



*Mona Mahmudnizhad*



*Mahshid Nirumand*



*Simin Sabiri*



*Zarrin Muqimi-Abyanib*



*Akhtar Thabit*

## Hanged for teaching “Sunday school”

**F**EW INCIDENTS ARE more shocking — or revealing of the religious basis of the persecution against Bahá’ís and the courage with which they faced it — than the group hanging of ten Bahá’í women in Shiraz on 18 June 1983.

Their crime: teaching religious classes to Bahá’í youth — the equivalent of being “Sunday school” teachers in the West.

Ranging in age from 17 to 57, the ten Bahá’í women were led to the gallows in succession. Authorities apparently hoped that as each saw the others slowly strangle to death, they would renounce their own faith.

But according to eyewitness reports, the women went to their fate singing and chanting, as though they were enjoying a pleasant outing.

One of the men attending the gallows confided to a Bahá’í: “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 induce them to recant their belief. We even urged them to say they were not Bahá’ís, but not one of them agreed; they preferred the execution.”

All of the women had been interrogated and tortured in the months leading up to their execution. Indeed, some had wounds still visible on their bodies as they lay in the morgue after their execution.

The youngest of these martyrs was Mona Mahmudnizhad, a 17-year-old schoolgirl who because of her youth and conspicuous innocence became,



*Shahin Dalvand*



*Ruya Ishraqi*



*Izzat Janami  
Ishraqi*



*Tahirih Siyavushi*



*Nusrat Ghufrani  
Yalda'i*

in a sense, a symbol of the group. In prison, she was lashed on the soles of her feet with a cable and forced to walk on bleeding feet.

Yet she never wavered in her faith, even to the point of kissing the hands of her executioner, and then the rope, before putting it around her own throat.

Another young woman, Zarrin Muqimi-Abyanih, 28, told the interrogators whose chief goal was to have her disavow her faith: “Whether you accept it or not, I am a Bahá’í. You cannot take it away from me. I am a Bahá’í with my whole being and my whole heart.”

During the trial of another of the women, Ruya Ishraqi, a 23-year-old veterinary student, the judge said: “You put yourselves through this agony only for one word: just say you are not a Bahá’í

and I’ll see that...you are released...” Ms. Ishraqi responded: “I will not exchange my faith for the whole world.”

The names of the other women hanged on 18 June 1983 were Shahin Dalvand, 25, a sociologist; Izzat Janami Ishraqi, 57, a homemaker; Mahshid Nirumand, 28, who had qualified for a degree in physics but had it denied her because she was a Bahá’í; Simin Sabiri, 25; Tahirih Arjumandi Siyavushi, 30, a nurse; Akhtar Thabit, 25, also a nurse; Nusrat Ghufrani Yalda’i, 47, a mother and member of the local Bahá’í Spiritual Assembly.

All had seen it as their duty to teach Bahá’í religious classes — especially since the government had barred Bahá’í children from attending even regular school.