

# The Wonderful Life of Kurratu'l-Ayn [ Tahirih ]

By Jinab-i-Fadil

*"The appearance of such a woman as Kurratu'l-Ayn is in any country and any age a rare phenomenon, but in such a country as Persia, it is a prodigy - nay, almost a miracle. Alike in virtue of her marvellous beauty, her rare intellectual gifts, her fervid eloquence, her fearless devotion and her glorious martyrdom, she stands forth incomparable and immortal amidst her countrywomen. Had the Bábi religion no other claim to greatness, this were sufficient - that it produced a heroine like Kurratu'l-Ayn." - Prof. E. G. Browne, of Cambridge University, England.*

ONE of the great principles of the Bahá'í Cause is the progress of woman and equality between men and women. When we speak of equality between men and women many people think that this idea is not new. But it was new at the beginning of this Cause and came from it. It was so new and so important that it was one of the greatest signs of the progress of this age. No one had ever conceived of this idea of equality; nothing definite concerning it was written in any religious book of any age, and some people have even thought that the opposite was taught.

Many women of the early period of the Cause in the Eastern countries rose like flames of fire, like the stars of God. Even in the Occident accounts were written of one of them, Kurratu'l-Ayn. Her history is very long and interesting. Her sublime faith, her lofty thought, her ardent work and service were truly a great miracle. She was indeed a woman whose equal is seldom found in the history of mankind. Her name, Kurratu'l-Ayn, means 'Consolation of the Eyes.' This title was hers because in knowledge, in sagacity, in radiance of soul and spirit, she was unique among the women of her country. She was a great and illumined soul who shone at the beginning of the Bahá'í movement, eighty years ago.

Kurratu'l-Ayn's father and uncle were members of the clergy of Persia, and were conspicuous for their dogmatic beliefs. Her great uncle, especially, was a bitter enemy of the Cause. She and her sister were trained, in their home, by their father and uncles, according to the

education of that time, scientific, literary and religious. But Kurratu'l-Ayn hungered for greater knowledge; she was never satisfied with the education which her father and uncles could give her and she finally left her native city to study in a theological institution which was a centre of religious education.

Women at that time were not supposed to leave their homes to further their education, nor were they supposed to go to other cities in search of the knowledge of God. But Kurratu'l-Ayn was graduated from the seminary, and received a diploma. This was contrary to the custom - to give a woman a diploma in theology - and up to that time men only had received them. But Kurratu'l-Ayn's attainments were so extraordinary that they were obliged to give her a diploma.

She then returned home, and married the son of her uncle. Difficulties now arose, for she was very brilliant, very illumined, and her husband was a reactionary leader. She was much esteemed, and at whatever gathering she appeared she spoke upon profound religious subjects. She was a gifted poet and wrote in both Persian and Arabic poetry of a very high order. She had two sons and one daughter.

The Bahá'í Movement had not as yet arisen, but the minds and the hearts of the people were awakening and becoming ready for this Cause. Kurratu'l-Ayn was still so eager for spiritual knowledge that she left her home and family to study a second time at the religious centre. She spent much time in meditation and supplication, and received inspiration from God. From her deep study she understood that God was about to manifest Himself again, and she was very anxious to meet and speak with the Manifestation. Continually she talked of this, teaching the people and telling them that He would arise. There were several other great and illumined souls who, also, knew that the Light of God was about to appear. They tried to find the Manifestation, seeking diligently from city to city for the Light of God. Kurratu'l-Ayn was, herself, not permitted to travel, but she asked them to notify her when they found the Divine One. After some time spent in travelling

at last, in the year 1844, they found His Holiness the Báb. They recognized his station and understood that he was the morning star in the early dawn of this great Day. Filled with this knowledge they wrote to Kurratu'l-Ayn.

One night Kurratu'l-Ayn had a vision. A beautiful being, with illumined face, and wearing a green turban, stood between earth and heaven, praying in new words, with a new meaning, a prayer she had never heard before. When she awoke she remembered the prayer he had chanted and wrote it down. She was waiting for news of this heavenly being when those other great souls met the Báb and wrote to her of him. They sent her several lines from the early writings of the Báb; these lines were exactly the same as those which she had heard in her dream. She became aflame with interest, and sought eagerly for further news of His Holiness the Báb.

One of those early disciples of the Báb was sent by him to the city where Kurratu'l-Ayn lived and studied in order to work with her. The Báb soon wrote an epistle to the head of the faculty at the theological centre, revealing to him the Glad Tidings. This epistle was given to this disciple and to Kurratu'l-Ayn. In it the Báb said: "If you have spiritual insight you will know that this is the Word of God. If you can distinguish the Word of God from human thought, you will know that this is the truth. If, with the knowledge you possess, you are not sure, after studying together you must pray and God will send a sign to make clear the truth."

