was possible to have a TV set. He said that he had to ask, he didn't know. Then he continued you couldn't call your family but every week you would have 5 minutes time to, meet and talk to your parents and nobody else. I thanked and left and astonishingly after 3 days when I was in open air they put a television in my cell but they put off the electricity at 10 pm and put on at 11-12 am.

Having TV was amazing, after one month I could know about the time and listen to news. I don't know how I can explain, how much it was difficult when I didn't know what was the time in the place that I didn't have any access to out to see the light of sun. In fact television gave me a new energy, because I could listen to news, music and have time and watch movie or different program. I don't remember exactly, but I think after 5 months one day the head of prison came to my cell and said a person will come to your cell and want to ask you some question, please be ready. In this prison all the prisoners should cover their eyes by black band and women should wear chador, a veil which is a long covering piece of cloth to cover the whole body. So since I was there I never saw anybody and anywhere just my cell. I felt free when I was in the cell alone I didn't wear chador and whenever I wanted to go out or somebody wanted to come to the cell I used to wear chador and cover my eyes.

One came to my cell, I couldn't see him but he asked me, do you know me? I said; "no". He said open the band and answer my questions. I did; I was surprised because he was the judge! He said your father for had sent letters and asked me to come here and observe your position and listen to your demands. I said I'm so thankful that you are here. And I explained whatever I wrote in my

letter to the head of prison and emphasized having permission to have book, paper, pen and my glasses. It was interesting for him because for several times asked me you didn't want anything else, nothing. And I said: "no thanks". Perhaps he was expecting me to cry or to beg for getting released. At the end he said: "we are thinking to give you few days off for the New Year vacation." I couldn't believe it but I didn't say anything and just thanked.

Few days later one day one of the investigators whose voice was familiar to me brought two books were rebuttal of Baha'i faith. I said: "ok, I will read". He was surprised and mentioned the other Baha'i prisoner refused to read these. I read both books and I was very happy because both of them were full of Baha'i writings. I read and memorized all the verses of Bahauallah. I had 5 mints time for meeting my parents every week from behind a glass bar with phone so I told them that I had these books and I enjoyed the verses of God. That night the interrogator came and asked for the books and never gave me again of such rebuttal books. But they brought me Islamic books and they thought I would never read them but I accepted and read them. In fact some of them were very useful and contained the philosophy of Islam. I think they gave me 13-15 of those kinds of books and then stopped. Once I asked: "why you don't give me another book. They said: "we don't have library here, we have few books". I asked to let my parents bring book for me and they accepted but they said no Baha'i book, just books which were available in public library. Next week I was very happy, I asked my parents to bring my favorite book, Rumi writings.

Next week my mother told she brought my favorite book add a puzzle magazine. After meeting I was waited to get the books but it didn't happen. After two days I asked but they said you have to wait because the head of prison should see your book and confirm if you can have these books or not. After one week they gave me just puzzle magazine and kept the other book. I was happy at least I had a lots of alphabet puzzle which filled my time. But I asked my parents to bring another book; the subject of this book was about sociology, related to my master study. Fortunately they gave me this book. Therefore, once a week I had new book and I had to return the previous one every week.

I took notes and started to write research paper. I remember it was very interesting and amazing for me when I was reading a book and tried to compare and analyze the text with Baha'i writings especially when I did with Quran the holy book of Islam and with some text from Islamic philosophy. So my reading time became useful and very exciting. One important event at this

time was when they called three of us, Baha'i inmates, to a different room in this prison and we had a meeting with a man. As I mentioned before the Islamic court gave four years sentences to three Baha'i youth and the rest should attend to the teaching Islamic class for two years. So three of us were in prison while the others were called by court to go to the teaching Islamic class and we didn't know about that. They called us to a different room and the man introduced himself as a researcher and professor, he asked us to explain about our activity and said: "I read about you and your activity online and I came here to investigate what is the truth and if you are innocent I will help you to get released."

We trusted him and explained about our social NGO activity and what happened in the Islamic court and how the intelligent service didn't allow to us to have lawyer to see our file and also when they called us to come here (prison) they didn't tell us anything even after 3 days we didn't know why they have kept us here without any explanation. We mentioned also about our prison rights and why we are here in isolated solidarity cells cell and we couldn't have book and magazine or couldn't call our family during the week.

He listened to us and took some notes and sometimes shook his head as gesture of accepting our talks. But suddenly he changed the topic and asked if we had ever thought about our belief, Baha'i faith and if it was correct or not. He added: "I am a professor and researcher and have studied Baha'i writhing for 40 years if you are ready we can read together some of them and discuss about the facts in your religious books if you can convince and convert me I will accept Baha'i faith and if you couldn't, it's up to you if you want you can convert to Islam." He was waiting for our reply.

At this moment I said: "excuse me for how many years you have been as a member of Society of the Martyrs of Islam"? He was shocked! Immediately he said: "NO, I am not a member of Islamic association; I am a researcher and professor." It became very clear for all of us that he was a religious court liaison with a mission to brain wash and convert us to Islam. He called my name and said: "you are a scholar and a Baha'i teacher; I heard many things about you and your abilities, do you refuse to sit for a religious debate with me?" And he continued: "you know, all the Baha'i teachers are the same, they never want to debate because they are afraid to lose the debate and have to abandon their faith". He then mentioned about some Baha'i teachers who were executed by government during the first years of Islamic revolution and said all of them were unable to discuss and prove the legitimacy of the Baha'i faith and they accepted that they

swayed off the right truthful Islamic path. I said:” if they accepted that they Chose the wrong unrightfully religion

Why the Islamic court gave them death penalty?” He started to talk but I said:” everybody knows very well that it’s not true. They never denied their faith. In fact they were executed because the Islamic court when understood they don’t want to change their belief gave them two options to accept Islam or die and all of them (240 Baha’i friends)were executed in those years because they said the Baha’i faith is an independent religion after Islam like Christianity and Judaism.” Our debates about the Baha’i faith and Islam had continued when I realized that it cannot continue like this so I said:”we will have this debate about the Baha’i faith and Islam when there is free open media for all to watch us in TV.”

Maybe he never expected such a suggestion, so he became quiet for few minutes and said:” I have to talk to authorities”. And he asked if we would promise to convert to Islam if we lost the debate and we promised. So he said:” we will see next week and continue our discussion.”But after two days again they called us for the class. He came with many Baha’i books and said we can read and discuss about that. And then he chose One of the Báb’s books and Began to read it to us. Then he said:”see such nonsense writing.” I said:” excuse me but you couldn’t read properly how you expect to understand the writings. Also last time we decided to discuss these in public media, don’t you?”

He said:” yes I remember but authorities didn’t accept.” Then said:”there is no answer? He opened his note book and showed lots of questions and sentences from the Baha’i writings and said:”no Bahia can answer my questions; if anyone can conceive me for sure I will accept Baha’i faith. In fact the Baha’i faith has been made by British government and all of you follow a fake belief.”I said:” I have a question, how do you believe if someone tells you the promised one that Mohammad promised has come?” He said:” he will declare when he is in Mecca and lean to the house of God, then a strong light will come from the sky and everybody can see the light. I asked if we could also see that light from this room. He said yes. I said:” Suppose you say that this light in this room is that light...And you believe that the promised one has declared him as such, but I couldn’t believe and I say these are superstition.” So what do you think, what will happen after that?

He said:”I and other believers follow him and help him to teach his teaching and new message and for sure many of us will be killed by you and other oppositions and also the promised one

will be killed by you as has written in Quran.” I asked if His teaching would be finished by killing Him. He said:” not at all, because His followers will continue His message.” I said:” please come back to this time, suppose after 200 years your nephews meet my nephews and my nephews will try to show that their new faith is not divine sacred religion brought by a God-sent saint and fight with them, would they change their belief easily? Will your nephews refuse the fact and all the sacrifices that happened by their Ancestors?”He said:”of course no, they will keep their belief and spread the faith...” and then suddenly he became silent.

For a while we kept on silence and then he said:” but when Báb declared, there was no light from Mecca and He also denied his claim after some while.” I didn’t say anything because I think whatever should be understood, we did it before. I remember he asked if we need anything and we said no thanks and he insisted and said any food or fruits and I said:” may I ask to have one of these books for few mints.” He said:”yes, which one?” I asked for the one written by Bahauallah and I said for many months I couldn’t read any writing from Him so that’s very kind of him if he let me read one page. He gave me “The Book of Certitude” and I asked if he let me to read loud till my friends also hear, he accepted so I opened the book randomly and read. I read one page and returned the book to him. He said:” now it is the pray time” and left but he said:” I will see you again.”Next week before we meet again, I had weekly meeting with my parents. It was surprising because when my father picked up the phone, the first question he asked me was, did you have any meeting with Mr. Haghnegahdar? I said no but we had meeting with somebody who wanted to discuss about Baha’i faith, and I didn’t know who he was? He didn’t introduce himself. My father said he should be Haghnegahdar, because that week the other youths that were invited by the court to Islamic class, saw that Haghnegahdar, the head of “society of Martyrs of Islam” was the teacher.

I said:” so that’s way they call us to this class”. Then my father explained:” that is the UHJ, universal House of Justice, the supreme Baha’i institution, has suggested that those youth attend the Islamic class, though it is meant to brain wash an convert them.”They suggested:”it’s better to attend to the class but do enter in to argumentative debates. Very respectfully listen to Haghnegahdar without any debate”. For me it was very difficult to follow this message, for few days I talked to myself:”why they said we have to be quiet, I have enough knowledge to answer the questions and there is a good opportunity to talk to the Islamic government and make

everything clear.”By the way I convinced myself to obey the UHJ message and don’t reply their question.

When we meet the teacher again, he was keen and ready to discuss to us. He didn’t bring any Baha’i books and said:” I will show you how much there is inconsistency in Bahauallah writings.” We kept quiet and he was surprised so asked if we didn’t want to talk. I said:”you know, the house of justice has sent a message and said we have to listen to you but there is no need for debate and discussion.” He said:”UHJ is not here so we can have discussion”. I said:” I’m sorry but we prefer to follow their guidance.”Again I said:” sorry, you can talk about whatever you want and we listen.” He began to read from his note book and then explained how much they are nonsense. For almost two hours he talked and asked for our views but none of us talked. For two more class we continued like this and finally in the last meeting he said:” that you know how much it was difficult for me to come here and talk and none of you reply to me. Before I came to class I prayed and asked God to help me to show you the right way and you could convert to Islam. Now I think there is no chance and I will not come again.”

He left and never came back. But for other youths these classes continued for 2 years. There are some videos that show what happened between the Baha’i youths and different teachers who came to convert them. But there was no chance for them to change even one of the youths. On the other hand the youths tried to study Baha’i writings to understand better about Baha’i faith. By the way I was learning how manage my time in that isolated cell with praying, reading, writing, exercising, watching television and washing the clothes, cleaning the cell and bathroom. Five days after New Year holiday in 2009, almost 6 months that I was in prison, one day the guard called me and said:” you can see your family”. I went with him to a place and I saw my parents were waiting for me, we could huge, kiss and touch each other after 6 months. At first my mother hugged and kissed me and then my father but he couldn’t control him and cried I also cried, my mother hugged both of us and said:” we are proud of you my dearest Raha and your father missed you”. For 10 mints we were with each other but four guards also were there and looked at us, nevertheless my parents told me some news about Baha’i world. When I returned to my cell I was full of positive energy and joy. After 6 months the Islamic court let us go out free for vacation for five days. I couldn’t believe. My God I couldn’t believe I was out and my parents were waiting for me, we hugged and went home. After 6 months I could see again the city, trees, sun, people who run everywhere to do their work.

