

In Memory of Ten Baha'i Women Who Were Executed in Shiraz

The Women Who Stood for Freedom of Thought with Their Lives

*By: Soheila Bana**

The day June 18th is the anniversary of the execution of ten Baha'i women in 1983 at Adel Abad Prison in Shiraz, Iran, whose alleged "crime" was believing in the Baha'i Faith.

Years after this group execution, we honor their memory as heroines who sacrificed their lives for freedom of thought in Iran.

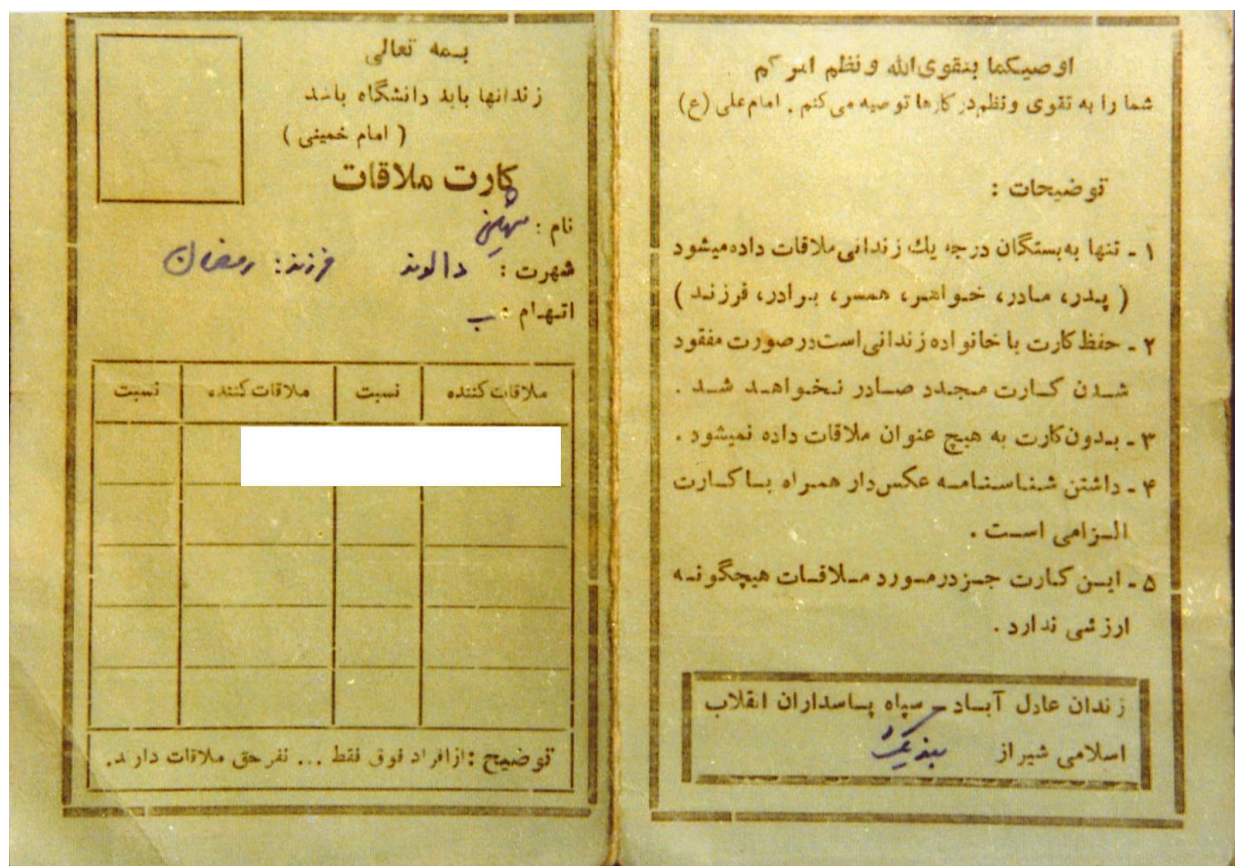
These women, ranging in age from 17-year-old Mona to 57-year-old Ezzat, are a part of our history. They stood firm in defense of their right to freedom of thought, paying the ultimate price with their lives.