They went to the head of the theological institution and gave him the message; and the news of the Cause spread in that city. Some of people believed. But many of the mullahs did not, and arose in opposition. One day Kurratu'l-Ayn, while talking of the Cause at the home of a woman believer, knew intuitively, all at once, that difficulties had arisen, and she said, "I must go home." Soon after she had left enemies surrounded the house and took the believer prisoner, thinking her to be Kurratu'l-Ayn. They inflicted injuries upon her, but she was happy to bear them. As they carried her through the city, surrounded by enemies, a man, who knew her, told the captors that she was not Kurratu'l-Ayn, whereupon they set her free. After this Kurratu'l-Ayn went to these

enemies and said, "I am Kurratu'l-Ayn. What do you wish?" They took her and banished her with her friends to Baghdad.

In Baghdad she was placed, under Government guard, in the house of a leading mufti [official]. The Governor of the city declared, "I cannot understand this matter for I do not know enough about this religion. We will call a meeting of the mullahs and question her."

When this was done, Kurratu'l-Ayn, being a woman, could not come into the presence of the mullahs, but must remain behind a curtain. From that place she gave the message with great power. Many people were present and they asked many questions, to all of which she gave answers which were in accordance with religious and scientific knowledge. Those who listened were completely satisfied and many believed her, realizing that she had profound spiritual insight. A Jew, who was present, became a believer because of her explanations. He recognized in her words the knowledge of God. The mufti of the city also became greatly attracted to the teachings.

The Governor of Baghdad finally exiled her with the friends who came with her. But wherever they went they gave the message and awakened the people. They would enter a city, go to a large house, and invite everyone to come and listen to them. Then, in a few days, the enemies would band together and wreck the house in order to break up the meetings. The Governor would then command Kurratu'l-Ayn to leave the city. On one occasion, when they had been driven quite a distance from the city - there were no trains - the driver left Kurratu'l-Ayn and her Companions in the desert, taking the horses with him that there might be no means of escape. Kurratu'l-Ayn wrote an eloquent letter which one of the men of the party carried back to the city. The heart of the Governor was touched when he read this letter and he sent a horse and donkeys to carry them on. Thus Kurratu'l-Ayn overcame all manner of difficulties.

When she returned to her native city she was opposed by all her relatives, and was made practically a prisoner in her own home. Every day and night these relatives met to question

her, but they could not confound her, she was so much better informed than they. Her uncle said, "If you told us you were a Manifestation we would believe it because you have such great knowledge; but when you tell us that a young man without education is the Manifestation we cannot believe it." She told them that earthly knowledge is but a drop from the unlimited ocean of the revelation of God.

While these events were taking place the Báb was a prisoner on the top of a high mountain, in the extreme end of western Persia. He was surrounded by Persian guards and cut off from all communication with his followers. Although his jailers were very vigilant and tried in every way to prevent his disciples from seeing him, yet the friends of the Báb came to the castle where he was imprisoned from every direction, travelling from the north, south, east and west, and by many ingenious ways met him, received his blessing and returned home.

There were many apostles of the Báb who were highly trained in deep spiritual knowledge. They were busy heralding in every way the new day and the coming of the new truth.

While Kurratu'l-Ayn was a prisoner in her own home, a disciple of the Báb appeared in the city of Qazvin, and started a class for the study of these spiritual teachings, giving the New Message. Through the patience and fortitude of Kurratu'l-Ayn in teaching the Cause, and the spreading of the Message by this follower of the Báb, many people came believers, and the fire of opposition was kindled among the Muhammedan clergy. The great uncle of Kurratu'l-Ayn seized this moment to rise in the mosque and speak against the Báb, thus still further augmenting the opposition. These vehement speeches so inflamed the animosity against the believers that they were scoffed at and derided everywhere.

On one occasion a fanatical mob took one of the teachers and a few others to the gate of the house of this great uncle of Kurratu'l-Ayn, bastinadoed them, and there left them. Another believer was beaten almost to death, and then carried to the house of the Governor. When his brother went to ask for the release of the tortured one the Governor answered by placing a foot of each in the stocks, and

beating them mercilessly.

One may imagine how Kurratu'l-Ayn, in her home, felt when she heard of these deeds. Although her relatives tried in every way to prevent her from leaving the house yet she managed to meet the friends, in a home where the pilgrims gathered who had visited the Báb. They met together with greatest unity and joy, encouraged each other, and gained wisdom and strength.