Every day many friends used to come to visit me to tell me how they were continuing the way of service by working for people in NGO's. During these days one time we had a call from a person who was an army lower for the supreme clergy man in Shiraz who was conducting Friday pray. My father told me that he was trying to have a meeting with him and ask him to search about the fact, if in our activity has been any teaching of Baha'i faith and his secretary suggested seeing the army lower who worked for the supreme clergy man in Shiraz. Incidentally the army lower called my father to meet my father when I was in break time. My father and I met him and again I explained about our activity and he asked me about our goal, if we didn't want to teach Baha'i faith. I said: "how he and others think that we teach Baha'i faith when nobody knows about Baha'i faith in the locations. Even our Muslim colleagues who worked with us in this activity did not know about our religion." He did not reply and said: "you know when I was young I was full of energy to change the Shah system and worked as a rebel but my brother advised me that: "don't spoil your time and life for this kind of aim go and continue your study and be a good and calm citizen ".then he pointed me and said: "you did something against the government so they gave you imprisonment". I put another question and said: "if everybody did like you never Islamic revolution happened in Iran and you never became as a soldier of Islamic government, further more our activity wasn't against the government because the Muslim youths who were involved in this activity released in first day after arresting so there should be another reason." He didn't say anything and promised that: "I will go to the one of the location that activity was conducting and will make a report and will send to the supreme clergy man." We thanked him for such a helpful reaction and my father hoped that by this report everything would be clear. Before five days break finished my father asked for another five days from the Islamic court and they accepted. So I had time to think how I could make my imprisonment to be more useful and amusing. One of my friends suggested writing some Baha'i prayers on my t-shirt thus take them to the prison to memories them. I listened to the advice and for next 6 months I had a lot of prayers to memorize. Also I chose around 20 to be brought to me in the coming weeks by my parents when they came to visit me every week.

All of them were sociology books also I asked BIHE to let me study Politics Module and they allowed me. I remember I was full of energy and plan for improve myself when I returned to prison. Since the first day of being in prison the Baha'i girl who was sentenced by government for four years was with me. We had different experiences along together. After some months I

decided to ask the head of prison to make us separate .I found it was very complicated to live with her and it was more challenging than being alone. Prison staff wouldn't accept very easy but finally we were in separate cells. It was the 2008 new presidential election and since many were unhappy about the results and though they were cheated on, there were street demonstrations and riots that ended up with some bloodshed and many arrests of the green movement members.

One night the guard brought a young girl to my cell. She was 22 years old. When she saw me she started crying and said that after 20 days she was seeing a person. She told me that she was an engineering university student and she was from south of Iran. Her family didn't know that she was arrested and she was very worried. I hugged her and tried to comfort her, and I sent her to take a shower and gave her a clean shirt .She told me that during these days she never put off her shoes even at night and she didn't take shower and all the time she kept her scarf. She said that she was scared of guards and other men in this prison to harass or rape her. I was listening to the news when she came out from the bathroom and she started to dance, I could see how much she had become happy and relaxed with me. I shared my dinner and explained to her that nobody in this prison had sexually harassed me since I was there and I mentioned that even they respected me.

Then she asked me why I was there and I explained. She was surprised and couldn't believe. She was very keen to know about the Baha'i faith. We had a long conversation full of questions and answers about Islam and Baha'i faith, the purpose of life, social movement, revolution and whatever happened in Iran after election till early morning. She was with me for almost one week when another girl came. Both of them knew each other and were excited to see each other. The new girl was very different. She was talking to guard very loudly when she came to cell and finished her sentences with this:" I am in food strike unless u release me". When the door was closed, she started to change her dress and explain how she came to prison. It seemed it was not her first time. She said that the intelligence service called her a few days ago and asked her to deliver herself to them. She said there was a plan for a big student demonstration against the newly elected president and the supreme religious leader Ayatullah Khameneei and the intelligence service arrested many to control the function. I found her smart. She was very young but full of idea for changing the government. And the funny thing about her was she told the guard that she would be in food strike but she had dinner.

We had different social views but we all shared the same view about our goals to provide democracy, social welfare, justice, and human rights for people. She explained to me about the protests, resistance and proceedings that happened by Green Movement especially the role of women even old women in recent events. She told me a story about the dorm of university of Shiraz. She said that there was a huge protest by students when the army opened fire on them and many of them got wounded more over when the ambulance came to took them to hospital none of them accepted to go with them , because they knew that from the hospital they would get arrested by the intelligence service . So the medical students help injured students and refused the help of the ambulance so they left.

She told that on the day of the big demonstration, a student tore the large photo of Supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Khameneei which was been hanging in front of the gate of the Shiraz university. One night another lady joined us and she was a middle aged woman, and she was emanating something that we three girls became suspicious of her intentions. She didn't say anything and asked for a place to sleep. I offered my place and I remember that those days the weather was very cold and all of us had to cuddle up to get warm in a small place. Later on we discovered who really was her .she told me that her brother was killed by the government. At first all of us thought that her brother was one of the political activists but she said that her brother was a person who smuggled goods, drugs and weapons and he has killed some of the member of the army during the clashes they had with each other.

She explained that the intelligent service arrested her because they thought she knew the hiding place of drugs and weapons. When she told me the name of her killed brother, I remembered that he was living in one the poor areas which I used to go there for social activity. I told her my story and she was shocked and said she couldn't believe that one could be in prison because of helping others. Her presence between us was very valuable because she was different and by her we understood better the meaning of life, because she always talked about her kids and family and the love story of her married life. Not too long after she joined us we had another girl she was a Christian recently converted from Islam. She was full of energy for teaching us Christianity. She said that her husband and another couple who were new Christians are also in custody.

Then I could guess what was happening outside of prison when I look at the new mixture of inmates In fact the government was in a big trouble and the events of the first years of revolution were somehow repeating. The government arrested all the people with charges of activity against

the Islamic regime. During that time a group of Baha'i people also was arrested including seven persons who were top directors of Baha'i community in Iran. And at the same time the government ordered that all the Baha'i activities must be stopped and is considered as illegal and against the regime. Most of those Baha'i friends had been given four to five year's imprisonment and the seven Baha'i directors were given 20 years prisoner³¹. Many letters from the human rights activists and Baha'i administrations in other countries were sent to the high ranking officials to release the Baha'i friends.

I remember whenever I had a temporary release from prison to meet my parents ,inspired by the international activist who worked for the Iranian Bahá'í prisoners, I decided to spend my time to visit the high ranking government agents such as Ayattollah Khameneei(The supreme religious leader), Mr. Ahmady neghad(The newly elected president), The Islamic parliament members, the national security council, ministry of foreign affairs, ministry of information, attorney general, vice president, the head of judiciary, representative of the Islamic human rights,...

So During my next home visit I told my parents that I decided to meet some high ranking officials to talk to them about the situation of Baha'i friends in prison and ask for the establishment of prison rights for them. My parents got worried asking .I traveled to Tehran and one of my friends also joined me for this affair. We wore black chador and I wrote letters addressed to different persons or organizations which I decided to meet them. I couldn't meet the right person, but instead I was allowed to meet their deputies. Some of them listened to me and accepted the letter but at the same time they said:"Baha'i people don't have any social, economical, political educational rights, why you are coming here? Why are you asking about the prison rights? Your request will be submitted to the Islamic court Go there." It was very interesting that the supreme leader and the president deputies both answered me the same. Some organizations like national Security Council, ministry of foreign affairs they wanted to help, I had a Prolonged and important discussion about the situation of Baha'i community and Baha'i friends who were in prison especially about the seven Baha'i directors which up to that time they didn't have any chance to meet their family.

I remember both of the national Security Council, ministry of foreign affairs supported all the demands and said if there was any chance to talk about the Baha'i community rights they would

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support. But they asked me to go to the Supreme Court and try to meet the head. It was very interesting because when we were in the Supreme Court office, he didn't want to talk to us directly and we had communication through his secretary. When I asked for meeting the Supreme Court and talking to him directly he told us by his secretary that he had to go for obligatory pray and there was no time so he said: "may be tomorrow". In the end when we wanted to leave his secretary was surprised to understand that I was a prisoner and in my break time I went there and demanded for the rights of Baha'i community.

Even they didn't reply to our phone call next day but I was sure that they were affected by the letter and discussion. My next visit was to see the people in the Islamic Human Rights Society. I and a friend of mine, met the society depute and we had a long conversation. He claimed that no ones from the Baha'i community or the prisoner's families sent any email or letter to ask about the rights or complain about the poor situation that they are in. He knew very well about me and my friends who were in prison in Shiraz and also he knew about the seven directors but he said that they had just one letter from a Baha'i family. The Islamic parliament and ministry of information didn't accept to meet us and said that we had to submit our letter to the office and if there was any answer they would call us. I was full of ideas to work not only for the rights of Baha'i community but for all the minorities and people who were arrested by government because of their social or political activities.

I spend my last days break with my parents and family and again that time also I prepared some books and deposit to my mother to bring for me every week. Also I meet many new Baha'i converts who accepted Baha'i faith during these intricate times for Baha'i community in Iran. It was an inspiring motivating experience for me to meet and talk to them. Among them I meet a young clergy man in my age who accepted Baha'i faith a year ago and he was shunned by his family and had lost his job and was expelled from his college because of his conversion from Islam. He came to meet me and we had wonderful times together, we studied some Baha'i writings. He and his friends also asked me to study with them one the Ruhi books that they hadn't chance to study it yet. So we decided to go to their city and stay for three days at their home and we studied from early morning to late night. I came back to my home and with many ideas and hopes returned to prison.

When I came back there were two Christian girls and that lady who was detained to get to her brother in my cell. I found them very skinny and sad. The two girls told me that after I left the

other two students got released after 2-3 days and a new girl who was recently converted to Christianity joined them. They explained how they were detained with no lawyer and no trial .It took them one month to be summoned for interrogation and later I heard that they converted back to Islam and denied to be a Christian and thus were released. They were bailed out, but then were detained again. They were moved to another prison and I used to pray for them. Strangely enough, later I heard one of them narrated that she could see my phantom at the exact time I was praying for her. I remember when we were in the same cell with those two Christian new converts; we had long discussion about the holy Quran and Gospel further how both of them wanted to prove to me that Mohammad prophet and Quran was a fake prophet. I tried hard to convince them that their previous religion was not fake and as horrible as they were told, but they wouldn't accept. For example one night again they started To sell me their faith and I said that without Bible our discussion was useless so it was better that they asked the guard to give them the book .they asked and surprisingly the interrogator accepted to give them the Bible. So one of them who passed all the training to teach other Muslims o become Christian read some parts of the holy book and explained that Mohammad was the sham prophet. I didn't say anything till a thought came to my mind.

I asked that if they believed in the holy book so we could put this question in the holy book and ask to it to reply to us if God can change His promise or not? Because they believed that God couldn't change His promise, when He said that Messiah will come again, as He came before he will come in the same body, so in this case Mohammad is sham prophet. Both of them accepted and they prayed to Maria and asked her to show the right part of holy book that the answer was there. It was an interesting time, when one of them opened the Bible, there was a story about David that one time a man had a dream and in his dream God told him that he will die in three days. So he asked David to help him because he was responsible for his family and if he died there would have been no one to look after them. David advised him to pray and asked God to change His decision. The poor man prayed for three days and at the last night he had another dream that God gave him chance to live more to take care of his family.

After the story both of them were in silent, I broke the silent and said that this story showed us that God can do anything. But they didn't accept and said no this story is different and Messiah will come with angles on a cloud. I was upset that how much they were brain washed. I told them that it was enough to discuss Islam and Christianity and I took the book and gave it back to

the guard and told them:" it seems you refused the Bible too as you refused Mohammad without any strong reason, the story was clear but you want to think freely. If you want to follow your imaginations and interpretations so there is no need for you to read this book." They didn't say anything and after that we never talk about any religion again.

