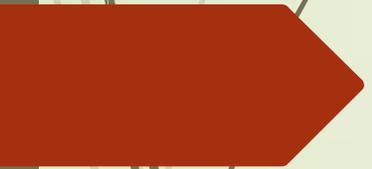


Tahiri: Beyond Emancipation

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The Evolution of my Research

- Began as a contribution to a feminist anthology, *The Discourse of Women Martyrs*.
 - As I delved deeper into Tahirih's life and discourse, it became increasingly clear that Tahirih's role in human history was far more significant and multifaceted than the popularized portrayal.
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Tahirih's Discourse

- What do Tahirih's poetic discourse and symbolic actions reveal about:
 - A) The divinely-ordained mission and station of Tahirih?
 - B) The true meaning of the "veil" and its removal?



The Special Significance of Tahirih as a Leader in the Babi Movement

- From the first moment, Tahirih recognized the Bab not only as the promised Qa'im, but also as a source of New Revelation, and began to openly proclaim these truths.
- The totality of Tahirih's life and discourse as a Babi leader was dedicated to ***rending the veils asunder***.

Tahirih's Challenge to the Clerics

- "Assemble the doctors both Sunni and Shiite, that we may confer and dispute, so the truth and falsity of either side, and the wisdom of both parties may be made apparent to all persons of discernment."
(Browne, 1893, p. 272)
- In one of her poems, Tahirih refers to the clerics as sitting "in the seat of hypocrisy" and the mosque as "a shop dispensing holiness," predicting that soon "The tie of the turban will be cut below the chin" and "The world will be free from superstition and vein imaginings."
(Maneck, 1989, p. 48)

Tahirih's Symbolic Action during Muharram

- In one instance among many, Tahirih defied centuries of Shi'ite tradition by dressing in colorful clothes when everyone wears black, during the annual period of ritualistic mourning and self-mutilation by men in the streets in commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussayn.
- In this instance, Tahirih was celebrating the Birth of the Bab, which in the Lunar calendar falls on the same day as the martyrdom of Imam Hussayn.

(Samandar, 1975, p. 78)



The Bab's Response to the Babi Men

- In response to their letter asking about Tahirih's unorthodox actions and teachings, the Bab praised Tahirih, referred to her as "truthful" ("saddiq") and "pure" ("tahirih"), and urged his followers to "submit to her command" for it was not for them to understand and appreciate her station.

(Balyuzi, 1973, p. 163)

Tahirih's Declaration to Vahid

- *"O Yahya! Let deeds, not words, testify to thy faith, if thou art a man of true learning. Cease idly repeating the traditions of the past, for the day of service, of steadfast action, is come. Now is the time to show forth the true signs of God, to rend asunder the veils of idle fancy, to promote the word of God and to sacrifice ourselves in His path. Let deeds, not words, be our adorning!"*

(Abdul-Baha, Memorials of the Faithful)



The True Meaning of the “Veil”

- The “veil” in the writings of the Bab:

“Were I to remove the veil, all would recognize Me as their Best Beloved.”

(Selections from the Writings of the Bab, p. 15.)

“Erelong the veil shall be lifted from your eyes at the appointed time.”

(Selections from the Writings of the Bab, p. 46.)

The True Meaning of the “Veil” (Cont.)

- The “veil” in the writings of Baha’u’llah:

“Take heed lest pride deter you from recognizing the Source of Revelation; lest the things of this world shut you out as by a veil from Him who is the Creator of heaven.”

(Proclamation of Baha’u’llah, p. 5.)

The True Meaning of the “Veil” (Cont.)

- ▶ The “veil” in the writings of Baha’u’Ilah:

“No sooner had the eternal Beauty revealed Himself in Shiraz, in the year sixty, and rent asunder the veil of concealment, than the signs of ascendancy. . . were manifest in every land.”

(Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 234)



The “Veil” in the Discourse of Tahirih

- *Behold, O hearkener to the verses of Truth
The Divine command has come to you with the spoken
word. . .
For, the Cause of God has come in concealment
It has set the four foundations afire . . .
Tahirih remove the veil
So that the hidden secret may be revealed . . .
(Translation by Roya Akhavan, from Afnan, 1991, p. 100)*

The “Veil” in the Discourse of Tahirih

➤ *Glad tidings, O countenances of purity, that the revelation of God has been exposed*

O eternal wind, call those with awakened hearts to give praise in His Presence. . .

Raise the melodious call from all sides, that from the face of the Unknown Countenance

The veil was removed, and, as it lifted, the darkness of the night was wiped away.

(Translated by Roya Akhavan, from Afnan, 1991, p. 89)

The “Veil” in the Discourse of Tahirih

➤ *O lovers, o lovers, the Face of the Lord has been revealed*

The veils have now been removed by the power of the Lord of dawn

Now arise with Baha, the Face of God has been revealed

Behold with a hundred favors and delights, that luminous face resembling the rising sun.

(Translated by Roya Akhavan, from Afnan, 1991, p. 90)

Removal of the “Veil” at Badasht

- With the symbolic act of removing the veil from her face, Tahirih rent all veils asunder and fulfilled her divinely-ordained mission of sounding the “Trumpet Blast” and announcing the “Day of Judgement.”
- She proclaimed: "I am the word which the Promised One is to utter, the word which shall put to flight the chiefs and nobles of the earth...This is...the day on which the fetters of the past are burst asunder."

Announcement of the “Day of Resurrection”

- Abdul-Baha's makes Tahirih's divinely-ordained mission and station abundantly clear: “Ṭáhirih, with her face unveiled, stepped from her garden, advancing to the pavilion of Bahá'u'lláh; and as she came, she shouted aloud these words: ‘The Trumpet is sounding! . . . The universal Advent is now proclaimed!’ . . . ‘Read the Súrih of the Inevitable,’ said Bahá'u'lláh; and the reader began: ‘When the Day that must come shall have come suddenly... the Day that shall abase! The Day that shall exalt!...’ and thus was the new Dispensation announced and the great Resurrection made manifest.”

(Abdul-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful*)

Removing the Veil from the Station of Tahirih

- What was the divinely-ordained mission and station of Tahirih and the true meaning of the removal of the “veil”?

Tahirih’s mission was to be the “Trumpeter,” “the Word that the Qa’im would utter,” “the Announcer of the Day of Judgement.”

Tahirih’s life, discourse, and dramatic actions, including those in Badasht, were all parts of a progressive process of removing the veil from God’s New Revelation.

Tahirih and the Emancipation of Women

- By sacrificing her life to proclaim the advent of the New Day, Tahirih contributed to a process destined to bring about a revolutionary transformation in all aspects of human society. Clearly, the establishment of full equality between women and men (as a fundamental prerequisite for the establishment of social justice and world peace) will always remain inseparable from the totality of Tahirih's mission.
- In confining the role and station of Tahirih to the emancipation of women, however, we unwittingly participate in perpetuating a reductionist frame initially popularized by Western Orientalists who could only conceive of Tahirih as a woman who broke the patriarchal norms of her society.
- The time has come for the world to get to know Tahirih outside of this reductionist frame.