Two great difficulties now arose for Kurratu'l-Ayn, one within the Cause, one without. Through her intuitive wisdom she realized that the day had come when the old dispensation should end and though she had had no direct instruction from the Báb, she herself began to inaugurate changes and to spread them abroad. It was in the earliest days of the Cause and the time had not yet come for the Báb to announce these innovations, for the hearts of the people were not ready.

One of the pillars of superstition was the veiling of Muhammedan women and their non-association with men. Kurratu'l-Ayn, with supreme courage, laid aside her veil, and came out heroically to mingle with men. There were many of the friends who were strong and sincere, but, having heard or read nothing on this matter (of the veil) from the Báb they were shocked and astonished and they blamed Kurratu'l-Ayn, calling her a heretic. Then it occurred to them to ask the Báb what he thought about the matter. They forthwith sent him, by a special messenger, long epistles against Kurratu'l-Ayn. On the way the messenger met a prominent believer and told him of this difficulty in the movement. The great man said, "I believe that Kurratu'l-Ayn is right, although I have no authority for saying so."

When the Báb received these documents he wrote a wonderful epistle, praising the extraordinary qualities of Kurratu'l-Ayn and calling her "The Pure One." When this glorious epistle arrived all the doubts of the friends disappeared and an understanding of the greatness of Kurratu'l-Ayn grew in the minds of those who had judged her.

The other difficulty was this: the great uncle of Kurratu'l-Ayn, he who was so opposed to the

Cause, had the habit of reviling in the public meetings, the Báb and the forerunner of the Báb, Sheikh Ahmad. At one of these meetings a disciple of Sheikh Ahmad, who loved him very much, was in the audience and he became very much excited when Sheikh Ahmad was attacked. So one morning, when the uncle was praying in the mosque, this disciple killed him. Although the murderer was not a follower of the Cause, but of Sheikh Ahmad, yet, because this sheikh had foretold the coming of the Báb, the whole city arose, blaming the friends of the Báb. The mob attacked and pillaged the homes of the believers, imprisoning them and putting chains around their necks; and it was decided that Kurratu'l-Ayn must be placed in still closer confinement.

The father of Kurratu'l-Ayn at first held the mob at bay before his house, and tried to save her. But he was soon overcome and they rushed in, took her with two other women, and carried her before the Governor of the town. The Governor questioned them minutely about the murder and Kurratu'l-Ayn with the greatest eloquence explained that the Bábis had had nothing to do with it. The Governor, however, was not appeased, and he had hot irons brought to brand the women who were with Kurratu'l-Ayn to compel them to tell a different story. Kurratu'l-Ayn turned her face toward heaven and began to pray. The court was filled with curious spectators, all watching eagerly this terrible deed.

Just as the burning iron touched the hand of one of the women there arose a commotion at the back of the court, the people crying out that the murderer had been found. He had heard what was being done to the women, and his conscience caused him to confess. So he asked to be taken to the Governor. This confession was such an unheard-of occurrence that the people were incredulous, but he said, "If you do not believe me, I will dig up the dagger that you may see it." He showed them where to find the dagger, and they were convinced.

The persecutions of Kurratu'l-Ayn continued, and a number of the friends were taken, with the murderer who had confessed, to Tihrán, the capital of Persia. They were all kept

prisoners for several months, and then the command came to execute several of them. The relatives and family of Kurratu'l-Ayn so hated her that they tried in every way to injure her and her followers. The Governor at last set her free, but ordered her to stay in her own home and not to go out. This she did for a long time, always closely guarded. Fearful lest her food be poisoned some of the friends, in the guise of servants, took special dishes to her. She lived, thus, in close confinement, until released by Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Tihrán, sent a letter to Qazvin to Kurratu'l-Ayn, by special messengers who brought a horse and left it outside the city wall. The messengers entered the city at sunset and were taken secretly to Kurratu'l-Ayn in the middle of the night. She escaped from her house and the city with them, mounted the horse which was waiting for her and, travelling day and night, reached Tihrán. With greatest joy she stood in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh.

Of the two men who accompanied her in her flight from Qazvin one was a believer and the other was not. Bahá'u'lláh entrusted to this second escort a large sum of money; this he was to carry in his saddle bag. The money was in gold and silver and the man reasoned with himself that it would be safer to put the silver pieces on top; then if robbers attacked him they would take the silver and leave the gold. When they reached their journey's end Kurratu'l-Ayn expressed great appreciation of his services and, without looking at the money, took nine handfuls from the bag and gave them to the man. She picked up the silver pieces as they were on top, and he was disappointed. Surmising this Kurratu'l-Ayn said to him, "You will prosper greatly in the future. This money is but for the expenses of the journey. God will bless you."