When Those two Christian girls were placed in to another prison, I and that lady who was detained for her brother and me lived closer for one more week and I had chance to listen to her experiences and life stories and as a sociologist it was a golden opportunity to listen to different social classes . She described about her life how it was different before marriage and after that, about her relationship with her dead husband and her daughters and only son. She told me many stories about her killed brother that even he was a drug and guns smuggler but him always help poor people in deprived areas. She said that poor people recognized him as Rabin hood and loved him because he financially supported many girls helped to get marry and many to initiate a job by giving or lending them money.

She told me for many years government wanted to arrest him but each time he could kill some of them and run away. In fact she knew his hiding place, but she kept quiet and resisted to give any information to authorities. Later intelligence office called for her son too and said:"we need your sign to release your mother". The innocent son trusted the authorities and came to release his mother but they put him in to the jail Too to talk about his uncles' hiding place. Finally the interrogator found all the information about the place of guns and drugs and money that were hidden by her brother. After they took that lady to another jail, I became alone in my cell and I followed my plan for studying, practicing art ,pray and fortunately I had Baha'i books as well (after first time that I wrote Baha'i pray on my t- shirt and took it to prison ,for the next time I printed Baha'i books in very small fonts and folded and put them in my shoes and took them to the prison) ,also I started to write my experiences, feelings ,thoughts and memories in prison and whenever I was off to home, I took them out by putting in my shoes or my socks. It was illegal and if the guards were founding the Baha'i books and my notes, I don't know what would happen to me.

Once had many note notes and I didn't know how I could carry them out, when I had my parents as weekly visitors, I put a note book in my dress and when I hugged my mother I went to her I whispered in her ears that I put a note book inside under your chador please hold it and take it out. She did it but was freaking out. She tried to keep her demeanor but I knew that in those five

mints personal visit how much she was worried. I really was worried about the consequences too. A week later my mother mentioned that nothing happened and it was a relief for me. On another occasion I sent out around 60 pages by one of the woman who was with me for few weeks. I put my notes inside her big over coat.

My writings were very important for me because I did many researches I had written many created stories for teaching spiritual concepts to children and I had composed some poems that for first time in my life came to me. For two years I was alone, I knew that the situation of government after election was getting worse and many groups of people demanded for radical social changes. Every day I could hear that new people were arrested and came to the intelligence office for interrogation. Almost after one year again I had some different girls in my cell .Most of them arrested during the protest against the last presidential elections. I remember two sisters who were arrested and one by one came to my cell. One of them was with me for two nights and another one for two week. They supported a protest plan for respecting the Cyrus the Great, the legendary King of Persia (600BC) who released Jews from Babylon and sent them to the holy land and was so respectful of human rights, then.

They described that there was a peaceful protest out of Shiraz near the tomb of Cyrus the Great to celebrate human rights in the response to the violation of their votes by the government. But before anybody could to the place the security guard was there and arrested the people who came who were coming for the gathering. The two sisters were arrested in this way .one of them was very worried because she afraid of losing her job but fortunately she was released after two days but the another one remained with me for more days .I remember I taught the first one a Baha'i pray and she used to recite it all the time because she felt relaxed.

The second sister was younger, she talked very rarely but she wanted to know about the reason that I was in prison and about Baha'i faith. As I Secretive practice the art she also asked me to teach her then she began practicing too. Then she asked my home phone number and when she was released she called my mother and visited her also both of sisters met me when I was in break time. Another girl who was arrested as a political activist, was an actress in theater and with the rest of acting group, they wanted to play a story about freedom. She was with me for two or three weeks .she shared all her life story with me ,she was very special .I saw her when I was released in turkey ,she got married with one of the guys who was in their group and run away from the country because constant threat by the security office .

She told me many stories about the people who were not happy with the new election and they believed that the government stolen their votes. She belonged to the “Green Movement”. She described how different groups of young, women, political parties, and students... tried to announce to general public and to world of how the elections were manipulated and the votes were stolen but most of them arrested and many of their activities were stopped. After her I had some different women and young girls who got arrested because they were conversion from Islam to Christianity and most of them were forced to write that they made mistake and they were Muslim. One of them was a lady who was American and she was arrested with her husband who converted to Christianity around 10 years ago and few months ago came to Iran from America to teach Christianity to Iranian people.

Through her I understood that there were some Christian missionary organization in and out of Iran which is very active in teaching and converting Muslims to Christianity. The converted individual was offered a well paid missionary job. Thus there was a financial incentive for conversion. So it became clear to me, why a large group of different social classes of Iranian people joined to them. The newly converts were happy together because they had begun a new social life full of love, helping, friendship, study groups and praying, none of which they had in their previous Islamic community.

But for the government all these organizations were a threat to the new revolution. I remember one of the woman, was from a poor family and she arrested along with her husband and her daughter, all of them was new converts. Her daughter got released after one day imprisonment because she was 14 years old. So after few days the security office asked them for bail, but the couple didn't have that much money so the husband said:” please release my wife because we have kids and I stay here”. The security office didn't accept but after a week they released both of them guessed because they knew that that family couldn't pay the bail. Obviously it was very difficult for many families to pay the bail. In Baha'i community some friends help other in these occasions. After one year and half the security guide accepted that I could have a mattress so my family brought a mattress and pillow with blanket sheet for me. I still have bone pain because of the cold concrete floor that I had to sleep on for 1.5 years.

During 2006-2010 I had regular off prison home visits time every three or four months. The seven Baha'i friends who were the directors of the Baha'i community of Iran were still in prison for almost one year and their situation had become better because after a year of solitary

confinement, with no family visitation opportunities, they were shifted to Evin public cell, where they were with 30 inmates in a 20 by 40 meters room. They could meet their family regularly every week in one of my home visit, I decided to go and meet The Baha'i directors in Evin prison... So I called one of the family and asked when would be the next meeting .she told me it was tomorrow but nobody called them from the security guard to go there for meeting, more over she and other families were worried because of the political situation of country after election and all the issues happened, specially that last week in the national TV there was a interview which showed how some political activists who were active in social and political changes and were arrested few weeks ago, appearance in media to show their sorry and excuse to the supreme leader, state and people.

None the less she suggested me that I could travel to Tehran and went to her house and joined them to go to prison because they decided to go there even the security didn't call them. Then I traveled at night and I arrived to her house early morning, I could feel who much this family were worried. This family and other families called each other to know if there was any call from prison for visiting their dears who were in prison. Finally they decided to go and asked directly from the security, if there was any cause that they didn't call them and asked for their right. I was with them behind the big gate of prison and looked very carefully. I saw many families who came to visit their daughter, son, husband, wife, mother, father.... from different religions, political parties, ethics....Some of them were very worried and some were sad and some were calm.

Some Baha'i families went to the office of prison to ask what should they did, but they didn't get any proper answer, the officers told them :”that today is the day that new president formally was introduced to the supreme leader so all the security officer go for the ceremony and they have to call and asked.” So they told them they had to wait if there was any reply for them then they could meet their family. For 4 hours we were waiting till they called us and said that they gave you permission to meet your families. All of us were very happy, the Baha'i families told me that I had to go with them and tried my chance, if they gave me permission to meet the prisoners too. My heart loved to go but my wisdom was stopping me.

I was worried if the security realized who I was and so I said to the families that I didn't come and stayed behind the gate and prayed for them. But they insisted so I went with them and I passed the gate without any one asking me who I was! I thought the guard was very tired so they

ignored to check who I was. But in the next door the security asked ID card and I showed my driving license, he asked who I was? I said that I was a friend who wanted to meet the prisoners. He said that it was not possible so I turned back, in this time one Baha'i called the security guard and said that she came from another city and she was in bus last night ,could you let her meet them ? The security said that it was not possible. Another Baha'i asked again, and then he said I had to ask the senior and took my ID. There was a deep silence between all of us. What would be happen? After while he came back with his senior while my ID card was in his hand, the senior called my name and asked if the ID card was for me, then he gave me permission to pass the door and go to meet the prisoners. All of us were very happy.

All the families offered me to talk to their prisoners first but I refused and said that it was their right to talk first. I couldn't forget their faces when they saw me, they thought I was released but their families explained that I came to meet them and there was a shock, they were not sure why I was given the permission while some of their close relatives could not visit them for months. I remember the last man I wanted to meet was the eldest one. When I came in front of him he just looked at me and his tears came down. Both of us put our hands on the glass and just cried; a guard called me. Everyone became worried; I went to him while I tried to clean my tears. He asked me very softly that why I was crying? And I said that I missed them and I didn't look at him. He said these people had never cried, you made them cry, you should talk to them instead of crying. Went back and this time I talked to all of them about my situation and they explained to me about their situation.

It was so comforting for me when one the Baha'i lady told me that in tough lonely moments she had remembered me that I was in single cell. When the bell was ringing, the smart phones disconnected, we had to leave. All the prisoners stood up and walked to the exit door while they were shaking their hands with a nice smile and all of us behind the glass looked them and shaking our hands while they disappeared. After 5 days I came back to prison I was full of energy to continue my life in prison. That time a woman was staying with me for one month. She was arrested with her husband, son and three persons. She was an opium addict, but with no drugs in prison, she had a terrible time for the first week.

So for at least one week she was hangover until she became better. She told me that she was a member of a drug dealing band whose job was to escort the opium caravan which smuggled opium from Pakistan to Turkey through Iran. She was my age but physically so strong and

experienced. She told me her life story and it was full of ups and down. One night after a long Police interrogation for 10 hours, she cried and said that she became tired and was worried about her second son who was 8 years old and was with her in law. She asked me to pray for her to become released. I asked her that why she didn't pray? And she replied for many years she didn't pray, so God wouldn't listen to her demand. I convinced her that if she prayed even she wouldn't get released but she became relax. She accepted and asked the guard to bring her a pray book and surprisingly the guard brought it very quickly. Then she asked me to find a pray which was for releasing from the prison. I told her if she was sure that there was that kind of pray and she said:"I heard about this pray please check "

It was a thick book and took more time for me to find a pray she asked .finally I found the pray and when I read it I found that for accepting the pray there was some steps. She had to wash her body and did ablution then she had to take four postures like the one Muslims take in their night pray and finally chant the special pray for getting released from the prison. It was a special pray which the seventh Imam of Shiite sect used to chant when He was in prison. She did it with all the ritualistic steps. She was sure that the next day she would be free. I had my doubts but did not say anything

.I was listening to the news when she called me and said that:" I think that I didn't ablution" .so she said that she would do all the ritualistic steps again. The weather was cold so I said that it wasn't important that she didn't just one step, God would accept her pray. But she didn't accept and she did all the ritualistic steps .Then she slept and was sure even more than before that she would be free the next day. The next day she woke up early morning and had her breakfast and asked me to weave her hair to become beautiful when her son would see her. I was doing whatever she asked me but I didn't believe that she would be free. She asked me when usually prisoners would be released, I told her usually between 1 to 2 pm. She told me about her dreams when she went back to home, she wanted to cook for her son some his favorite foods and cookies and take him to park and play with him. She promised herself to take after him more than before and became more kind to him.

After lunch she was sleeping and I was listening to the news when the guard called her for releasing. She wore her chador precipitant and hugged and thanked me for everything and left. Still I was shocked and couldn't believe what I witnessed. There was a good lesson to me it was not matter who pray but pray should be with sincere trust. the Court asked me to write a letter to

ask for forgiveness to the security minister and Islamic court and I didn't accept as I said and wrote that I didn't do anything wrong so I wouldn't write a plea letter to ask for forgiveness. The Islamic court released the two other Baha'i youth who were in prison like me after almost two years because they wrote the pardon letter.