Their story forms a chapter in the history of Iran—a chapter that we earnestly hope will never be repeated.

A Few Pages of This Chapter

In Adel Abad Prison in Shiraz, Saturday, June 18, 1983, was like any other Saturday in the spring of 1983; it was the day for visiting female prisoners. The Baha'i families went for their visits, unaware that it would be their last. "No one believed they would be executed! Everyone thought they would be imprisoned for a few months and then released."

The "crime" of these girls and women was their involvement in teaching ethics and the Baha'i religious education to children from Baha'i families. They were also falsely accused of espionage, but all it would have taken for all their "crimes" to be forgiven was to renounce their faith and convert to Islam. On the visitation card given to their families by the prison, it was written "Charge: Baha'ism" or "Charge: B." Some Baha'is, under pressure and by force, were made to say they had converted to Islam, and suddenly all their charges and "crimes" disappeared.



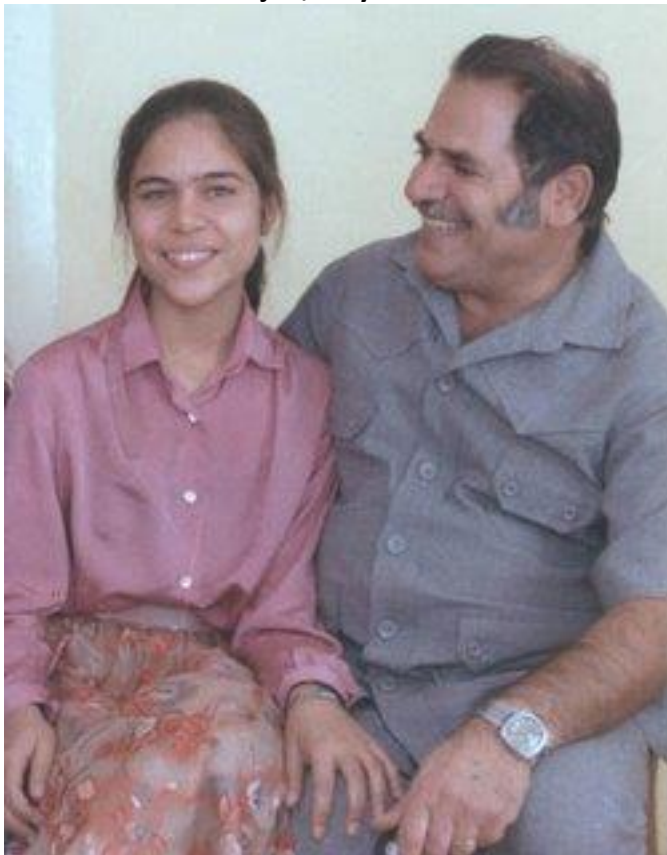
The charge written on the visiting card clearly indicated that these people are prisoners of conscience.

The arrest of the Baha'is in Shiraz in 1981 took place over two raids on a number of Baha'i homes. Some of these women were arrested around October 23, 1982, and others on November 29, 1982. The account of the arrests, as detailed in a letter written by the sister of one of those arrested during those days, goes as follows:

"Monday, Azar 8th, 1361, corresponding to November 29, 1982. About a year has passed since (her) arrest followed by spending several days in IRGC Prison in Shiraz while there was still much talk about it on her birthday. It was around 8 PM when, heeding Dad's persistent warnings that 'I have a bad feeling, surely a thief has come!' we went home. It was about 8:30 PM when the doorbell rang. Three armed men, all members of the IRGC, entered the house. They searched everywhere, collected some books, religious pictures, and a family album they found, and put them into two sacks, took inventory of them, and had us all sign it. Then, from a list with many names written on it, they called out (her) name [...] The next morning, it was found out that about 45 people had been arrested that night, in roughly the same manner by the IRGC, and transferred to the same IRGC prison located in the southeast corner of Shiraz. Initially, everyone thought that only their family members were targeted, but upon inquiring, they realized that many others had been arrested around the same time."

