

Play – The Life of Táhirih – The Pure One

NARRATOR

Táhirih was born in the city of Qazvín in Iran in 1817. Qazvín at that time was one of the important centres of the Muslim religion.

Her father was a famous expert in the Muslim faith, and so was her uncle, so Táhirih heard much about religion from the day she was born.

Táhirih was not like most children, who would rather play than study. Even as a child she became known for her knowledge and understanding.

At that time in Iran, women were thought to be inferior to men. Men believed that women were only good enough to do the housework and look after children. In public, the women always had to wear a veil to hide their faces. They had no choice.

Young Táhirih begged her father to allow her to attend his classes about religion.

The men were not allowed to see Táhirih, but after a while they realised she was there, so she was allowed to speak from behind the curtain. She learned quickly and her wisdom grew.

When she was 13 years old, Táhirih was married to a cousin, Mullá Muhammad. Her parents arranged the marriage, as that was the custom. Mullá Muhammad was not her choice for husband.

A few years later, Táhirih came across the teachings of a great scholar, Siyyid Kázim. She was advised not to read his books as they did not agree with the things her father taught about religion. This only encouraged Táhirih, as she did not agree with all of her father's opinions anyway. In one of these books, Táhirih read that:

SPEECH AND STAGE DIRECTIONS

Father enters, walks around holding an open book, waving his hands, pretending to read passages aloud.

Father exits.

Táhirih enters, sits down and reads a book. A group of children playing and laughing invite Táhirih to join them. After protesting a little she joins them in a circle dance. Her hair is loose.

The other children exit.

Women in veils appear. They put a veil on Táhirih, who looks downcast.

Women exit.

Father enters.

Táhirih is on her knees begging. Her father stands commandingly over her, shaking his head. She persists. He speaks:

FATHER:

"You can listen but you must always sit behind a curtain."

Táhirih leaps up in delight and runs offstage.

Táhirih's family stands around the stage. Mullá Muhammad stands facing forwards. Táhirih enters with her father. She is wearing jewellery. She looks frightened. Her family push her forward, and she timidly steps towards Mullá Muhammad. He offers his hand and she takes it. The family clap. Her father places his hand on their heads, and then Mullá Muhammad marches offstage pulling Táhirih behind him. She keeps looking back at her family. All exit.

Táhirih enters (no veil) and begins reading a book.

Táhirih speaks, looking up in wonder:

TÁHIRIH:

"A new Prophet of God will soon appear."

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This Prophet would fulfil the promises of all the religions, including the Muslim traditions followed by her father.

The book was so logical and convincing that she longed to meet its author, Siyyid Kázim. But he lived far away from Táhirih in the country of Iraq.

Táhirih became more and more interested in this new teaching, and told everyone about it. Her family and her husband grew very angry with her, because all she could think about was the new Prophet who was to come.

Several months later, in the year 1844, Táhirih heard very exciting news from her sister's husband.

SPEECH AND STAGE DIRECTIONS

Táhirih sighs and clasps her hands together, looking upwards.

Father, husband and others enter. Táhirih speaks excitedly to her family. Father points his finger angrily. They all walk away shaking their heads. Her husband remains. He is shouting at her. She pleads and tries to explain. He pushes her away and leaves the room. She sits on the floor, forlorn.

Táhirih picks up a book and is reading.

Mullá Ali runs on stage and shouts:

MULLA ALI:

"The Promised One has come! The Promised One has come! He has brought a message from God!"

Táhirih leaps up and replies:

TÁHIRIH:

"Who? Where? Tell me!!"

MULLA ALI:

"A Young Man in the city of Shiraz - He is called the Báb - it means 'the Gate'. I gave Him your letter, and He sent these Writings for you."

Táhirih looks at the Writings.

TÁHIRIH:

"These are the words I heard in my dream! He must be the Promised One!"

Táhirih runs out excitedly, with Mullá Ali.

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The first 18 people to believe in the Báb were called 'The Letters of the Living'. Táhirih was the only woman amongst these disciples, and the only one never to actually meet the Báb. Táhirih was so happy to have heard the Báb's message, that she told many people about His coming, and wrote many books and poems about the Báb and His Teachings. The Báb announced that His Mission was to prepare the way for another Messenger from God, a great World Teacher who would unite mankind.

On the excuse of making a pilgrimage, Táhirih was able to visit other towns and cities and tell people about the Báb. Many, many people became followers of the Báb. They were known as Bábís.

When Táhirih returned, she told her husband that she wanted nothing more to do with him. This made her husband and her uncle very angry.

They resolved to destroy the Bábís in the city. The uncle aroused a mob who attacked any Bábís they could find in the city.

Sadly, one man, who wasn't a Bábí himself, thought this was so wrong that he killed Táhirih's uncle. This made the family very angry, and they blamed Táhirih, although she had nothing to do with the murder.

They kept her under house arrest, guarded at all times. She was only allowed to leave her room once a day, to wash.

Many other Bábís were also arrested and sent to prison. When they were later found to be innocent, and released, sadly they were all killed by a mob.

SPEECH AND STAGE DIRECTIONS

Táhirih returns and sits writing.

Táhirih exits.

Husband and uncle enter. Táhirih returns and speaks to her husband. The uncle looks angry and the husband shakes his fist at her and she leaves. He follows, still shaking his fist. The uncle follows too. (i.e. all exit)

A man runs onto the stage, looking scared, followed by several others who are chasing him. One of these men shouts:

MOB MAN:

"Kill the Bábís. KILL THE BÁBÍS!"