When I came for my next home visit off the prison, there was a big argument among my Baha'i friends of whether I should write a pardon paper. They asked that why I didn't release and when I explained, they told me that the two youth Baha'i told them that there was a rule for prisoners that they used it. And they explained to me that the rule was if a prisoner passes half of his/her term she/he can release. In fact the rule was for prisoners who wrote a pardon. There were some Baha'i friends encourage the two Baha'i youth to write the pardon letter but when I refused to do it, it became as a challenge for them as well as the youth and their family. I remember how much gossips was made around this event which suffered me and my family; finally we stopped to explain what happened but the two Baha'i youth and their family wrote a letter and spread it through online and explain that they didn't write pardon letter!

It was very painful for me to digest whatever happened but I cooled myself by seeing how both of these youths were happy and healthy more than before and one of them got engaged after one month and the other one went to a long trip for two months. It was the third Persian New Year that I was in prison; the security guard called me and said that I had break time for 10 days. It was really joyful; I knew how much my parents were happy because the last two New Year eves they were alone behind the prison gates, crying and weeping while I was inside my cold lonely cell. I spent 10 days with my parents, family and friends and it was really good. One day one of my close friends invited me for lunch to his house. He invited a new believer family as well to have a good time with us. They described and why they accepted the faith. I was enjoying their company when the wife asked her husband to see my palm and tell me about my future.

He asked me if I believe or not and I said that I would be happy if he told me something about my future but for sure I couldn't believe. He said that he would tell me about my character and my health situation and not about my future. It was interesting when he told me that I suffered from an illness since I was kid and I had to be very careful of it because it might knockout me. When I went home I asked my parents if I had any serious illness when I was kid and surly they said NO. I went back to prison after 10 days but a day after that at noon when I had finished my lunch and lied down and reading a book, suddenly I felt a strong pain in my tummy and I

couldn't move. Too soon I felt Nauseated and couldn't get up .The pain was terrible I couldn't call the guard,

It was evening around eight o'clock when the guard brought me dinner, he was surprised why I didn't go to the door to take the food and thank him. So he called me and said that if I was ok? I told him that I was not ok and couldn't move, he asked me if he could come to the cell and look at me. I accepted, when he saw me immediately left the door open and as he was saying to me that I shouldn't worry, he said that he was going to call the ambulance. When he came back he said that there was no ambulance so the head of prison said that they would take me to hospital by his car. He helped me to wear my clothes and shoes and took my hand and helped me to walk. It was in a strong pain as I couldn't stand so as I was bending I tried to walk toward the car. They took me to the army hospital and when the doctor examined he told them that the appendix ruptured and she had to do surgery.

But he mentioned that I was not in a good shape so it was better to call my parents, I was in pain but I could realize that in a few mints they call somewhere and then they asked me to give them my home phone. When I gave them I asked:”please talk to my mother and don't talk to my father because he becomes ready to go to hospital tomorrow for cardiac surgery and he is not in a good situation to hear about me.” After few minutes I heard my mother voice that called my name and when I looked her I saw my father, mother and sister were in front of me and were very worried. Immediately I said that they shouldn't worry I was ok. But all evidences showed that I was not. The security guard asked my parents to sign a paper which gave would allow them to take me to surgery room. My father talked to the doctor and explained that her daughter was not a killer or smuggler and a Baha'i and teacher but taught poor children in poor areas and because of that she was in prison.

Suddenly the attitude of the doctor changed and he said that it was better to take her to another hospital because they didn't have Gynecologist more over he called for a public hospital and informed them that an urgent patient would come and asked them to help. Again there was no ambulance so the doctor told my father that he shouldn't wait and it was better to take me by his car. The next hospital after all examinations said that it was not appendix and it was internal bleeding, and surgery should who done as soon as possible and they mentioned that the surgery rooms in that hospital was not empty so they took me by ambulance to another hospital. Later that my family told me that how much in that hospital when they realized why I was in prison all

the personal tried to help me and how much their behavior were respectful and apologetic more over some doctors apologized because of all the persecutions and suffered that my family had . Finally at midnight I went to surgery room for almost three hours .My parents stayed at hospital and when I came to I saw them that were calling my name. I spent five days in hospital and during these days I made a good communication with all patients, doctors, nurses and even families who came for visiting other patients didn't have hesitate to talk about my story and why I was in prison. Some of them knew about my story and I did not hesitate to others would express surprise that why this kind of activities were not acceptable by government and question why they had me in solitary confinement for so long for no crime! At the same time my father also was in hospital so my poor mother should be both sites.

When my father came home he was very weak and he needed special caring. My aunt came to our house to help my mother to take care of two patients. After one week I was better with help of my sister and my mother went to court to show the surgery paper to ask for break time, because the doctor wrote for at least 45 days rest at home. The court signed my letter for 45 days break and it was a golden time for me to be at home with my parents especially with my father who was worried about me. I remember the last meeting when he came to visit me in prison he was very sick as he couldn't stand on his feet and he told me that doctors told him that there was no way for him except cardiac surgery. Though internal bleeding was a shock for my family but there was a divine reason behind of that. When I came back to the prison though I was very weak ,the head of prison asked me if I needed more rest and I said no. he asked me two times and assure me that I could go for a few days more if I felt pain.

As always I began to clean my cell and organize my books and writings and started to read, write and practice the art of illumination, memorizing and meditation the verses of Baha'i writings which I took them to prison hidden off. I was in this prison alone for 3 years and four months when one day the Interrogator called me and told me that they shifted me to another prison and asked me if I wanted to write a pardon plea letter and mentioned if I wrote the letter the same day they would release me. Again I refused to write the letter and he told me that I had to pack my staff and be ready for going to another prison. After one hour the security guard took me to a prison which was the women's prison in Shiraz. After almost four hours the head of the prison didn't accept me and said that he didn't have any place to keep me so he sent me to Adel Abad prison which was familiar to me.

When I passed the big gate, I remembered my childhood when I used to come here every week to visit my grandfather, aunt and uncle who were arrested by government in first years after revolution because they were part of Baha'i organization in Shiraz. I recalled all my memories about those years, when my aunt who was 24 years old and was one of the ten Baha'i women who were executed by the government in one night. My grandfather passed away one week after my aunt because of diabetes. My uncle had death penalty with forty Baha'i friends because they were Baha'is who didn't want to convert to Islam but, all of them along other political prisoners suddenly without any reason which was given by government they got released after two years of imprisonment Now I was there and I could feel that all the walls carried many stories from those days from the people who played very important role in history of Baha'i faith in Shiraz. The security guard left me and found myself alone among the officers who were men. One of them called a female officer to check my bag and my body to sure that I didn't have any forbidden objects, and then a soldier took me to a hidden place which was dark and very cold.

Part three: hidden prison

While I was incarcerated in Intelligence prison in Shiraz, I was in solitary confinement for forty months; they Gave me an option to write a "forgiveness plea" and get released to write Forgiveness plea and when I declined the offer for reason of not being guilty, they sent me to Adel Abad Prison in Shiraz, for 8 months, to spend the rest of my commendation. Adel Abad prison was for men containing 4,000 male inmates, but there was a "hidden" prison for the troublemaking women (those sentenced to life imprisonment or death penalty. During those eight months my cell was an old kitchen .In that 6 square meter room there were 11 other female inmate .they were murderers, smugglers, arms and drug dealers. There was a concrete floor with one small mat; a large part of the roof was missing so it was a way to experience outside prison cold and hot weather and mosquito s and mouse and lice.

there was also no shower, no proper plumbing in the bathroom, no warm water, no hygiene supplies, no food or drinking water for the first three days, not enough blankets for all and only one dim light bulb. However, the guard used to illegally supply women with drugs (heroin, crystal Methamphetamine and opium). After three days, they brought eight cooked turnips to share. At this time, I wrote a letter to the prison warden describing the conditions of the cell, and

said that if he had no regards for the rights of the prisoners, at least he should respect the human rights of the people in the prison. I gave the letter to a guard to deliver it, but he discouraged me against the warden's fury because I would be severely punished by the warden. However, I insisted and he did deliver it. That evening I was called to the warden's office, was taken there handcuffed accompanied by a guard. The warden asked what this nonsense was that I had written, and I invited him to come and see with his own eyes. He asked me why I was incarcerated, and I explained about my activities, and that I was a Baha'i. He then asked the guard to retrieve my file – which was only one sheet of paper!

He asked some questions to confirm what was on the paper. He said that on the sheet it is written that I was a spy, and Muslim converted to Christianity. I replied that was untrue. He then showed me the sheet of paper. I read at the bottom a note that I was to be banned from contact or speaking to anyone. He then asked if the Baha'is accept Islam and Quran. I replied that they do. He then asked me questions about Baha'i beliefs and activities. He asked why we believed there was someone after Mohammed, and I replied that it was in Quran. He asked me to show him in his copy of the Quran, which I did. From that point we had an hour long conversation and I saw that his demeanor was changing and softening. He then went for the ritual of his obligatory prayer and then he came with me to see the conditions of my cell. The next day they installed a shower, repaired the plumbing, and covered the hole in the roof. They provided one shampoo and one bar of soap to share; provided additional blankets, washed the old ones and provided drinking water. All of the other women were illiterate. I therefore used to write letters on their behalf requesting pardons, medical attention and for prisoner rights.

Within a few days of my coming to this prison, a fight broke out among the other women over a small piece of opium, making such noise that the guards entered and started beating these women with batons, and then took all of the women with handcuffs and leg chains for drug testing, body search and interrogation. I got emotional and wept. A guard asked me why there were tears on my face when they were beating other women. I said: "my heart is broken by seeing this event because I couldn't believe why I am here between such a messes." Then he asked about my charge and I explained. He heard about me so had believed that I was innocent in that event he exempted me from the interrogation, drug testing and body search. I watched as ten of the women tested positive for narcotics and was sentenced to 30 back lash strokes. I spoke up

despite my tears, and asked if they could be given the opportunity to quit – and if they were unsuccessful then the punishment could be carried out.

They refused my request, however the warden walked in at that point and he asked what was going on, and asked me what I was saying. I repeated my request and he said:” No, they had been given many opportunities for rehabilitation but they started all over again.” After much begging from women the warden agreed to give them one week to quit but if they would not come clean, they would receive 30 back lash strokes. No medical assistance was provided for these women to quit. I took care of these women, tried to feed and bathe them and after one week they were retested. Six of the women were clean, and the others didn’t pass the test, but they hadn’t been taking anything – just had too much drugs still in their systems. The punishment wasn’t carried out. in the coming weeks, those women began fighting with each other because they were drug free and more alert had nothing to engage themselves with .I wrote another letter to the warden suggesting that if they could provided some kind of job opportunities to keep them busy. The warden asked what kind of work, and I suggested that they start a sewing workshop.

This was approved after 3 weeks. They started to take us out of the room for 3 days, and when we returned the entire room had changed. The walls were painted, there were sewing tables, machines, benches, cutting tables, lights over every table, sewing supplies, materials and a pants pattern. We were asked to make 20 pairs of pants in one week. Many of the women did not know how to use the machines, so I divided Sewing task according to their skills and capabilities, after that week, the warden approved and ordered us to make 20 pairs of pants for sell. After a few weeks the number was increased to 50 pairs of pants. I discovered that when prisoners produced things that were sold, they were eligible for an allowance. I wrote again to the warden and requested that this be made available to us.