After their arrest, they spent some time in the IRGC detention center for interrogation before being transferred to prison. The interrogations in the IRGC detention center were sometimes very lengthy. Yet, the treatment they received in prison was worse. Since Baha'is were considered "unclean," they were kept in a cell separate from other prisoners. When they were blindfolded and taken for interrogation, they were given a rolled-up newspaper to hold, and a guard held the other end, leading them so as not to come into contact and become "unclean" by touching these individuals. The Baha'i prisoners even had their own designated plates. In Ward One of Adel Abad Prison in Shiraz, the women were three to a cell and were allowed to visit each other's cells. However, sanitation was a serious issue; regular access to a bathroom was not available, and there was no proper medical care. One of the girls suffered from severe menstrual pains so intense that she normally needed morphine injections for relief. But during her seven months in prison, she had no choice but to endure the pain without medication.

Mona Mahmoudnejad, 17 years old



Mona and her father Yadullah Mahmoudnejad, were executed three months apart.

Mona was a high school student. She was arrested alongside her father on October 23, 1981, at the age of 16. It is said that due to her young age, Mona was the last person to be hanged on that day as giving her one last chance to recant her faith, but she did not. Mona is one of the youngest victims of ideological repression in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mona's mother was also imprisoned for several months with her and was then released. Mona's father, Yadollah Mahmoudnejad, was executed in Shiraz in March 1982, three months before his daughter.

Akhtar Sabit, 21 years old



Roya Eshraghi, 22 years old



Roya was a lively girl, a lover of nature and animals, and a veterinary student at the University of Shiraz, who had been expelled from the university after the revolution due to her Baha'i faith. Roya's parents were also active in serving the local Baha'i community and were arrested along with her. Roya's mother was a homemaker, and her father had been dismissed from his job after the revolution for the "crime" of being a Baha'i.

Roya was executed at the same time as her mother, Ezzat Janami.

Simin Saberi, 24 years old



Shahin (Shirin) Dalvand, 25 years old



Shahin – affectionately called Shirin – always had a smile on her face. Even though her family had emigrated to England, she stayed in Iran to complete her education. Shirin had studied sociology and had completed her thesis on combating addiction, but she never got the chance to work and apply her efforts in the fight against the scourge of addiction.

Mahshid Niromand, 28 years old



Mahshid completed her university education in physics at Shiraz University. She served the Baha'i community by participating in local Baha'i committees.

Zarrin Moghimi Abianeh, 29 years old



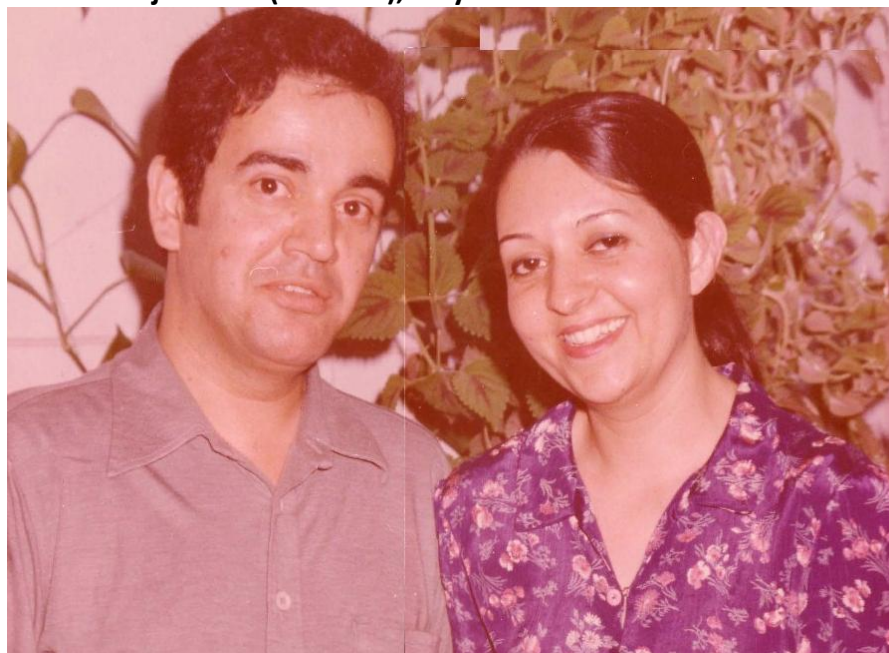
Zarrin had studied English Literature at the University of Tehran. She possessed an exceptional rhetoric skills and had a deep understanding of Islam and the Baha'i Faith, and knew some verses of the Quran and Baha'i texts by heart. The interrogators who tried to convince her to convert to Islam found it a challenging task. They remarked that instead of an English language certificate, she should have been awarded a certificate in rhetoric.

