# No Shaykh, No Slave: Anti-Structure and Egalitarian Mysticism in Tahirih's Liminal Poetics

Forum for Contemporary Issues in Language and Literature
No. VII/2026
ISSN: 2391-9426 • e-ISSN: 2719-8111
doi.org/10.34739/fci.2026.07.01

Neha Mohajer
ORCID: 0009-0008-5065-9408

OP Jindal Global University, Delhi, India

**Abstract**

This paper argues against the inclusion of the translation of works of literature in the commonly theorized model of semantic transferal from the source text to the target text and for the role of the title in the complex structure of the literary work of art. Works of literature – including their titles – are by their nature polysemic. One of the terminological deficiencies of English literary scholarship is the lack of a term for the "hidden meanings" of a literary text. Unfortunately, the use of the word "sense" by Frank Kermode has not become accepted, nor has the key role of the title and also the ending of a work been sufficiently recognized in English literary scholarship. The function of the title in creating "hidden meanings" resists generalization, yet the issue of translating the title has not received deserved attention, although it is central to the work of analysis of the text that the translator must undertake.

**Key words:** Tahirah Qurrat al Ayn, Persian poets, feminist works, literary analysis

## Historical context

Tahirih (b. Fatimih Baraghani 1814-1852), later known by the epithet Qurrat al-'Ayn (Solace of the Eyes, a name given to her by Seyyed Kazem Rashti for her knowledge), was a pioneering Persian poet, theologian, and advocate for women's rights (Milani 1992, 80-81). She was born into a prominent clerical family in Qazvin during the Qajar period. Her father, Mulla Salih Baraghani, was a respected mujtahid (Islamic scholar) whose decision to educate his daughter in Islamic jurisprudence, Qur'anic exegesis, and Arabic and Persian literature was exceptional but not without precedent among reform-minded clerical households of the time (Milani 1992, 78-80). This early intellectual formation positioned Tahirih within the Shi'i scholarly authority as well as at its margins.

This marginality must be understood against Qajar Iran's clerical-state relation, in which Shi'i jurists exercised substantial authority over religious legitimacy, public morality, and women's visibility (Amanat 2005, 40-55; Afary 2009, 23-41). Female participation in theological discourses was structurally constrained, making Tahirih's religious education and public voice not merely unconventional but also politically destabilizing (Milani 1992, 78-80). In Qazvin, specifically, where clerical authority was tightly interwoven with local governance, Tahirih's dissent was a direct challenge against the gendered foundations of Shi'i religious power (Momen 2023, 287-295). Her poetry and prose serve as literary and ideological interventions, carrying a feminist consciousness within a deeply religious and patriarchal society. Tahirih was afforded a rare chance at education in Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and Persian-Arabic literature, disciplines predominantly restricted to men of her time (Amanat 2005, 143). Her literary trail offers meditations on identity, human rights, and divine justice, while simultaneously challenging the monolithic narratives of religious orthodoxy and gendered marginalisation (Buck 1998, 54). Her works garnered more attention as she became an icon in the *Zan, Zendegi, Azadi* (Women, Life, Freedom) movement (Parthasarathy 2023).

Tahirih's initial theological orientation emerged from Shaykhism, a reformist movement within the Twelver Shi'ism that emphasized on an esoteric interpretation, messianic expectation and some form of awaited spiritual renewal. Shaykhism provided both the conceptual vocabulary and the affective nature of the works that enabled Tahirih's later acceptance of the Bab's claims (Milani 1992, 82-84). Such orientations align with broader patterns of millenarian movements, which characteristically arise in moments of perceived religious exhaustion and historical crisis, reconfiguring time around anticipation of imminent, divinely sanctioned transformation (Worsley 1968, 3–15; Cohn 1970, 15–25). Her subsequent allegiance to the Babi movement and faith then marked a decisive rupture with the established clerical structures, transforming her station from a learned daughter of the ulama into a public religious dissident.

Following the attempts at the suppression of the Babi movement, Tahirih was placed under house arrest and later executed in 1852. Accounts of her death stress its extrajudicial nature and its symbolic framing as martyrdom rather than punishment in religious narratives. These narratives contributed decisively to her posthumous transformation into a figure of presence rather than erasure, a woman whose voice survived her silencing (Milani 1992, 89–91).