I also requested a small refrigerator, air conditioning and a small hot plate and a television. These were accepted and got provided. (To have these items were the right of every inmate according to prison law.) I learned very much about managing people, dividing work, how to work with individual talents and how to point out errors and correct them. I learned some project management skills for how to begin, develop and Finish a project successfully. I also learned how to manage people who did not always get along, and how to help them communicate amongst themselves better. In the next coming months little by little, the attitude of the officials towards these women began to change. They showed a bit more respect towards the female

inmates. I gradually began to realize why and how women would not like to ask for their needs and rights as they used to see nobody would listen and respect their wishes and they wanted to be safe from punishment and sexual harassment in prison. So they were silent against the violence and injustice in their various forms. I was denied to have books to read as I used to do in previous jail compound, Instead I started to listen to the story of women and decided to write them .it was interesting because women wanted to talk about themselves and their tough life and devastating life events. So when I asked them to talk to me, they accepted full heartedly and that was a good opportunity to write and save these stories for my memorabilia notes.

Story life of some women in this prison which was narrated by them:

Afsaneh Alhani

My name is Afsaneh. I am 33 years old and charged with drug trafficking. I have been given a death sentence with life imprisonment. I have already served 6 years in prison.

I want to tell my story so you know how I got here and why:

I was 2 years old when my parents divorced. My little sister was killed by my stepmother, so I grew up with my stepmother's kids. I always remember being beaten up like a ball. My father was a blacksmith, so he worked all the time.

I left home because I wanted to save myself from the beatings but my father came and took me home again. I worried about telling my father that my half sisters and brother were beating me.

My stepmother died from cancer. When I was 6 years old my father sold everything for her treatment. At that time we did not have anything and we were really poor so we moved to another city.

After one year my father married a 14 year old girl (him being a 42 year old man). My 14 year old mother was a Madam and I knew that. Since the age of 8 my job was begging in the streets and my new mother also beat me. So after a year she became friends with my cousin and they concocted a plan for me. My cousin and I got married when I was 9 and he was 18 years old. I remember at first my father saying: she is too young, so we will have a wedding party after a year. However, after 3 months they started to nag and pressurize me so we got married. I remember they bought me a pink wedding dress and we did not have anything else like photos or jewels or anything else.

We lived in a shed. For the first three nights my husband was impotent and the whole family

knew. My mother in law gave my mother a lock³² and said they were under a spell that is why my husband could not have sex but my stepmother did not accept that. So my husband's female relatives bound my hands and opened my legs and bound me to the bed. My husband raped my virginity with his finger and took a piece of cotton with blood on it and gave it to his family. It was very painful and I was in bed for 2 days.

After 2 weeks, one day, I was alone in the shed and my stepmother and my sister in law came and took me to a strange house. There were some men and women there. At first I did not understand what they wanted but then the owner came over to me and told me, "You are here to have sex with them". She showed me the men with her finger and they all laughed at me. I was shocked. She told me what should I do and took me to one room and left. A man came to the room and I could not do anything. He became very angry and left the room. That lady came back and this time she was very angry and shouted and abused me and beat me. Then she left. Later another man came and I had a very bad experience. The truth is my sister in law was selling me for sex. Going to this house became my routine.

Every day my sister in law took me to the house and I had sexual relations with the men and in the afternoon my sister in law came and collected the money from the lady and returned me to the shed. One day I decided to commit suicide so I drunk a cup of opium tea. When my husband's family found me in that situation they took me to my father's home and I told my brother everything. My brother told me that I had to stay there and not to go back and told my father the entire story. My father became angry and fought with my brother and said, "What is the difference between this girl and others?" Then he beat me and said, "Go back home and do whatever they want and do not come back again and do not talk about your story to anybody again."

I returned and my sister in law and stepmother took me to another house and gave me to truck drivers and they had sex with me during their journeys and took me to another city and gave me to other drivers and ...at that time I was 13 years old.

My husband never said anything when I came back home. He just asked me for the money. I

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-it is a superstitious belief .on the night of wedlock the groom must be show a bloody handkerchief to his family ,it means the bride had virgin. So because they couldn't mother in law told they are under a spell. That show nobody is guilty.

was 15 when I decided to work for myself and collect my own money. So now I knew where I had to go and knew about the men who wanted sex. Sometimes I called them and sometimes they called me and I went to their place and gave them sexual favors and...

I was 18 years old and I had so much money and gold. I had a good life but suddenly I became very sick and was at home for 4 months. During this time nobody took care of me, not even my husband. He brought girls and women to the house and had sex with them and used drugs and drank and I made them food and cleaned the house. One day my husband asked me for money and I told him I did not have any. He became very angry and beat me. I decided to commit suicide but I thought if I die my husband will find another wife so I escaped from the house and went to one of my friend's houses. She took me to another home and told me to stay there. There was an old couple who lived there with their two sons. They accepted me for one week but after one week one of the sons, who was 14 years older than me and had 3 kids (his wife escaped from home), asked me to marry him and I accepted and I did not say anything to him about my husband and my life.

My new husband was a drug offender and dealer. I was still sick and my whole body was in pain but I started to take care of the kids and my new husband's kids liked me. They were a 9 year old girl, and 8 year and 6 year old boys. For nine years I lived with them and we had three kids, another daughter and two sons. So we had six kids at home and I took care of them all. My husband gave me drugs and after some time my addiction grew too strong, so if he did not give me drugs I fought with him. Many times I decided to quit drugs but I couldn't because of my husband. I worried that our kids would also use substance. I begged my husband to quit drugs but he didn't accept. One day I went with the kids to my brother's house and asked him to keep us. We were there for 2 months and during this time my husband was arrested by the police and went to prison for 2 years. So I went to a new home with all the kids but my brother in law came and took all the kids and said their father said they are mine. I couldn't do anything so I gave up. But every week the kids came to my home and for one day they were with me. One time my daughter said that her uncle had sexual harassed her. I became very angry and didn't allow them to return to their uncle's home. I called him and said, "I'll go to the police and write a complaint." This threat caused the kids to stay with me, because he was an offender and scared of the police. But the whole time he abused me and the kids.

I had to take care of the kids and I wasn't qualified to do anything so I started dealing drugs

with one of my friends that I knew from earlier days. I made a good income but it was very dangerous. After 2 years my husband was released and came to me and asked me to forgive him but I didn't accept. I asked for a divorce but he said no we are couple and you have to go back home but I didn't accept and he left. For 2 years our life continued like this. Sometimes he came and asked me to move back in with him and I refused. Finally I was able to get a divorce and under the law their father was not the right person to take care of them so the court gave them to me.

For 10 years he always sent the kids money and came and sometimes spent time with them. Unfortunately 5 years ago one of my brothers in law reported me to police and they arrested me as a drug dealer. At that time they couldn't find any drugs in my home, so I escaped execution but because of some complaints they arrested me and in Court they gave me a 15 year sentence. So my oldest daughter and son took care of the kids and my boyfriend also helped them. I'm here in prison and every day I work in the kitchen. I just passed my 6th year here and I'm waiting to finish my sentence. After I am released I will never commit any offences. I want to have a good life and take care of my daughters. I have a dream for them to finish their school and have a good life. I never want them to live like me. I had a really horrible life and painful experiences. Maybe I will marry my boyfriend.

Soosan keshavarz

I am Soosan and I am 40 years old. I was 12 years old when I married an Afghani man. In fact my uncle sold me for 50000 riyal. I never saw him up to the wedding night. The first day of my marriage I returned to my father's home but they did not accept me and said you have to go back and live with him.

We lived in an aviculture which was dirty and dark. I covered our walls with newspaper. For 2 years we were there and my first daughter was born. My husband was a very angry person, and always beat me, even when I was pregnant. He worked in an aviculture. Our life was very difficult and for me it was worse because I was 13 years old and I had to take care of a kid. Again I got pregnant and this time I decided to abort but I was scared of my husband, so I decided to divorce him but my family did not accept that. My father always worried about divorce and said it is bad in our family.

When my son was born we went to Pakistan and he started to deal drugs. He forced me to hide drugs in my dress or my body and transport them to other places. At that time we made so much

money but I wasn't happy. At last we were arrested by the police and the court gave me a sentence of execution because I had 11 kilos of drugs on me and he was released after 5 years. I have been in prison for 12 years and now he lives in Tehran with our kids and he works as a builder. After 4 years the court changed my sentenced to life imprisonment, because I worked in the prison and I was a good prisoner. 5 years ago we got a divorce. I am really tired. I want to go to home and stay with my father and mother.

Most of the time I want to beat my head against the wall. Since I was 12 years old I have always been in bad and difficult situations. Can you believe I have never even smoked but because of my husband I even went as far as nearly being executed?

Maryam Ghatei

My name is Maryam and I am 35 years old. I have 2 kids, a son and daughter. I was charged for using drugs. My sentence is one year and 60 lashes. My husband is a truck driver. He also used to use drugs but he always travelled. My neighbors complained to the police and one day the police came to my home and arrested me with the drugs. My father and mother take care of my kids and I'm happy because I'm sure that they are in a safe place.

I want to tell you what has been happening to me for the past 5 months that I have been here. On the first day the women prisoners asked me to take all my clothes off, even my underwear. All of them looked at me and checked me for drugs. After that they took me to a small room and told me to sit on my feet and they lashed me. The scars are still on my back. After that they took me to a cell.

There were 16 beds and 24 prisoners, so the oldest prisoners had beds and newer prisoners had to sleep on the floor. You could see many prisoners of different ages, crimes, family structures, and education all together. All the women who are addicted have to pay 15000 riyal to the prison account and in return the prison clinic would give them methadone every day. Every day a long line of women, who want methadone, stand in front of the clinic and they are always fighting with each other.

It is very natural to see some women that don't have money to pay, so they are in so much pain and sometimes because of that they die. Nobody takes care of them. For two cells, where the population reaches 50 – 55 people, there are two bathrooms and toilets. We have just 15 minutes to take a bath and wash our clothes, so if anybody stays more than 15 minutes others

open the door with their foot. Sometimes there is a punishment from the warden for people who stay more than 15 minutes and you can only take a bath 2 times, not more. The schedule in prison is that from 7am all women have to go for some kind of work in the prison. Some of them weave. Carpets some of them work in the kitchen, they clean, they sew and there is a workshop for learning some skills like hairdressing, painting, wood carving, and knitting.

We have lunch at 12 pm but there is not enough food. We only get a small piece of bread with some rice and stew and all the women are always hungry and because of that they are always fighting a lot. From 1 pm to 4 pm is quiet time and nobody can make a sound and then from 4 pm till 10 pm we are free and we can do what interests us, like watching TV or taking a bath or washing our clothes or going out into the open air. Mainly we sit together and talk or sometimes sing a song or 2 with 3 of them dancing. 10 pm is lights out but some women still talk to each other very quietly.

Every month one person has to clean the cell and we take turns but sometimes the older prisoners give money to the poor prisoners and they work instead of them. Two people are responsible for washing the dishes every day. We have a small library with 40 or 50 books but few people are interested in that, maybe because most of them are illiterate.

Every week, for 15 minutes, we can meet our families, one week with the female members of our family and the other week the male members, so I see my son one week and my daughter the next. However, we can talk to our family every day on the phone. The line for calling is like the line for getting methadone. Actually you have to stand in line for everything because of the population, even for going to the clinic. Sometimes you have to wait a week to go to the doctor, so can you imagine what happens to a person who has a severe illness.

Every month we can buy fruits and hygiene products, like shampoo, soap, etc. and sometimes we have the opportunity to buy clothes and underwear. When somebody comes to prison the authorities don't take care of their illness, so lice and skin illnesses were very epidemic. They only disinfected once a year, so beetles, mice and other things were always present.

Theft, back biting, makes false accusations, insults, beatings. Were the only, and mostly, enjoyable job for women. I saw how women teased and taunted other women to the extreme that they wanted to commit suicide.

Another terrible thing about the women in general prison is homosexuality and masturbation and they talk about that shamelessly.