They attack the first man and he falls to the floor. He manages to get up and run away and they follow him off the stage.

Táhirih enters, reading.

Guards come, Táhirih veils herself and protests, but they take her to one corner of the stage and stand as though guarding her door.

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After this, the plan was to kill Táhirih. But in the middle of the night she escaped, and rode on horseback to the capital city, Tehran, where she stayed with followers of the Báb.

In Tehran she spent time staying with Bahá'u'lláh, one of the followers of the Báb. Some years later, He announced that He was the Messenger of God promised by the Báb. Táhirih recognised that He was from God, and treasured the time she spent with Him.

Meanwhile, the Báb had asked some of His leading followers to hold a conference about His new religion. The Báb himself could not attend because He was in prison.

Bahá'u'lláh sent some of the Bábís with Táhirih to help her on the difficult journey to the conference.

The conference was held in a little village called Badasht. It was a summer place full of gardens and grassland. In one of the gardens, all the Bábís met to discuss the new religion.

Bahá'u'lláh was there, and He gave people special names. This was when Táhirih received her name. The name Táhirih means 'pure'.

The people of that age were very set in their ways, and did not realise that men and women are equal. They had difficulty adjusting to the new laws brought by the Báb.

SPEECH AND STAGE DIRECTIONS

The guards leave, yawning.

A man sneaks in and helps Táhirih creep away, offstage.

Táhirih (veiled) and a few men enter and accompany her as she walks around the stage.

The men are joined by other men, plus Táhirih (still veiled). They all sit in a circle.

Táhirih claps her hands in pleasure, gets up and leaves.

A messenger enters and speaks to one of the men:

MESSENGER:

"Táhirih would like to speak with you."

MAN:

"I will not go."

The messenger leaves.

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With these words, Táhirih announced the new age. By taking off her veil in public, she proclaimed the equality of women with men.

After 22 days, the conference of Badasht ended suddenly. Bahá'u'lláh was arrested by the Governor, for being a follower of the Báb, and Táhirih was taken away and forced to stay in the house of the Mayor in Tehran.

She stayed there for 3 years, as a prisoner, living in a small room. The Mayor's family became fond of her. Táhirih gradually came to know some of the women living nearby and she taught them about the Báb. Over time she was allowed more freedom, and people flocked to hear her speak.

The Muslim leaders became afraid that she was too popular, and came to hear what she was saying to people. Táhirih explained Who the Báb was, but they could not accept that He was a Prophet from God.

Táhirih was a very powerful, wise and moving speaker. One day there was a wedding at the Mayor's house and many of the wedding guests came to listen to her instead of enjoying the music and dancing!

The Mayor's wife cared very greatly for Táhirih. One night, Táhirih called the Mayor's wife to her room.

SPEECH AND STAGE DIRECTIONS

Táhirih enters. She stops and stares at the men, who all turn to face her. She flings her veil off and throws her hands up high. All the men gasp and look shocked. Some men run away. Táhirih speaks:

TÁHIRIH:

"I am the word which the Promised One is to speak, the word which shall make the chiefs and nobles of the earth afraid! The Trumpet is sounding! The great Trumpet is blown!"

Everyone leaves except Táhirih, who moves to another part of the stage.

Táhirih sits alone, thinking. Some women come to join her. Gradually more and more people (men and women) surround her and sit down.

Two men join the crowd.

Táhirih speaks:

TÁHIRIH:

"When will you lift your eyes towards the Sun of Truth?"

Everyone leaves the stage except the two men who speak to one another:

FIRST MAN:

"Why should we listen to a woman?"

SECOND MAN:

"This cannot go on, we are losing our power over people. Táhirih must be killed."

The two men leave the stage.

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SPEECH AND STAGE DIRECTIONS

Táhirih enters on one side of the stage, wearing all white, with loose hair, head-dress, necklace. The Mayor's wife walks towards Táhirih and speaks:

MAYORS WIFE:

“Why are you dressed like a bride?”

TÁHIRIH:

“I am preparing to meet my Beloved. I shall no longer be a prisoner in your home.”

The wife starts to cry. Táhirih comforts her and speaks:

TÁHIRIH:

“You must not cry. Listen to me. My last wish is that you leave me alone while I am saying my last prayers and devotions”.

Wife moves to the other side of the stage and is joined by her grown-up son. Táhirih kneels down and begins to pray. Wife points to Táhirih and says:

MAYOR’S WIFE: “Look, my son.”

The son looks surprised and then shakes his head sadly.

A group of men burst onto the stage, and one speaks:

MAN: “Where is she?”

Wife moves towards Táhirih. Táhirih stands up, kisses her, faces the men and speaks.

TÁHIRIH:

“You can kill me but you cannot stop the emancipation of women!”

The soldiers take Táhirih aside. The mayor’s wife speaks:

MAYOR’S WIFE:

“Follow her, watch what happens.”

The son follows Táhirih who hands the men a silk scarf and they strangle her while the son looks shocked. She falls to the floor. The men laugh and exit. The Mayor’s son crouches over the body and puts his head in his hands.

The death of Táhirih the Pure took place in August 1852. She is regarded as the first martyr for women’s rights. Since then, the Faith taught by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh has spread to every country in the world, and Táhirih’s courage and sacrifice is remembered by millions of people worldwide.