Tahirih has been posited as a transnational feminist icon whose writings resonate with audiences internationally (Dehghani 2023, 381–409). Her defiance of societal norms was epitomised by her act of unveiling – a gesture that not only rejected the physical veil but also the broader systemic veiling of women's voices and agency in Iranian society (Afary 2009, 83). Her unveiling and public speeches disrupted normative boundaries, establishing her as a liminal figure within Iranian society and the global feminist imagination (Soheil 2017). Distortions of Tahirih's legacy in both Western and Iranian narratives have been questioned and reimagined. Misrepresentations rooted in misogyny and sectarianism have often downplayed or erased her poetic and intellectual authority (Yazdani 2023, 358–380). We see her figure as a transnational icon inspiring feminist movements across the European avant-garde women. Her portrayal as a cross-cultural heroine reveals the extent of her influence and the internationalisation of her legacy (Dehghani 2023, 381–409).

Her theological commitments decisively shaped the (often) symbolic language of her poetry. Her mission rejected the traditional roles of clergy and priests, championed equality among sexes and races, and embraced visions beyond nationalism, among other principles. These ideas significantly shaped her writings. She often delivered sermons from behind veils to large audiences, encouraging them to set out on a search for truth, one which will allow them to look beyond the veil of ignorance.

Her literary craftsmanship has been contextualised with the Persian tradition of *istiqbāl* (literary imitation), linking her works to renowned poets like Rumi and Hafiz. Yet, her works remain submerged within a painful history. They reveal the strategic subversion of religious authority through poetic form, affirming her feminist theological reimaginings (Shayani 2023, 304–334). The Babi movement had a great effect on Tahirih's poetry. Her liminal and radical identity, when charted from this perspective, challenges the religious orthodoxy and patriarchal norms of her time (Momen 2023, 285–303). This paper seeks to analyse two of Tahirih's works in an effort to bridge the gender gap in historical Iranian narratives by positing Tahirih as the champion of feminist ideals within the modern literary works of Iranian scholars.

All poetic excerpts discussed in this article are cited from English translations rather than Persian or Arabic originals. The poems "Look Up" and "Friends are Knocking at the Door" are drawn from translations edited by

Amin Banani and Jascha Kessler. While this study acknowledges the interpretive mediation involved in translation, it focuses on the conceptual and symbolic structures made accessible through English versions.

The term 'liminality' originates from the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold, and was first introduced in the context of ritual studies by Arnold van Gennep (1909) in his work *Les Rites de Passage*. Van Gennep described liminality as the transitional phase in rites of passage, wherein individuals exist in an ambiguous state, neither belonging to their previous status nor fully incorporated into the next. The Bab declared himself 'Gate', which will usher in the New Age (The Bab – Herald of the Baha'i Faith, www.bahai.org/the-bab), and Tahirih was considered as one of the pathways. This places her perfectly within the transitional period and marks her identity as a liminal poet. This reading of her poems will place her within this transitional time, marked by social upheaval and change.

Victor Turner (1967), then, expanded the concept of liminality significantly in anthropology, emphasising liminality as a state of 'betwixt and between', characterised by ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. Turner's work brought to light the social and symbolic potential of liminal spaces to challenge and reconfigure established structures. He identified liminality as a site for *communitas*, a form of anti-structure that temporarily suspends hierarchical norms and creates possibilities for social transformation. Crucially, Tahirih's liminality operates within a millenarian temporal horizon which was shaped by the Babi expectations. The Babi movement found itself suspended between an exhausted Islamic dispensation and imminent revelatory rupture. This kind of an apocalyptic 'now' intensifies the liminality by rendering the existing authority provisional and unstable, thereby amplifying the anti-structural force of her poetic works. Tahirih utilised these possibilities in her work to create a more postmodern understanding of hierarchies, gender, truth and theology. In particular, her poems 'Friends are Knocking at the Door' and 'Look Up' create a liminal identity within which she describes her own presence.

## Look Up

Poetry is often used as an act of resistance, utilising the transformative power of language to convey meaning within the realm of the symbolic. In some sense, it often creates liminal spaces within literature of idealised, utopian,

imagined futures. The space provided by poetry can often be seen as liminal because of the room that it gives for meaning-making. This room is then utilised by poets as well as the audience to continually create new meanings.