Every Wednesday in front of all the women who are sentenced to death by execution and the women, who will be next, they put bodies in an ambulance. It is really barbaric some of us are upset and depressed for a few days. I was with them for 5 months and I'm here in this hidden prison and the situation is worse than there. 11 women are here and we don't have anything. No bathroom, food, or open air... we can't even see our families or call them.

I need shampoo and soap and pads but what should I do? All the prisoners here are men and how can I tell them what my needs are. I am really happy that you are here and listen to me.

I wish I could go back home and take care of my kids. I miss them very much. I will never use drugs. I want to work and become independent. I want to go to school and finish 12th grade.

When I was in this prison the security guard explained to me that there was a rule that let me go home every week because in this prison I didn't have open air every day and my family couldn't visit me. So the first time that I went home was the end of the first week that I was in prison and the night that the big fight happened between the women. The head of prison gave me permission to go home that night and told me that I had to return next morning. It was very late almost 9 pm that they allowed me to go home so I called my parents and asked them to come and pick me up. When I was waiting for them behind the big gate of prison I thought how much they suffered because of me these years. I remembered the first day that I was in this prison, the guard took me to the office to take photo of me and do the official work to register me in the new prison, they put Handcuffed me on my hand and the guard felt embarrassed to put it so she told me that you didn't deserve it but I had to do it, please hide your hands when we were going out of cell.

The guard and I were going toward the office that I saw my parents were behind the big gate and were asking about me, and nobody replied to them. Even the guard refused to say that some women were imprisoned in this men's prison, it was illegal. Poor my parents for the second time they didn't know where I was and now the situation was worse because even the court and the previous prison denied to reply to my parents about my new place. When I saw them I called them and my mother turned to me and wanted to come closer but the security guard stopped her. Her arms were still open when they took me very quickly to a car but I hold up my hand up so they could see the Handcuffs. I was in my thought that my parents came so after one week they could see me and understand where I was. I described to them everything and sent over a note to my cousin who was a Baha'i activist and explained my situation in new prison.

He told me that there was going to be an expand program from the Baha'i community of US to visit the women/men of the congress of US as well as some senators and some human right activists in UN to give them more information about the situation of Baha'i community specially some of them that were in prison. So I thought that my letter could help them to realize how we were living in that terrible prison. When I sent my letter by email I didn't know that they would share it in many social sites also. So when the intelligence service after three months when found my letter they put pressure on the head of the prison to force me to write a letter and mentioned that whatever I wrote was wrong and explained that the situation of prison was good and prisoners were in good situation. I didn't accept and said it was not true and I mentioned that the head of prison was aware of everything and he had helped to change the situation. I was not sure but one of the social workers who worked for many years in the prison and I thought she was an Intelligence Service Agent in Shiraz and had plans to isolate me, make other inmates to ignore and disrespect me, As I heard by other prisoners. So I was working all the day behind the sewing machine and I ate my food alone. I could see that all of inmates wanted to show me that they afraid of each other to talk to me because among them were spies for that social worker. She used to intimidate them for not talking to me and inmates were really afraid of her.

But this situation didn't continue for long because Inmates were not really friends with each other and united. They used to fight for small things. There was a hierarchy between the prisoners, so those who were in prison earlier had more power and could order others to do whatever they wanted. So the situation not only was difficult for me but also for many underdogs. Though some of them tried to get to inform me of whatever the others said about me but still everyone suffered from. Before we had a friendly sphere and all of inmates used to talk to me about their pains, difficulties and problems and I used to write many the letters for them to jail office about their demands. The social worker could make a disunity Atmosphere but couldn't compel me to write the letter unlike of the latter I wrote about the situation of the prison. Because of my last surgery I had a check up by medics every month. When the doctor looked my last sonography report she said I need an urgent surgery again.

There was no time for waiting I went to hospital that night and the next day I had surgery. The court gave me 45 days break and I was at home the last month of my prison time .but when I took the letter of the court to the prison they told me you run away from the prison for 45 days and you had punishment. I said the entire story and they didn't believe or they didn't want to

believe so they made a file for me which showed I skipped the prison. I didn't accept I asked them to allow me to see the head of prison. They called him and he said that he would see me after couple of hours. So they put in another cell but before that the officer who was friendly told me that your released letter came yesterday and I was released, so I understood that they could not keep me in jail again and this file just was for hurting me.

For four hours I was waiting till the head of the prison called me. He was very serious and asked me why I skipped the prison and while I was explaining that I was in hospital and there was my permission letter from the court, I could see that he knew everything but he pretended that he didn't know. Upon my return to prison, they said that my sentence period was finished. Then he asked me if I wanted to continue my activities and when he realized that my answer was positive ,he said that I did not deserve prison and advised me to go abroad and do whatever I want to do in those countries. I knew that he was trained by intelligence service to talk to me in this way so I said that my plan was to complete my studies but I will go back to serve Iran .our communication continued for almost one hour and then he gave me a closed envelope and said that I was free but I had to deliver this letter to court. I asked for a paper to show that I passed all my four years sentences and now I was free, but he laughed and said there was no paper for me even I knew they would not want to give me any documents indicating what they did to me in those four years, but insisted that it was my right and I knew that my struggle was useless. We left together his office and he still talked to me. It was interesting because all the officers and prisoners knew that I was free so when I passed the way which went to the big gate all of them said good bye to me and wished me luck. One of them who was from the security office told me "it seems you have not changed so we will see you again very soon". I Resounded by shaking my head and signed for the last time the note book of the prison and passed the big gate .the soldiers who were behind the door stood up and showed me their respect and said that they would never forgot me.

When I was behind the gate I was so emotional, I didn't know what I should do. When I was going home my mind was full of thoughts about future .After four days I went to Turkey and I was there for three months and helped Baha'i community and refugees there to study Ruhi books. Then I applied for my further studies in India.

Chapter four

In recent years, qualitative researchers have demonstrated a growing interest in the personal narrative as a valid articulation of individual and collective experience with the social, political and cultural worlds of education (e.g., Blak 1997; Davidson 1996; Farrel 1994; Mohanty1994; Polakow 1993; Weis and Fine 1993). We increasingly recognize that all narratives, whether oral or written, personal or collective, official or subaltern, are” narratives of identity” (Anderson 1991); that is they are representation of reality in which narrators also communicate how they see themselves and wish others to see them (STEIN 1987; Volkan 1988).Narratives declare narrators alignments with certain in individuals, group, ideas, and symbols onto which they externalize their most valued, positive, and pride-inducing qualities. Narratives also declare narrators dissociation from other individuals, groups, ideas, and symbols onto which they externalize the least favorable parts of themselves. This articulation of identity – of voice- has thus become understood as a locus of human dignity, much as reason was for the enlightenment. (Antoinette Errante)

In this paper the narratives in individual and social life show how the Baha’i women in Iran through resistance have made their identities, dignities, agencies and how they externalized their most valued, positive qualities and also their dissociation from other individuals, groups and

ideas in post revolution. For instance, when Dr. Susan Moody arrived from Chicago (1910) she joined a small group of Iranian Baha'i doctors and established a hospital in Teheran. Over a few years, Elizabeth Stewart, a nurse, Dr. Sarah Clock, and Lillian Kappes, a teacher, joined her. All those Baha'i western women who were inspired by Baha'i faith were the first group of women who came to patriarchal dominant society of Iran to serve people and to show their equality between men and women in social activities and public sphere which both grounds are inspired from basic principle of Baha'i faith. Moreover, they traveled to East to serve and empower Iranian women. Their struggles resulted to establishment of a number of girls' schools which were operational on an informal basis by Baha'i women. Also with the assistance of American Baha'is, the community had maintained a highly reputed boys' school Dr. Moody persuaded the executive committee of that school to adopt one of these girls' schools as a separate department. Eventually this school became one of the finest girls' college preparatory schools in Iran. Very soon all these activities gave identity and dignity to Bahai community that has never been supported by Muslim fundamentalists, who named all these activities as a policy to convert Muslims to bahai faith, though always there has been enough evident that the aim and benefit of all activities have been to empower Iranian society especially women and children. In my view their efforts show how they challenged the patriarchal society in those days, which they didn't allow women to come to public spheres, because they believed that public was male dominant and home was female sphere. Their agency not only challenged the society but shows how their spiritual understanding of service gave them courage to empower Iranian women to struggle for their rights and social status.

I would like to point to another two Bahai women examples in Bahai history which their identity and efforts for empowerment of women and education of society helped me to claim how Bahai women were inspired by Bahai teachings and principles In 1911 Godseah Ashraf became the first Iranian Bahá'í woman to travel to America for the purpose of pursuing graduate work in educational psychology. She returned to Iran and taught in Baha'i schools. During Abdu'l-Bahá travels to the West in 1911-1912, he made more explicit Baha'i teachings with regard to women's rights, stressing especially the need for women's education, the lack of which he viewed as the sole reason for the perceived inferiority of women. He deemed the education of mothers so essential to the proper upbringing of children that he held that the education of daughters should take precedence over that of sons. Consequently education, social services and participation of

women in Baha'i administration since early 19 century have beginning and not only formed the Baha'i women's identity and stand point but also Iranian society. Also the consequences of this journey represent the future role of Baha'i women in Iran. As we can see in the time of Pahlavi the Baha'i minority represented a major pool of educated people, they had, of necessity, been employed in the many branches of the civil service, while continuing to be denied formal constitutional rights. Among them the role of Baha'i women is outstanding. For example, Ms Zhinus Ni'mat Mahmudi, that was the first female meteorologist in Iran, and one of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is in Iran. Ms. Mahmudi worked as the Director of the Department of Meteorology of Iran. She also authored the Geographic Atlas of Iran and taught atmospheric science and meteorology at various educational institutions including the University of Tehran. As I mentioned before, the clergy men couldn't bear these identity for bahai minority in Iran especially for women which they treated them as second citizen based on their religion belief, so in post revolution when they became the main part of authority of government they prevent and excluded bahai community from the high education and employment to keep them behind. ([Human Rights & Democracy for Iran](#), A project of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation)³³ Ms Zhinus Ni'mat Mahmudi and other Bahai women represented the principle and teaching of Baha'i faith about the status of women in Bahai writings, so the Islamic government couldn't bear their identity and agency which challenged their religion and political power.

In this case, I would like to elaborate on one of the Bahai principles which I think has inspired bahai women in their agency; so the equality between man and woman does not refer only to the spiritual plane, for Baha'i scriptures explicitly state that there should be "no difference in the education of male and female in order that womankind may develop equal capacity and importance with man in the social and economic equation. So in the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah, women are advancing side by side with men. There is no area or instance where they should be kept behind: they have equal rights with men, and will enter, in the future, into all branches of the administration of society.

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☞ [-Human Rights & Democracy for Iran](#), A project of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation

<http://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-4018/jinus-nimat-mahmudi> ,seen 2014

For that I chose those stories to show how these principles not only have been performed but advanced and commixed spirituality and social activities.

Consequently Baha'i women who were inspired by these principles practiced and presented their understanding and their spiritual growth in their individual and social life. In the life story of Ms Mahmudi which was retold by her cellmate: "She advised the young inmates to not waste their time and she volunteered to teach physics while she was with them." Her feeling of responsibility to teach women even in prison in that traumatic time shows me not only the particular way of her resistance in tough times which she knew she would be executed, but how her resistance enables women to mobilize creative powers and thereby to reshape their lives, and her agency requires a well-developed range of skills in self-discovery, self-definition, and self-direction. Because by using those skills, individuals may identify beliefs, desires, projects, that encourage their own flourishing as well as that of others and disavow beliefs, desires, and projects that they deem unfair and detrimental.