Zarrin was very sensitive and wrote poetry. Once, after visiting a young man charged with being a Baha'i who had just been released from Adel Abad Prison, she was so moved that she wrote a piece titled "I Come from Adel Abad," which begins:

"What should I write, and how should I write, to convey where that place is, in what language can I describe what kind of world it is there, and which words or phrases are capable of expressing what my humble earthly eyes have seen? I close my eyes to see if what I witnessed was a dream or reality, a sweet dream or a bitter truth. Tonight, I come from Adel Abad..."

Zarrin was arrested along with her parents. Her mother spent three months in prison, and her father was imprisoned for two years and was released eight months after the execution of his daughter.

Tahereh Arjomandi (Siavoshi), 32 years old



Tahereh was a nurse and provided medical care to other prisoners while in prison. She was arrested and imprisoned alongside her husband, Jamshid Siavoshi. It is said that

during a prison visit, Tahereh found her husband had been tortured and feared he would not survive. Her husband did not die from the torture and lived on, but was executed two days before Tahereh, on Thursday, June 16, 1983.

Nusrat Ghofrani (Yaldai), 56 years old



Nusrat and her son, Bahram Yaldai, at his last birthday party. Mother and son were arrested at the same time and executed two days apart.

Nasrat was a member of the Baha'i Assembly in Shiraz. It is reported that she endured torture and suffered many lashings. Nasrat was arrested together with her husband and son. Her son, Bahram Yaldaei, was hanged at the age of 28 in Adel Abad Prison in Shiraz two days before his mother's execution.

Ezzat Janami (Eshraghi), 57 years old



Ezzat Janai, standing between her husband, Enayatullah Eshraghi, and their daughter, Roya Eshraghi. Ezzat and Roya were hanged together two days after the execution of the father of the family.

Ezzat Janami was arrested along with her husband, Enayatollah Eshraqi, and their daughter Roya. The Eshraqi family had previously been arrested by the IRGC but chose not to leave the country, nor even the city of Shiraz.

Ezzat's husband, Enayatollah Eshraqi, was hanged two days before her at the age of 63. Ezzat was hanged alongside her young daughter, Roya.

Visiting day for women in Adel Abad Prison was on Saturdays. After the visiting hour, these ten women were taken to be hanged on Saturday, June 18.

The visiting day for men was on Thursdays. Two days prior, on Thursday, June 16, six Baha'i men were hanged after the visiting hours.

Some of these men were close relatives of the women who were executed on Saturday.

Bahram Valdai, 28 years old (son of Nusrat Ghofrani).

Koresh Haqbin, 34 years old.

Jamshid Siavoshi, 39 years old (husband of Tahereh Arjomandi).

Bahram Afghan, 50 years old.

Inayatullah Eshraqi, 63 years old (husband of Ezzat Janami and father of Roya Eshraghi).

Abdul Hossein Azadi, 66 years old.

The hanging of ten women, two days after the hanging of six men, was an unbelievable tragedy for the Baha'i community: "It was a disaster, a disaster! No one thought they would be executed! Everyone thought, as with previous arrests, they would be interrogated and then released. Who could have imagined that a mother and son would be executed together? A husband and wife hanged at the same time? Three members of one family, a father, mother, and daughter, executed together?"

To this day, it remains difficult to speak about the atrocities inflicted upon the Baha'is. Despite the many hardships they face in Iran, from being deprived of civil rights, such as job termination and denial of education, to the fundamental right to life, many Baha'is still refuse to leave their homeland. However, their fears prevent the speaking out and acknowledgment of many truths. Even those who have lost loved ones prefer to speak without naming names, unwilling to cause trouble for anyone.