The poem *Look Up* contextualises the liminality of the time that Tahirih was in. A state of in-between for many Babis as well as Tahirih, herself. It marks the period of transition within Iranian society as the Babi movement began to gain popularity, and there was a change within Iranian social life and values. The term Babi is derived from the title Bab, meaning "the Gate". The Bab was considered the forerunner of Baha'u'llah, and his period is seen as a period of preparation for the coming of the next Manifestation ("Origins of the Baha'i Faith"): *In the 19th century, countless individuals believed a new Revelation was imminent. In Persia, the Báb fulfilled the prediction by several clerics of the appearance of the Promised Qa'im.* (Tahirih the Pure One, https://tahirihthepureone.com/index.php).

People were in search of a new messenger, and Tahirih believed she had found Him and acted as a medium for spreading his message with the masses through her prose, poetry and speeches, one of the best examples of which is her poem "Look up": *Look up! Our dawning day draws its first breath!/The world grows light! Our souls begin to glow!*. The opening of her poem is a clear invocation of the transitional moment between darkness and light, ignorance and awakening. The use of the term "Dawn" represents not just temporal change but symbolic emergence from the liminal space of unknowing into an as-yet-undefined clarity. "Dawn" is often used as a chronotope of liminal time, associated with transformation, uncertainty, and possibility. The coming of dawn hints at immediate notions of transformation, socially, spiritually, and politically. Tahirih places herself between an ideal, imagined future and her contemporary, a form of bridge between the imagined and reality. She exists within an in-between world where the self is neither what it was nor what it will become.

The poem unfolds through a sequential movement of rupture, suspension, and renewal, which closely parallels the structure of ritual transition. From the first stage of separation from a fixed point in social structures and cultural conditions to a more ambiguous state where there are a few attributes of the past state to the third stage of reincorporation, where the passage is consummated (Turner 1969, 94-95).

The poem undertakes the rites of passage in a chronological form, introducing the separation of the past ideals from the present by the use of symbolic terms. Throughout the poem, Tahirih describes the engagement of the principles of the Bab with the social reality of her time.

*Look up! Our dawning day draws its first breath!*
*The world grows light! Our souls begin to glow!*

*No ranting shaykh rules from his pulpit throne.*
*No mosque hawks holiness it does not know.*

*No sham, no pious fraud, no priest commands!*
*The turban's knot cut to its root below!*

These stanzas reflect the first two stages of the rites of passage. The use of the phrase "dawning day" describes a symbolic separation from the reality of the past and a move towards a more centreless future. It signals the entry into a transitional, liminal state. This symbolic dawn marks the death of an old order and the birth of a new reality. Such language reminds us of Turner's identification of liminality as a site of both disruption and potential (Turner 1974, 230-240).

The stanza relies on a dense cluster of negations – "No ranting shaykh", "No mosque", "No sham", "No priest" – whose rhythmic accumulation performs the dismantling of authority at the level of syntax. The repeated "No" functions as a linguistic stripping away, formally enacting the collapse of institutional hierarchy before any new order is named. This syntactic negation mirrors what Turner describes as the suspension of structure characteristic of liminal moments.

Tahirih moves away from the religious structures of her time and calls for a total detachment from them. The "ranting shaykh" and "mosque hawking holiness" provide a critique of ritual authority which has been divorced from authenticity. This exemplifies the ritual stripping of status and power, echoing the symbolic 'death' phase of traditional rites (Lukszyn and Zmarzer 2006, 76-84). Within the liminal zone, external structures lose legitimacy, and sacred truth must be encountered directly, not mediated by corrupted or power-hungry institutions. There is a removal of social demarcations in favour of a classless society.

Her work also questions the legitimacy of religious structures and the understandings of Manifestations of God. The threshold of religious sites act as liminal spaces; upon entering these spaces, one assumes that their holiness is more than what it was outside, yet less than the ideal. However, Tahirih contradicts the liminality of religious spaces by saying, "No mosque hawks holiness it does not know". She takes away the transformative power that religious institutions have and places it on the individual itself. Allowing for a complete detachment from intermediary sources of religious knowledge.

> *...The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.* (Turner 1969, 96)

Tahirih calls for a rejection of the divisions within society. She delivers a climactic rejection of hierarchical religion. The "turban's knot" symbolises clerical power and spiritual authority, often misused. It shows an abandonment of the social structures of her time, dismantling the symbols of the old order. In van Gennep's terms, this is more than just a separation – it is a symbolic death, part of the sacrifice of old identity and roles, clearing space for reincorporation into a new, unmediated sacred order (van Gennep, 10-14). What emerges then is not atheism, but a new spiritual condition of radical immanence, free from dogmatic control and oppression.