In chapter two I retold the story of ten women who were executed by Islamic government (1983) to illustrate their agency and the effect and way of their resistance in prison to explain how their faith and values shaped their identity, dignity and aim of individual and social life as well as new generation after them as the life of those ten women formed by the life stories of earlier Baha'i women/men in Baha'i history and how the journey of Bahai women identity and dignity formed through later years. As Anderson (1991) said all narratives are "narratives of identity" so in the short life story of those ten Baha'i women I can see that they were sincere dedicated to the Bahai faith, highly educated, active and were effective members for the Iranian Baha'i administration while they were useful and effect people in their work place and for the society. for instance in the life story of Akhtar Thabit who was a nurse in hospital, as we read in part two : Till the time of her death she served the other prisoners, washed their clothing (considered untouchable and 'defiled' by the authorities because it belonged to 'infidels') and hung the clothing to dry on a line she had improvised from plastic bags; put her nursing skills at the disposal of all including the non-Baha'i drug addicts and immoral women in other wards who relied upon her for help, claiming that the peacefulness of her countenance alone was an aid to them; and, on one occasion, restoring to consciousness a Baha'i prisoner who had blacked out due to a heart attack. She represented her ability to serve inmates and lifted their life and at the same time resisted to the tough situation which determined to subjugate her and others to give up to the unfair

condition. But the only reason which deformed the situation was her faith and it also shaped her agency.

Nominally those life stories show in traumatic time they tried to serve others in the way to reduce difficulties and hardships as I call it a kind of resistance through women's agency and honestly these kind of activity should be call their identity and dignity in prison environment which inspired by their faith. For instance in Muna's story we read: It has been stated by one of the guards that Muná asked to be the last to be hanged, and that she prayed for the 'murderers' of her martyred friends. Then she is reported to have said, 'In the Baha'i Faith the kissing of hands is prohibited, and we are only allowed to kiss the hands of those who kill us for our beliefs.' Seizing the executioner's hand she kissed it lightly, then kissed the rope and placed it around her throat and, smiling, said goodbye to this world. As I realize knowledge of this 17 years old girl about the bahai faith help her to conceptualize the traumatic time, the concept of service in terms of giving her life to prove her innocent and at the same time all these things could assume as a way of resistance and her agency to the power of state that wanted to compel her to recant.

As Stree Shakti Sangbatana argues; there are stories of those who resisted power and fought public modes of patriarchal cultures. Traditionally mothers pass knowledge and expertise down to their daughters verbally. Fine-tuned skills of resistance and survival, ways of nurturing physical and mental health and the enduring support in times of trouble have passed down this alternate line. Teaching and learning in this parallel culture is intimate, personalized, and practical; the knowledge communicated nearly always about survival and resistance in a shared oppression. In this case I would like to say that those evidence who retold the stories of ten women inspired by them and they knew that they had to retell whatever they saw by themselves, (that's why Bahai community accessed to these narratives) to show how the resistance of those women can lift up and improve the others life . For example I can realize from Mrs. Siyávushí' why she advised a Baha'i who had been imprisoned with her but who was later freed that: 'Leave Iran and tell the world how we suffered, and what the enemies did to us. And tell the Baha'is, too, so they will utterly detach themselves from material things, will not be content with the glitter and illusions of this contingent world, and will devote their lives to service to the Cause.' Because she wanted to say why she and others sacrificed their life, it was the only effective way which they could give lesson to the people who read or listen to their stories, how

they can make their life meaningful and valuable through service which rooted in their spirituality. In another they resisted power and fundamentalist system to produce knowledge about resistance and survival in oppressed situation, and also challenged and shifted the strategy of state toward to the active Bahai in coming years.

Another aspect of the narratives of those women is how they declared dissociation from other individuals, groups, ideas, and symbols and how they articulate their agency and voice. Therefore it becomes clear to me when Simin said to other Baha'i inmates; "It is not important how they (the interrogators- Islamic government) treat us here, but what is important is that our interrogators realize the goal of the Baha'i Faith and its administrative order. We have unveiled the nature of the Baha'i administrative order and introduced and proclaimed the Faith. It is important that the truth is being made known to judges all across Iran in order that they might understand that the Baha'i Faith is a religion, not a political movement."

We can see how the way of their resistances were linked by their faith and their dedication to the Baha'i principles and teachings. Service was the hallmark of their lives. Their resistance when they reply to interrogators shows that their aims in their life were service to mankind in different ways. Let's review some part of their stories which revealed my understanding. In the story of Ruya when the interrogator asked her to recant she replied: `Your honor, the love of father and mother for their daughter is a natural sentiment, but my love for my Lord and my attachment to His Cause must take precedence over my love for my parents. I will not exchange my faith for the whole world. `Or Mahshid in the same position replied, `I have found the path to Divine Reality and I am not prepared to abandon it. I am willing to abide by the court's verdict.' In this case they serviced interrogators to enlighten them and other who will read their stories. another example would be Mrs. Yaldá'i, During her imprisonment she was cursed and by her interrogators who pressed her to announce on radio and television that she had spurned the Baha'i Faith and was inviting the Baha'is to follow her example by recanting and becoming Muslims. `I am but a drop compared to the ocean of the Cause of Baha'u'llah,' she replied. `Do you think that you can stop the sun from shining? Do you think I was a member of the Baha'i Assembly when this religion was established? You should understand that the light of the Cause of God will not disappear even if I and others were to recant. Again she served interrogators when she tried to enlighten about the real meaning of faith and the cause of God. For me it's

interesting because she knew that they never convinced but she made clear her duty to them as a service not for anything except to give them and us as I can realize, this lesson that service must be sincere and honest as she and other did.

These examples as feminist theory of [agency](#) explains show us how it is possible for women in male-dominated societies to live in ways that reflect their genuine needs and concerns, and to mount active resistance. Thus the resistance and agency of those women not only shaped the life of many people in all over the world who knew about them but changed the policy of Islamic government about the Baha'i community in Iran. And I think their resistance had a specific effect on the state because they were not only the Bahai women who preferred to be executed instead of recant but as the international human rights elaborate between almost 200 martyred in first decade of post revolution almost 40 percent were women between 16 -60 years old and it was a large number to show the government that their strategy couldn't successful if the state by executing women wanted to give a lesson to the Bahai community that they have to recant otherwise they would killed.

In other word it was their agency to the Bahai history and I chose my story life as an example to show how my life (third decade of post revolution) that I never saw them but heard and read about them got shape by them (that's why I chose these stories). And consequences of their agency and resistance, when I was in prison the interrogators and Islamic court never ask me to recant my belief because they had experiences from those women and other bahais that this strategy will not work so their policy has been changed to imprisonment active Bahai to give this message to the Bahai community that if they can be a Bahai but no representation, social activity and religion practice which for the government these doings were recognized as threaten their fundamentalism power. As Hilde Lindeman mentioned, individuals articulated their attitudes by telling stories. Since the narrative form opens up the possibility of reinterpreting past events as well as of devising different continuations of a story in progress, it enables women to mobilize creative powers and thereby to reshape their lives, therefore in chapter three I tried to retell some part of my life and experiences which is reflexive of those Baha'i women to articulate that not only their goals and attitudes is still alive even the situation of Baha'i minority in Iran through ten years ago got worse but their agency persuade the Islamic government that the treat of

execution and other discriminations couldn't stop Baha'i community to progress individually and serve countrymen/women.

My story and experiences was written in three parts .The first part expresses why and how I got involved in some social activities and how my education and Baha'i approach formed my service to the society. Also explains how the Baha'i community under all discriminations and exclusions tried to be not only breathing but active and helpful for Iran. In my view the way the Baha'i community have resisted to different discriminations can inspire other minorities' communities in all over the world who have face the same exclusions and violation of human rights as an existence paradigm. For example the institution of BIHE The Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE),which is known as the Bahá'í Open University, was designed and managed by the [Bahá'í community](#) for [Iranian Baha'is](#) who were denied access to [higher education in their country](#), as a symbol of resistance, since the high education for men and women is one the most important principle for Baha'is. Though the Islamic government for several times arrested the teachers and students or shut down their classrooms and on 2011 the Islamic government gave five years imprisonment to some Baha'i teachers of BIHE, none the less this institute still is operative online and helps Baha'i students who love to study and research.

Also the Ruhi Institute that I mentioned in part one, chapter three is an educational institution, which Intends to develop human resources for the spiritual, social, and cultural development it's another form of resistance to all discrimination and exclusion, that bahai individuals try to serve and part of the betterment of their society. In this case, this understanding has emerged from a consistent effort to apply Bahá'í principles to the analysis of social conditions.³⁴ That's why I recognize Ruhi project as a kind of resistance and human agency for Baha'i community in Iran as well as their social identity in post revolution.

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- The Ruhi Institute tries to understand the process of the transformation of human society in terms of a far more complex set of interactions between two parallel developments: the transformation of the individual, and the deliberate creation of the structures of a new society. Moreover, just as it does not view the human being as a mere product of interactions with nature and society, it does not identify structural change only with political and economic processes. Rather, it sees the necessity of change in all structures—mental, cultural, scientific and technological, educational, economic and social—including a complete change in the very concepts of political leadership and power. It is understood that individuals, all of whom possess a more or less developed spiritual nature, may be illumined by divine teachings, even under the influence of the most oppressive social forces. These individuals, then, by no means perfected, try to [walk the path of social transformation](#), a path which, nevertheless, is not one of individual salvation but one which implies a constant effort to create and strengthen the

Both of these examples have had an important role in my life experiences. Where I mentioned about my experiences in Bam city or economically poor areas in Shiraz, service to the deprived children was as a main aim of my life. Thus I explore my agency in this time to require a well-developed selection of skills in self-discovery, self-definition, and self-direction. As Hilde Lindeman argued, by using those skills, individuals may identify beliefs, desires, projects, and so forth that promote their own successful as well as that of others and deny beliefs, desires, and projects that they deem unfair and detrimental. For instance when I decided to continue social activities after my first arresting by government, trying to find a permission letter for the activities by the Islamic council in Shiraz show my agency and resistance to the fundamentalist state through unfair conditions which wanted to isolate and marginalized Bahai individuals and community from the society. Because all the activities give identity and voice to the minority, that Islamic government pointed them as enemy of Islam and national security of Iran.

in part one also you read about the Baha'i and Muslim youths who worked side by side to serve and learning through serving others in different situations, like teaching in different poor and criminal areas or serving in a children hospital with cancer patients or visiting facilities which were housing handicapped children, children without family and abused children and so on. There can be no question of the fact that the involvement of the participants in these activates provided a significant growth in their knowledge and skills. Reading, writing, discussing social and moral questions, attending classes, organizing... gave them a very positive sense of their role in their individual and social life which I have to say it was the first time after revolution that Bahai and Muslim youths worked together under the same aim. Though the results of those activities were questioned by Islamic government and they claimed that our aim was teaching Baha'i faith and not humanitarian aid, and they marked it as political activity however the fruits and results of those activities inspired many youths. Obviously the state reacted because

institutions of a new social order. These new institutions, even when designed perfectly, may not function perfectly at first, but they do make it possible for an increasing number of human beings to walk further along the path of spiritual growth and transformation. This continuous interaction, between the parallel processes of the spiritualization of the individual and the establishment of new social structures, describes the only dependable path of social change, one that avoids both complacency and violence and does not perpetuate the cycles of oppression and illusory freedom that humanity has experienced in the past. According to this vision of social change, the Ruhi Institute directs its present efforts to develop human resources within a set of activities that conduce to spiritual and intellectual growth, but are carried out in the context of each individual's contribution to the establishment of new structures, whether in villages and rural regions or in large urban centers. [Http](#) statement of purpose and method

naturalizing Bahai minority activities in Islamic society is one of the dangerous challenging for them so they distort these activities as political and gave sentences to the Bahai youths. In this case they gave their message to the Bahai community that shouldn't engage to the social activity if they want to be out of prison.