The sister of one of the executed girls says, "I really don't know how to express the impact of this event on my personal life. Of course, anyone who loses a loved one becomes very depressed because there will no longer be an opportunity to meet them! My children never got the chance to meet their aunt."

She continues, "But what's really painful is that there are people who are willing to kill a fellow Iranian, simply because her beliefs differ from those of the government! It feels terrible to know these were such peaceful people who had nothing but love for others, held no grudges, did no harm to anyone, and yet they were treated this way. How could anyone not like them? It's saddening that the world has reached this point where people can't recognize that this is not right! This is not justice!"

"At the same time, we were somewhat glad that they stood firm and resisted, staying true to their beliefs. My sister was passionate about life! But if she had said she was not a Baha'i and became free, perhaps I would have been sorry and asked her, 'You who believe in peace and humanity and principles, how could you turn your back on everything?'"

Another sister speaks of her sister's livelihood: "She was always smiling and happy, wanting to make everyone else happy. Lately, she had been thinking about marriage, considering her suitors, and she almost knew which one she would choose."

She continues, "The execution of my sister was very painful for me. She was not just my sister but also my best friend. We had a unique bond, such that she could understand everything from the tone of my voice. During the most challenging period of my life, when my child had cancer, she was a tremendous support! Even now, when I see someone who reminds me of her, I can't help but follow them. Having dealt with and still dealing with a loved one's (terminal) illness, I know some things may be accepted. But accepting the sudden death of a loved one is incredibly hard!

The brother of one of the women says, "They were tortured and pressured to confess to being spies for Israel, simply because they had traveled to Baha'i holy places in Israel before the revolution. But when our Prophet was exiled there, that place wasn't even called Israel yet; it was part of the Ottoman Empire. It's like saying Iranians who go on a pilgrimage to Mecca are spies for Saudi Arabia!"

A relative of the women states, "They were subjected to psychological torture. (She) was terribly frightened. They had said they would tear her heart out of her chest."

The news of the execution of ten Baha'i women spread among the Baha'is of the city on Sunday morning. Below is an account of a mother who saw her daughter's body shortly after her execution:

"I was very worried. The day before, my daughter wasn't her usual self, but she didn't say anything. She always stood and waved to me at the end of our visits. This time she disappeared. The next day, I heard that ten women had been executed. I didn't know if it was true or not, I didn't know who had been executed. I ran out of the house out of frustration. Just as I stepped outside, I saw a friend with her young son approaching me. I asked, 'Is it true?' The lady pulled out a paper and read the names to me. There were nine names. I realized, and asked, 'Is my daughter among them?' She said, 'Yes.' I wanted to see her body. A few other mothers and I went towards the prison. We begged the guards to let us see the bodies. Finally, they agreed. They took us to a dirty room with a fan spinning above. Ten bodies were lying on the floor. Mona's mother recognized her. I recognized my daughter by the scarf she had on her head. Her face was covered with a blindfold. I kissed her. I kissed her for her sister, her brothers, and her father, too. I left the blindfold on her face and left. They didn't let us bury the bodies. We begged an interrogator to let us bury them. They said no! They would all be buried in one place."

No wills were left from the executed. One of the girls had written a short note on a piece of paper and had it sent to her family, "No one has the right to wear black or cry for me, except my mother, who I know can't bear it."

However, the suitcases containing the women's belongings and clothes were delivered to their families after the execution.

"To this day, that suitcase is the most precious thing I have!", says a brother.

*Indirect quote via one of this mother's children.

Footnote: This article was prepared after conversations with some family members of the executed. Thanks to the assistance of Diane Ala'i, Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations in Geneva, who helped establish contact with these families. The following sources have also been used in the preparation of this article.

Mona's Dream

[/http://monasdream.com](http://monasdream.com)

Omid Memorial

<http://www.abfiran.org/farsi/memorial.php>

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[/https://www.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?zanan/more/16174](https://www.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?zanan/more/16174)