> *No more conjurations! No spell! No ghosts!*
> *Good riddance! We are done with folly's show!*
>
> *The search of truth shall drive out ignorance.*
> *Equality shall strike the despots low.*
>
> *Let warring ways be banished from the world.*
> *Let justice everywhere its carpet throw.*
>
> *May friendship ancient hatred reconcile.*
> *May love grow from the seed of love we sow!*

Tahirih refers to the tools that are used to keep the masses in check. Myths, rituals, social classes and structures are used to instill fear to achieve conformity amongst the masses. She describes these methods as ones that employ the ignorance of the masses in their favour. These stanzas enact a desacralization of hollow forms, allowing for new sacred meaning to emerge. It aligns with the liminal phase's purpose: not only to dismantle the old but to prepare for a transformative incorporation into a new way of being (van Gennep 1960, 14).

Communal equality is imagined through domestic and tactile imagery: justice "throws its carpet", friendship reconciles hatred, love reproduces itself through repetition. These images replace a sense of vertical authority with a form of horizontal intimacy, suggesting a sense of community in shared presence rather than ranked positions. Such imagery aligns with Turner's notion of communitas as relational rather than hierarchical. This stanza completes the rite of passage: having separated from old illusions and passed through liminal suspension, a new vision of society emerges (Van Gennep 1960, 20). Thus, consummating the "passage". The use of the term "despots" to denote the power structure that continually oppresses masses into submission points towards the communitas ideal, for egalitarian, anti-hierarchical bonds formed within liminal spaces (Turner 1969, 96-97). There is a redistributive moment wherein the vertical structures of power are levelled.

The final couplet calls for restoration, reconciliation, and spiritual rebirth – the classic closure of the liminal journey. Turner describes communitas as a condition that can lead to renewed community, often framed in terms of shared vulnerability, humility, and love (Turner 1969, 131). The repetition of "love" as both origin and fruit underscores a cyclical, regenerative logic – a core pattern in ritual transformation. This is reincorporation – the last phase of the liminal process – where a new ethos replaces the old, not by dominance, but by mutuality (Van Gennep 1960, 21–25).

## Friends are Knocking at the Door

The poem, "Friends Are Knocking at the Door", begins with Tahirih imploring the guards to open the doors. Tahirih connects the world she is within to the future she seeks to build. She focuses on the spaces in between, on ambiguity, transition and the negotiation of boundaries. Her poems often reach out to readers and are framed in the form of a plea, waiting to be heard and understood.

They take on the tone of gentle insistence and quiet desperation before they show the strength in belief.

*Gatekeeper! Friends are knocking at the door.*
*Open the door! Why not open the door?*

*What is so wrong with letting them come in?*
*Why must they wait in the dark corridor?*

*How long do you think they can be patient?*
*How long should they stay there and pace the floor?*

The figure of the "Gatekeeper" acts as the central figure, one controlling the narrative, enforcing the rigidity of constructed laws which detest transitional figures. The poem's repeated spatial markers create a layered architecture of liminality, a spatial hesitation which formalises liminality as prolonged suspension rather than momentary transition. While the "Gatekeeper" may evoke ignorance or clerical authority, the poem ultimately frames the figure theologically. Positioned at the threshold of access and grace, they function as a metaphor for divine mediation itself, regulating not exclusion but degrees of revelation.

The imagined future is so brilliant that, in her mind, it only awaits those on the other side of the door to embrace the cause. She posits herself within this transitional space and asks the gatekeeper to allow friends to enter. "Friends", here, is not necessarily a word which confines the group of people who can enter. "Friends" characterises Turner's ritual subject (passenger); someone who is ambiguous, passes through cultural realms that have few or none of the attributes of the coming state. Most of her poems show post-nation ideals and remove demarcations between classes, races, people and identities, allowing for the space of transition to also be all-consuming. Their presence on the other side of the door makes the scene liminal: the threshold of the door separates the two realms and marks the moment when something could change.