There are some evidences that show us how the state waned to distort the aim of activities. for example when the intelligent security service released the Muslim youths in same night and custody the Bahai youths, Also in the Islamic court the judge man diverted the questions to asking about the Bahai faith roundly to prove that the aim of these activities were converting Muslim children and youths to Bahai faith and also the Islamic court punished Bahai youths by compiling them to attend to the Islamic discourses for the sake of converting them to Islam. In fact the state demonstrated their power in one hand and practice historical violence to the Bahai community in another hand to not only oppressed them but violated their human rights. In this case again in my story we can see these youths resisted and confirm their identity and agency to the court verdict by verifying that their rights to give service and engaged to the social activity is their human and civil rights and the government couldn't prevent them even by putting them in Islamic discourses or imprisonment them. So again the new strategy of state failed.

In part two, I articulated my situation, feeling, activities, attitude, learning and correlation with others in isolate cell during three years and four months of my imprisonment. In this case I explained as Stree Shakti Sangbatana argued; we generally tend to think of experience or memory or even the telling of a life story concerned with the concrete reality of life and not with the abstraction of theory or the forms of fiction. But memory and experience isn't exempt from ideological processing, so my standpoint of life, aim, belief and identity even resistance through managing my life in isolate cell, which determined as the punishment, was base on my believes and learning from the bahai faith that has constructed my identity as a women , activities, aim, resistance and agency.

We have to learn as we read life stories, to listen to the " language of silence"; we need to understand the pauses, the wavering, the incoherence, the questions that are avoided (Stree Shakti Sangbatana). In my story obviously I am silent about some things like: my relationship with the other Baha'i woman who was with me for few months and then I asked security guard to separate us, and why I preferred to be alone instead of being with her but enjoying the time with other women prisoners who came for few days to my isolate cell. Also I didn't talk about

the security guards, if there was any issue between us or about the Baha'i administration when they encourage the other two Baha'i prisoners who were in jail with me to write the pardon letter to the government and about my relationship with them after they got released. Also I didn't explain about my feelings when I was talking about the guy who got converted to Baha'i faith and I explained that I spend lots of my times with him when I had free time during my out of prison vacations.

It is very difficult for me to explain why, because I know the reasons as I am part of the story and "language of silence" in life story is meaningful because it shows there is something that the narrator prefers not to explain them either for personal reason or for keeping some secrets about others, policy and so on. Now I prefer to analyze my "language of silence" to forget the painful memories which reminds me disturbing times to reduce and control my rage toward them and pay attention to other parts of my life which have given me and others positive energy. And call it as way of resistance in traumatic time.

In part two, I attentively described about my doings and plan while I was in isolated cell when I mentioned how I wrote a letter to the head of prison and asked for my prison rights or for having books and how I managed and organized my time in isolate cell to make those times fruitful by reading different books, studying a course, writing papers, researching, self learning an art, memorizing, even when I explain how I got risk to have Baha'i books and sending my notes outside of prison, Can be ascribed to the way I resisted the oppression imposed upon me. All I did had its roots in my believe in the Bahá'í faith and shows my dedication to this religion and the importance of spirituality to manage myself in isolated cell which I call it agency because I never give up to the rough condition but change the situation as an opportunity to recover and progress my abilities. In another part I described about my struggles to visit the high ranking government agents to explain about the situation of Baha'i prisoners to demand for their prison rights, in fact shows me my agency as an individual who engaging with the [social structure](#), though I was a prisoner to raise the voice of Bahai prisoners that the state must recognize their prison rights if they gave them sentences based on law.

Where I explained about my relationship with the other prisoners who were arrested in fact I articulate my identity and agency employ not only with their ideology and thoughts but about the agency of women in social reforms and my social awareness and responsibility even when I was

in isolate prison. It seems my aim to serve people was mixed with my thoughts and soul that nothing could stop it, even isolate prison, which I would like make a link between this attitude and Baha'i faith that shaped my knowledge, deeds, minds, soul, personality and spiritual and social identity and agency, that estimate in oppressed condition. As Michel Foucault spoke³⁵; Agency began to be seen as something that actually always accompanied oppression; wherever there are constraints, is where you will find agency.

in this part I explained about my feelings when I heard about the message of the universal house of justice (UHJ) which advised Baha'i youths not to argue with the person who came to convert them to Islam, which I was not agree with the message, but my belief and commitment to the principles of Baha'i faith that said believers must follow advices of the UHJ because of unity, helped me to realize the wisdom of this message during the weeks and released from the harm and troubling situation that the Islamic court planed for us by organizing such classes. I comprehend the message of UHJ the way of resistance which they showed to the youths indirectly and showed them their agency to those classes.

In part three, I explained about the last eight mounts of my imprisonment where I was in a hidden prison and the condition was worse. Entire of this part which included all my efforts to help inmates and change their situation and life again articulate my resistance and ability to make decision to change the situation even when the circumstances were dangerous and unsafe. For example when I insisted to meet the warden or when I got responsibility to conduct the sewing workshop with the women that no one considered them as human being in that prison, proves that people's actions are not always autonomous but mediate or control by the structures that they locate, but an independent identity would there be the conditions for real agency.

As Kavita Panjabi argued³⁶, memory is a construction of meaning that demands interpretation And memory is layered both synchronically, by perceptions of self, locality and nation and diachronically, by the historical circumstances within which It is structured and recollected. My

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- [Manjima Bhattacharjya](#), [We are only halfway to understanding women's 'agency'](#), Info change News & Features, August 2010

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- Kavita Panjabi :literature and gender: essays for Jasodhara Bagachi ,Essay on honor of Gasodhara Bagachi (between testimony and history: 241 page

feeling and attitude to Adel Abad prison, when the court put me in the hidden prison, because I refused to write pardon letter which is the way of resistance and agency to confirm that I was not guilty and the Islamic court verdict was unfair, illustrates the historical heritage I was following from ten bahai women who were in Adel Abad prison and were executed in 1997 which one them was my aunty (Akhtar Thabit). My agency and resistance to the dangerous and rough circumstances in that hidden prison brought changes to the life of other women and me; instead of giving up to the decision of authorities which wanted to take advantage from that situation to punish me that I refused to wrote the pardon letter, my spiritual feeling and aim of service help me to manage the conditions.

In fact in this paper, I tried to map a journey from the birth of Baha'i faith to confirm that the spirit of principles and teachings of Baha'i faith molded the life of the believers who dedicated to the cause their lives in different way. But the agency of Baha'i women historically illustrates that their ability to make decision, to transform the choices and effective improvement in fundamentalist, patriarchal society gets its inspiration from their faith and for me is the new understanding of women's agency and resistance. In my view their spirituality which rooted in Bahai writings verify their agency and resistance as well as their identity and dignity .that's why I try to be the voice these women.

It's clear that using violence before and after revolution on Bahai community was the way that the Islamic government articulated their power to control the minority and as we can see they practiced violence in different ways. If the first decade they killed Baha'is just because of their belief and their activities, later on in third decade they put them in jail but have not executed for the same reason, but they always gave this message that they have power to control the bahai community in all aspects. Though always Baha'is claimed and proved that their activities for the Iranian society have been service and the bahai administration has not been political, but the Islamic government documents and reports and courts claimed that they recognize all these activities as political and against the national security and Islam.

In another picture we can see that they articulate their power to other groups; in the name of Islam and supporting national security, Iranian secret service In 2009, when Ahmadi Nejad, was elected as president, while the green movement was the oppose force, again established their power by arresting who they thought could be an enemy for their power from different parties, religions, minorities activists and so on. The entire of their strategy like arresting, suppressing,

biting and putting different people in jail was a message to the nation that they have power for making decision and against must be punished. Obviously bahai community got more pressure and suppressed in between.³⁷

In these life stories I explained the concept of service in different ways. Service recognized as not only the religion but social and political act so obviously the fundamentalist government never accept the service as a social activity but they interpret it as a political and religious act against the national security and Islam (public religion in Iran). Because these kinds of activities in one hand give identity to the bahai minority and the other hand naturalized their faith and belief in the Islamic society, which is a big enemy for Islamic government as the clergy men brain washed Muslims community in Iran for long time.

So Islamic government celebrate their religion and power by their interpretation of Islam and Quran beneficially, because they know that most of people trust the knowledge of clergyman, spiritual leaders without any further research , since the lack of enough documentations and evidences also help them to brain wash people. I call such strategy as an indirect violence, in this case activities such as Ruhi institute, BIHE and my social activities coherent as resistance to slavery of other understanding and thoughts.

in the course of these stories I realized that service is one way of resistance of this minority community which I focused just on women who were in tough situation through making decisions and choices in traumatic and sensitive times, creating new opportunity to change the situation, struggling for their and others rights, to help themselves and others by their abilities and capabilities and practicing their bahai teachings and creating and developing their identity and dignity of women and be a voice of the noble women.

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-According to a US panel, attacks on Bahá'ís in Iran have increased since [Mahmud Ahmadinejad](#) became president. In the ten years following the 1979 revolution, more than 200 Baha'is were killed or executed, hundreds more were tortured or imprisoned, and tens of thousands lost jobs, access to education, and other rights – all solely because of their religious belief. Since 2005, more than more than 710 Baha'is have been arrested, and the number of Baha'is in prison has risen from fewer than five to a current figure of 136; roughly 600 more are engaged with the penal system: awaiting trial, for example, or awaiting sentencing. The incarcerated now include young mothers of nursing children (imprisoned with their infants). Since the summer of 2013, escalation of attacks has included both murder and attempted murder. These attacks are believed to be hate crimes that are religiously motivated.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Bah%C3%A1'%C3%ADs

Conclusion

Hearing the voices of women in different contexts, regions, circumstances from different background, religion, education, social status and so on through life story method is a golden opportunity for academic segment and specially feminism to improve their social, political and cultural knowledge which was my aim for this paper and in my view Baha'i history focusing on women's agency could be a new site of research to produce knowledge based on faith institutions.

Nobody claims that there is a women's movement in bahai history but when I study bahai life stories and I am living in a bahai community and see that bahai women struggles for equality and dignity, I call it unknown women's movement. In my view women in these stories were not victims, I observe them as reflective individuals who had the capacity to negotiate and survive with traumatic, difficult and unfair situations by affirming their identities through claiming on their spiritual, social and human rights.

As the stories determined bahai women's agency and resistance in post revolution has different outcomes including: The role that they have had in building history and inspiring the life of new generation , the main efficiency that they played in changing the attitude of Islamic government toward the bahai community, the ability to reform their traumatic and difficult circumstances for themselves and others, the capability of representing the bahai teachings and principles in their life as an example in their society and finally guiding the unknown women's movement which I can realize they have created since declaration of Bahauallah. Also I would like to make a link between this unknown women's movement and other women's movements to show how both side could be inspired by each other if there were more researches.

All my endeavor in this paper was to introduce Bahai minority in Iran, and to document life stories of some Bahai women, map a journey of bahai women's agency and resistance before and in post revolution and explain the effect and necessity of firm belief in social activity and service to emphasize that in this era mankind could have a new approach to the spiritual part of civilization, culture, development, politic, economic, globalization, human rights, constitutions, history, morality and so for the sake of humanity.

For further studies I would like to translate more life stories and also interview with women who were in prison recently or with the family of women who are in prison right now to illustrate other aspects of women's agency and resistance and distinctions between Bahai men and women in traumatic time and changes in relationship between Bahai community and the state and the agency of international organizations to reduce the pressures on Bahai community in Iran.

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