In the absence of this man the enemies of the Cause stirred up the people against the believers and, knowing this man to be friendly to them they searched for him. However, upon his return, the search was discontinued, in almost miraculous fashion. The man then realized the truth of what Kurratu'l-Ayn had told him. Later he became very rich.

During these days there were many meetings

of great spiritual importance, the friends sitting at the feet of Bahá'u'lláh and learning new truths. One day, at one of these meetings a very learned man was present. He discoursed upon philosophy, giving proofs and evidences regarding the Cause. Kurratu'l-Ayn listened for a while, then arose, and cried out, "This is the day of deeds. If thou art a man show forth deeds!"

Again, there was a great meeting, where many of the friends were gathered, (The Conference at Badasht). Up to that time women had taken no part in such a meeting; the veil was still worn, and prejudice was strong. In the middle of the meeting Kurratu'l-Ayn entered, suddenly, without her veil. The believers were utterly astonished, and much excited, and the meeting was thrown into confusion. Then Bahá'u'lláh, who was present, told one of the friends to chant the chapter from the Qur'an about the Resurrection: "The old conditions have passed away and the new conditions have been set up. The old ideas have vanished and the new principles have appeared."

After this Conference Kurratu'l-Ayn started upon a long journey, teaching from city to city. She was continually followed by spies who sought a pretext to accuse her. Finally she was arrested, carried back to Tihrán, and imprisoned in the top of a house, in a room which could only be reached by climbing a ladder. Here she was kept for nearly four years. It so happened that this house was the home of the Mayor of Tihrán. His family became interested in Kurratu'l-Ayn and often invited her to come downstairs and take part in their entertainments.

One of these occasions was the wedding of the son of the Mayor, and Kurratu'l-Ayn was invited to be a guest. Now a wedding day is a time of merry making and not a religious festival; so there was music and dancing. But when Kurratu'l-Ayn appeared, with majestic carriage and spiritual face, the assembled company looked upon her with awe and asked her to speak to them. She talked eloquently upon the Cause and its teachings of justice.

Shortly before her life was ended Kurratu'l-Ayn was ordered to appear before the Shah of Persia, an awe-inspiring despot. He had heard

many tales of her, of her wonderful personality and magnetic powers which could win the hearts of her enemies even. So he wished to see her.

When she arrived at the audience room the Shah was there surrounded with all the pomp of his high position. In she walked, carrying herself straight as an arrow, and began to speak to the Shah of the great spiritual principles of the Cause. He became so interested because of her beauty, eloquence and depth of knowledge that his mother feared lest he be converted; so she called the guards to remove Kurratu'l-Ayn.

In the year 1852 orders were given by the Shah that all the believers be killed, and the life of Kurratu'l-Ayn was demanded. On the day appointed, the first man assigned the task of martyring her refused to perpetrate the deed. A second man was then sent. He was intoxicated and strangled her with a handkerchief; then he threw her body into a well and covered it with stones.

So she gave up her life, and her spirit ascended to the Kingdom. Though her body returned to the dust, yet her light is ever shining; she is living always. Her name and her services are eternal.

A large volume might be written of the life of this peerless woman. In the history of the world there are few like her. Educated and beautiful, a gifted poet, she was still willing to sacrifice all, even her life, for the sake of truth, that through the spreading of truth the world of humanity might become enlightened.

When Kurratu'l-Ayn was in prison the jailers refused to give her paper and ink. But so eager was she to write to her sister that she used a straw from the broom for a pen and the juice of green vegetables as ink. She wrote thrilling poems, sublime ideas, eloquent verses on the bits of paper which were wrapped around her food and sent them, to her friends. These poems are today chanted throughout the East. Her verses are full of the fire of divine love.

### Info

Transcriber : David Merrick, Edinburgh

All comments appreciated : davidmerrick@paintdrawer.co.uk

This Version : 2009-01-31 12:18

Latest Version : [http://www.paintdrawer.co.uk/david/folders/Research/Bahai/Tahirih/Life%20of%20Tahirih%20\(Jinab-i-Fadil\).pdf](http://www.paintdrawer.co.uk/david/folders/Research/Bahai/Tahirih/Life%20of%20Tahirih%20(Jinab-i-Fadil).pdf)