"How long do you think they can be patient?" introduces time into the liminal frame. Liminality is often marked by indeterminate time- it suspends chronology. Here, the "friends" are caught in a waiting loop, pacing, unseen, possibly forgotten. This also shows the anxiety that often accompanies change and how rigid ideologies often require a demarcation between what is good

and what is bad. The search for a different truth is shown as trespassing on regular and constricted modes of knowledge, creating a ritual pause, a moment before entrance.

“At least, why don’t you raise the window curtain?” shifts the focus from full admittance to partial revelation, a compromise. Windows are seen as liminal symbols, allowing visibility without contact, another form of a threshold. It implies that even in the act of withholding, there are degrees, and liminality is not all or nothing. In the following lines, it becomes clear that the gatekeeper is, in fact, God.

*They want nothing from you, except yourself.*
*The only thing they beg for is your grace.*

*Outside they got drunk on love — then sober.*
*They didn't care. They're longing for your place.*

The stanza is saturated with liminal tension, presenting the in-between states of desire, selfhood, and spiritual transformation. She considers the message from God a liberation from self-imposed chains. She implores the “Gatekeeper” to let the people in, saying that they want nothing but more knowledge of Him. This line is beautifully constructed because it identifies the falsity of the belief revolving around God while also accepting it in certain ways. It is the knowledge of God that, in some way, limits their ability to recognise the truth that Tahirih believed in. She implores them to see the truth the way that she did. To further contextualise this line, the Babi faith was a forerunner of the Baha’i faith (Momen 2013, 45-63). In Islam it is believed that Prophet Mohammed was the last prophet, Tahirih’s reading of Islamic texts led to a different conclusion, one that is based on the belief that God would not abandon humanity and would send messengers from time to time. This led to her investigation and eventual conversion to *Babism* (Tahirih The Pure One, https://tahirihthepureone.com/index.php). Here, she mentions how it is the very knowledge of God which often hinders the search for, or hinders the understanding of, a different truth.

By introducing a fundamental liminal paradox, the seekers desire the most intimate form of knowledge – the self. The self here is not a position but a presence, and crossing it requires a deeply existential threshold – stepping out of the guarded identity and into radical vulnerability.

"Grace" here can be read both theologically and relationally. In either case, it functions as a threshold gesture – it is not earned but bestowed. To receive it is to be transformed, and to offer it is to acknowledge one's position of power at the gate. Tahirih posits herself within that position of power and becomes an emblem of its reality. The use of the word "beg" reinforces this: the ones outside are supplicants, in a ritual pose common to liminal rites (van Gennep 1960, 9-10), where the outsider must humble themselves to cross into the sacred space. Grace, then, becomes the framework for crossing over.

The stanza refers to the "outside" as a place of surveillance. Where everything is constructed and curated to quench the immediate thirst for love. They are "Drunk on love" refers to an act of such devotion that they reach a state of delirium. "They" here is setting a clear demarcation against those who question her message, for "they" stand on the other side of the threshold. They are "drunk" and then "sober" because once they enter into the safety of their hearts, the truth that Tahirih wishes to convey reaches them, and they manage to find some level of solace within it. Tahirih does not shame generations of knowledge but rather talks about how such deep devotion and love become a form of constraint to their love. Yet, they are stuck within the world of the outside and inside and can never truly live in either. This delirium is only caused by the fact that there is love, there is a search for truth, there is hope, but that is not the entirety of it. The thoughts that they have contain some form of truth to them as well, their devotion has other forms, but they contain the same love and thirst which Tahirih's heart seems to exhibit. So, they don't care about what else is right or wrong as long as they find some form of communion with their Creator.

*They dropped their veils, forgot their desires,*
*gave up this search, and stripped to nudity.*

*Burn off the clouds now and show us the sun.*
*Pull off the veil. Let us see your beauty:*

*So then the wise would be struck dumb,*
*And the fools will find their wisdom:*

*The selfish know their true Self then,*
*the saints will all get drunk with them:*

*No servant and no Lord will be,*
*master and slave as one will be.*

These stanzas act as a means to transformation, the dissolution of binaries to reach higher forms of living. The dropping of veils evokes the ritual act of leaving behind social markers and masks- what van Gennep classifies as the "separation" phase of a rite of passage (Van Gennep 1960, 10-11). Nudity, here, functions as a means of radical exposure – an existential vulnerability necessary to enter the "threshold" where transformation occurs (Turner 1969, 94).

The rapid succession of stripping verbs – "dropped", "forgot", "stripped", "burn off", "pull off" – creates a kinetic momentum that mirrors ritual shedding. Transformation here is not contemplative but violent and irreversible, enacted through motion rather than reflection. This kinetic language situates transformation within liminal rupture rather than gradual reform.

The veil is being used both physically and metaphorically. Tahirih had previously publicly unveiled herself at the Badasht Conference, where she proclaimed the coming of the Messenger of God and the beginning of a new age (Tahirih The Pure One, https://tahirihthepureone.com/Badasht.php). In the metaphorical sense, it calls for the removal of everything which clouds the judgment of people and holds them back from recognising certain truths. In the physical sense, Tahirih was known for her advocacy of women's rights, and her removal of the veil was a symbolic move, representing her belief in the equality of the sexes. So, the veil becomes a symbol of confinement and oppression, one which has to be removed. The image of unveiling recalls Turner's description of liminal spaces as places of invisibility or in-betweenness, where "the structure of social order is temporarily suspended" (Turner 1969, 95-96). These spaces then lead to some form of transformation.

She is also famously known for raising her voice against oppressors and calling for the emancipation of women. When she was sentenced to death by the Shah, she said the following: *You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women* (Tahirih The Pure One).

The next stanza then goes on to break down the dichotomies that the social structures have created. The division between the knowledgeable priestly classes and those who followed their commandments, between the Saints and the laymen, the lord and the servant, the master and the slave, all of which will be dissolved as they come into communion with the new message which has been sent for them.

An observation that is particularly interesting is that the poem always posits the one who is socially more powerful as the spiritually weaker one. It is the "fools" who will "find their wisdom" and the "wise" who will "be struck dumb". In some ways, it reflects the ability of social practices, norms and theological knowledge to limit one's ability to find truth in something different. For Tahirih, this knowledge then hinders growth and transformation; a space of understanding is the first step within the liminal transition. Since the Babi period in itself was a transitional time, her message in some way welcomes people to the period of Modernism. However, in search of such ideas of thinking, one has to abandon their understanding of truth to form another which can be more inclusive, more classless and more genderless in its being.

## Conclusion

Tahirih Qurrat al-'Ayn stands as a liminal figure – at once theologian and poet, revolutionary and mystic – who straddled the boundaries of orthodoxy and heresy, tradition and reform, patriarchy and feminist resistance. Through her poetry, she created a transitory space in which old structures were dismantled and new possibilities imagined. Her verses, especially in "Look Up" and "Friends Are Knocking at the Door", exemplify a potent blend of spiritual critique and transformative vision. Framing her work through the lens of liminality, as theorised by van Gennep and Turner, allows us to see her not merely as a historical dissident but as an architect of new sacred imaginaries.

Turner mentions that liminal beings are often represented as monsters or deviants (Turner 1960, 95). Tahirih was often perceived as a deviant and was treated as one by the State, too. Martyred for her belief in the Bab, Tahirih was treated as a criminal for voicing her faith and principles in public. Her position as one of the revolutionary poetesses of Iran had all but been scratched from Iranian history. Remembered for her contribution and sacrifice by the Baha'is of the world, her acts managed to make it past the borders of Iran and be an inspiration for women and others seeking equality throughout the world. Her symbolic unveiling at Badasht and her lyrical dismantling of social hierarchies exemplify the transitional, anti-structural power of the liminal moment, offering not just a critique of her time but a prophetic vision for future communal and spiritual identities.

Tahirih's figure is as inspirational as it is controversial. Her works aren't studied in schools, but have a special place in the hearts of Iranian Baha'is who are still the subjects of widespread persecution. Her time in Iran was marked by social upheaval and change. Existing as a contemporary, as well as believer, of the Bab, her period was known as the period of preparation for the coming of the next Manifestation. Though, it is interesting to note that Tahirih herself never met the Bab in person but, according to Baha'i narrative traditions, saw Him in a dream (Uplifting Words 2019). This puts her in a uniquely liminal time and space, her poetry being a reflection of the same. Tahirih lived with the principles and ideals of the new faith, surrounded by constant opposition and scrutiny. Her person, as a literary figure, marked the beginning of this transitional age within Iran.

By situating Tahirih within both Persian literary tradition and feminist thought, this paper reclaims her voice as one of enduring relevance. Her poetic reimaginings reject binary oppositions of power and identity, pointing instead toward a communitas grounded in equality, divine love, and radical truth-seeking. In doing so, Tahirih not only crossed thresholds – she remade them. Her work challenges contemporary readers to consider the enduring necessity of spiritual and social liminality in dismantling entrenched systems of control and constructing more inclusive futures.

## References


Afary, Janet. 2009. *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Afkhami, Mahnaz. 2022. *The Other Side of Silence: A Memoir of Exile, Iran, and the Global Women's Movement.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. https://muse.jhu.edu/book/102768.

Amanat, Abbas. 2005. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Baha'i International Community. "The Báb – herald of the Bahá'í faith". (n.d.). https://www.bahai.org/the-bab, Accessed May 20, 2025.

Baha'is of the United States. n.d. "Origins of the Baha'i Faith – Baha'is of the United States", www.bahai.us/beliefs/origins/#:~:text=THE%20BAB%20%E2%80%93%20HERALD%20OF%20THE,to%20sharing%20His%20spiritual%20teachings. Accessed May 22, 2025.

Buck, Christopher. 1998. *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha'i Faith.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Cohn, Norman. 1970. *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*. Rev. and expanded ed. London: Temple Smith.

Darveau, Jessica, and Mustapha Cheikh-Ammar. 2021. "The Interplay between Liminality and Consumption: A Systematic Literature Review with a Future Research Agenda". *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. www.semanticscholar.org/paper/ba1a75e49f336682b9e2edf2b2bf5b2c172f6b29.

Dehghani, Sasha. 2023. "Tahirih Qurrat al-ʿAyn and the Women's Avant-garde in Europe". *Hawwa* 21(4): 381–409. https://brill.com/view/journals/haww/21/4/article-p381_7.xml.

Lukszyn, Jan, and Jan Zmarzer. 2006. *Teoretyczne podstawy komunikacji*. Warszawa: PWN.

Milani, Farzaneh. *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*. Syracuse University Press, 1992.

Momen, Moojan. 2013. "Negotiating Survival: A History of the Babi and Baha'i Faith in Shiraz (1844–1921)". *Baha'i Studies Review* 19(1): 45–68. https://doi.org/10.1386/bsr.19.1.45_1.

Momen, Moojan. 2023. "Tahirih and the Religious World of Nineteenth-century Qazvin". *Hawwa* 21(4): 285–303. https://brill.com/view/journals/haww/21/4/article-p285_3.xml.

Parthasarathy, Adhiraj. 2023. "The Legend of Persia's Qurrat Al-'Ayn Tahirih, Who Publicly Unveiled and Inspired a Long Revolution". Scroll.in October 10, 2023, https://scroll.in/article/1057215/the-legend-of-persias-qurrat-al-ayn-tahirih-who-publicly-unveild-and-inspired-a-long-revolution.

Shayani, Sahba. 2023. "Literary Imitation in Three Poems Attributed to Tahirih Qurrat al-ʿAyn". Hawwa 21(4): 304–334, https://brill.com/view/journals/haww/21/4/article-p304_4.xml.

Soheil, Keemia. 2017. "Táhirih, a Symbol of Progress: Reading a Nineteenth-century Iranian Poet in the United States and England". Undergraduate thesis, University of Michigan, https://lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/english-assets/migrated/honors_files/ Soheil%20Thesis.pdf.

Tahirihthepureone.com. n.d. "Conference of Badasht", https://tahirihthepureone.com/Badasht.php. Accessed May 14, 2025

Tahirih the Pure One. n.d. "Tahirih's Martyrdom", https://tahirihthepureone.com/Martyrdom.php. Accessed May 14, 2025.

Turner, Victor. 1974. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Turner, Victor. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Turner, Victor. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine.

Words, Uplifting. “Táhirih Discovers the Báb | Baha’i Faith History”. *Upliftingwords* (blog), September 2, 2019, https://www.upliftingwords.org/post/tahirih-discovers-the-bab.

Worsley, Peter. 1968. *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of “Cargo” Cults in Melanesia*. 2nd ed. London: MacGibbon & Kee.

Van Gennep, Arnold. 1960 [1909]. *The Rites of Passage*. Translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Yazdani, Mina. 2023. “Layers of Veils Obscuring the Image of Tahirih Qurrat al-ʿAyn”. *Hawwa* 21(4): 358–380, https://brill.com/view/journals/haww/21/4/article-p358_6.xml.